

## **SAINT-DENIS AND PLAINE COMMUNE**

### **Reference Material**

**Center for Urban Development Studies**

## SAINT-DENIS AND PLAINE COMMUNE:

### **Context: decentralization, institutional framework.**

#### Regional Planning

Regional Planning in the Paris Region is the primary responsibility of the IAURIF (*Institut d'Aménagement de la région Ile de France*) a state agency created in 1960 to prepare the master plan. Since 1983 the IAURIF has played an important part in the implementation of the national decentralization policy.

With the implementation of the national decentralization policy, the role and objectives of the IAURIF have been expanded to include economic development, transportation, protection of the environment, and information technology. The IAURIF is establishing a research institute to develop new development strategies that respond to the changing European and global environment and create new institutional and financial tools to implement them. It has become an active participant in international cooperation as part of the METROPOLIS network.

#### Institutional framework

Urban planning in France has been evolving from a highly centralized state function to a shift of responsibility to local governments while encouraging a variety of collaboration among the three primary scales of local governments – region, department, commune – and among voluntary associations of local governments. Two laws provide the institutional framework for decentralized planning:

1. The SRU law (*Solidarité Renouvellement Urbain/Common action for urban renewal*) mandates local planning agencies to go beyond the traditional spatial master plan and prepare comprehensive plans that interrelate land uses, transportation, open space and development controls.
2. The complementary legislation is the *Loi d'orientation de la ville*, (urban structure law) which mandates an interrelation between urban development and housing policy.

In order to meet the comprehensive requirements mandated by these two new laws, municipalities have had to undertake at least a sustained dialogue as part of the preparation of their development strategy; many have also opted to take advantage of incentives provided by the national government in the formulation of their plans. These changes in the planning process have been hailed as an "urban renaissance." Since 1982 decentralization in France has given more autonomy and independence at the regional and municipal levels. This change in this institutional framework is essential to establish new policies to generate new partnerships between local entities and regional territorial strategies.

### **Plaine Commune: an Inter-communal cooperative agreement.**

#### 'Inter-communal cooperative agreement' (*intercommunalité*) ?

Three types of inter-communal cooperative agreements have emerged among local governments. The nomenclature reflects the population size of the member communes (the smallest administrative unit in France). Communities of Communes were started first in rural areas as inter-communal cooperative agreements and later introduced in urban areas. The responsibilities of the three types of inter-communal cooperative agreements are the same, only their populations differ.

1. A *Community of communes* (Communauté de Communes) that regroups mainly rural localities of less than 5,000 inhabitants, mostly in rural areas.
2. An *urban community* (Communauté Urbaine) that regroups individual urbanized communes of more than 50,000 inhabitants, usually on the periphery of a major city.
3. *Communities of cities* of more than 500,000 inhabitants (Communauté d'Agglomération) can be formed when independent municipalities decide to cooperate in the preparation and implementation of a development strategy.

Institutionally, cooperating communes create a *Public Inter-communal Cooperation Agency* (Etablissement public de coopération intercommunale – EPIC) that assumes the planning and, if appropriate, implementation responsibilities formerly vested in each commune.

One of the key purposes of the legislation was to counter the fierce rivalry among independent units of government trying to attract new economic activities by modulating their tax rate. Although not mandatory, Communities of Communes are encouraged to adopt a uniform business tax that allow them to share the benefits of new development, regardless of where it is located within the communal boundary. The central government provides specific incentives to CCs that adopt a uniform business tax by increasing its annual transfer from E 36.75 to E 62.50 per capita, generally increasing its participation to capital investment projects proposed by the CC, and transferring the local share of the centrally collected Value Added tax at year's end rather than after a two year delay as normally the case.

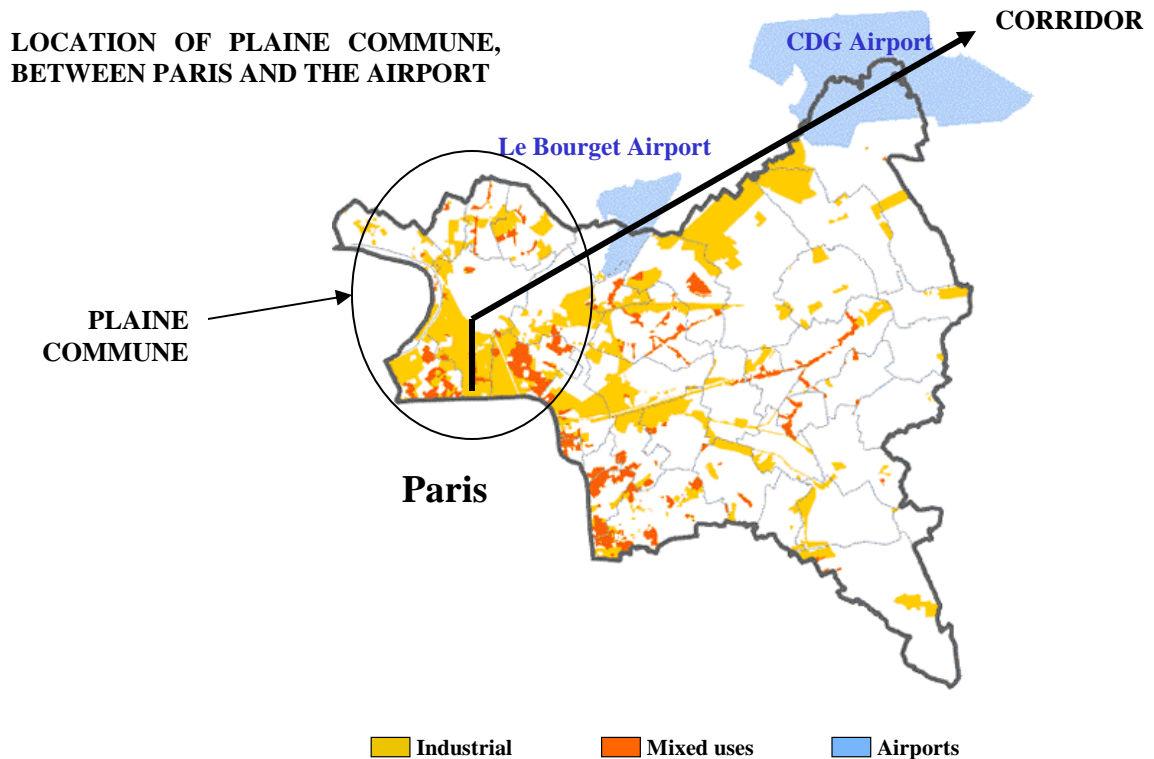
Since 1999, a new type of intercommunal association, the “ Agglomerated Communities,” transferred all major planning decisions to the new local level:

- Economic development
- Spatial planning
- Equal housing opportunities
- Development controls
- Additional activities chosen by the Community Council.

The communes in the Plaine St. Denis department, under the name of Plaine Commune, were among the first to take advantage of these procedures and establish a Community of Communes in 1985 and later in 2000. It is today an Urban Community with of two additional communes (seven in total).

Main Objectives:

Plaine Commune is a public institution created in November 1999 at the request of the towns of Aubervilliers, Epinays-sur-Seine, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Saint-Denis and Villetaneuse. The purpose was to coordinate planning, operations and maintenance and economic development investments among the five communes by delegating specific powers to a new level of local government shared among the five municipalities. The national legislation that encourages the creation of voluntary cooperative arrangements among contiguous local governments dates back to 1993 and has affected a total of 1,351 local governments.



In addition to major employment and research activities, Plaine Commune contains higher education facilities, including two Universities (Paris VIII and Paris XIII) and the newly constructed Stade de France. It is highly accessible, being served by major regional highways, three lines of the high-speed regional transit system (RER B, C and D), two subway lines and buses (RATP), suburban rail lines and a new tramline.

Institutional Framework:

Each Community of Communes creates a “Community Council” to which each municipality delegates certain powers. In order to benefit from additional government subsidies each commune must delegate certain powers to its Community Council, consisting of at least two of the following areas:

- *Environment*: solid waste collection and disposal; sewage treatment; fire fighting; abatement of water; air and noise pollution.
- *Housing*: creation of affordable housing; housing improvements (Operation Programmée d’Amélioration de l’Habitat – OPAH)
- *Transportation*: street construction; maintenance and operation of elementary and special schools; day-care centers; sports facilities; cultural facilities.

The *Community Council*: the Community Council of Plaine Commune consists of 50 representatives designated by the individual city councils. Each appoints two representatives plus one representative per 8000 inhabitants.

The daily business of the council is the responsibility of an *Executive Board* composed of the President and 12 vice-presidents chosen by the council. The President is the chief executive and legal representative of the Community Council and is assisted in this task by the vice-presidents.

The representatives are divided among three sectoral *commissions*, chaired by the President or his delegate. Each commission is entrusted with developing policy, programs and projects in its area that it will present to the Community Council for approval.

- Commission 1: urban projects, housing, environment, waste collection and disposal, sports facilities, cultural activities.
- Commission 2: Economic development, job creation, higher education, tourism.
- Commission 3: Development policy, contracts, liaison with European Community.

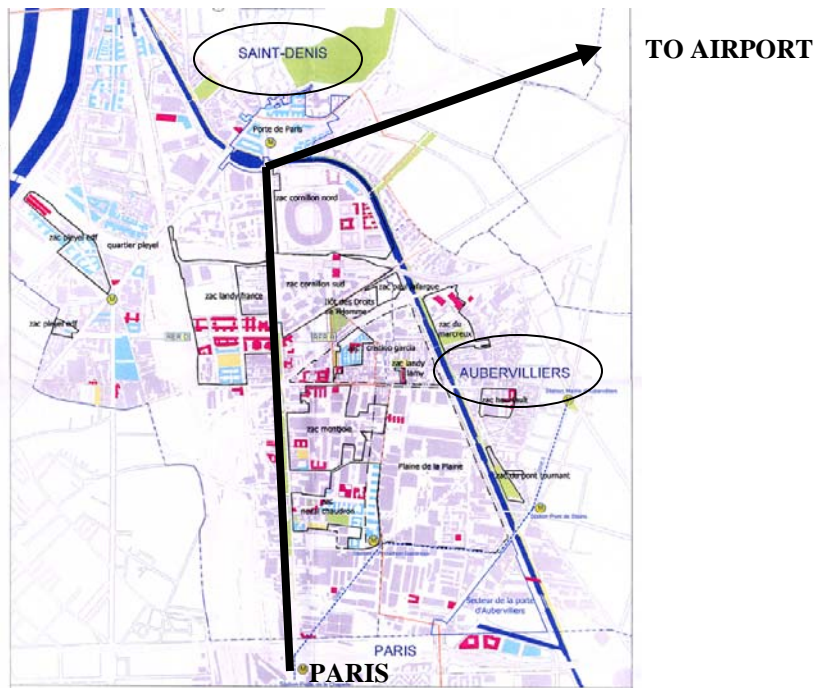
**Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers**

Saint Denis is located north of Paris, on the main axis linking the city center to the Charles-de-Gaulle airport (CDG) and leading to northern Europe. This highway is a growth corridor for the area and the municipality of Saint Denis. However, the industrial past of Saint-Denis and, recently, an important immigrant population poses clear challenges. Prior to its integration as part of Plaine Commune, most of the heavy industries left the area and were progressively replaced by offices and smaller commercial companies. Paradoxically, this successful modernization of the economic base has not benefited the population. In spite of a sharp increase in employment opportunities, Saint Denis has an unemployment rate of over 20%.

Saint-Denis is also characterized by a high rate of public housing (more than 60 % of the stock) and a very diverse population due to the immigration mostly from North and West Africa. In recent years, the quality of housing and social services has deteriorated, particularly education, and public safety has become an issue.

If Saint-Denis has benefited from its location on a growth corridor and succeeded in modernizing its economy, Aubervilliers still contains concentrations of manufacturing jobs, small factories and handcrafts. Most of the housing market is rental (73%) and in bad conditions. Its population is also characterized by a high percentage of immigrants, having a poor level of education and mostly working in the local area. In contrast to Saint-Denis where a good public transportation system has helped social inclusion, no 'links' exist between Aubervilliers, Paris or the northern growth corridor.

The planned extension of a Parisian subway line in 2006 will help alleviate this situation by connecting the city center and the west part of Aubervilliers close to the corridor. Developing a social inclusion strategy for Aubervilliers will require the renewal of the housing stock, attracting new activities, and improving social services to promote mobility (cultural and education). The partnerships with Plaine Commune will help the municipality develop strategies to face those issues.



**Map of the urban developments by Plaine Commune  
Located in Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers.**