



The French urban planning agencies' assignments abroad

Recent references



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From Local to Global: the International Activity of French City Planning Agencies

For thirty years now city planning agencies have been contributing to the development of France's cities in the fields of strategic planning, urban design, transportation plans, urban projects, public space development, local housing programmes, urban regeneration, retail development schemes – and much else. In this respect they have been consolidating the work France embarked on during the postwar "golden age", and responding to the urban revolution that has transformed the country. At the same time the agencies' activities have been very different in terms of both form and content.

The first notable aspect of the agencies' approach is partnership. Their system of governance brings together all the institutional bodies which, in one respect or another, are responsible for cities' urban policies: municipalities and intermunicipal groupings, and authorities in charge of transport, housing, the environment and economic development – not to mention the state itself. Each member of an agency's board of directors presents his projects and outlines his needs in terms of preliminary studies; the agency work programme thus reflects the shared requirements of all partners. In a decentralised context in which dispersion of skills is too often the rule, other bodies find this "model" of a mutualised tool worth adopting.

The agencies' second characteristic is their multidisciplinary. A French city planning agency is a consultancy in which all planning skills are available and which functions on all scales of development. Transversality is crucial to urbanism and the quality of a given project hinges first and foremost on the way it combines and optimises the sectorial activities involved in its implementation. Land use, transportation, environmental protection – everything is interconnected. As a meeting point for specialists in all disciplines with the habit of working in a team, the agencies come up with projects reflecting a truly transversal philosophy.

These two features – reinforced, naturally, by a high degree of professionalism – explain why the agencies have been called on so often to work in cities in other parts of the world. Many of these ventures have taken place in the context of individual agencies' "decentralised" cooperative foreign aid programmes, while others have been part of commissioned studies financed, in some cases, by international funding bodies. The diversity of projects France's planning agencies are involved in testifies to their responsiveness to the needs of national and local authorities abroad. This booklet provides illustrations of this responsiveness at work. Solidly embedded in their respective territories, the agencies are there to make their know-how available to the cities of the world. And FNAU is there to back them up.

André ROSSINOT
President FNAU
Mayor of Nancy

FRANCE'S URBAN PLANNING PUBLIC AGENCIES

One thing for sure, French urban planning agencies are unique in today's world. Tunisia and Cameroon are examples of other countries that have created this kind of tool – in Tunis and Douala respectively – but with a specific focus on the nation's political or economic capital. Only Morocco has created a true national network, but its agencies are backed and controlled by the state.

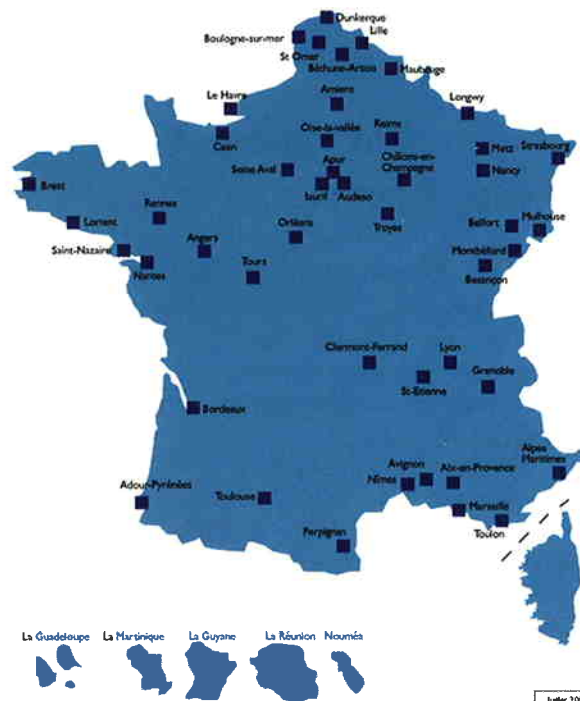
In France it is local authorities – municipalities and intermunicipal groupings, départements and regions – who decide together to create a planning agency, then ask for state approval and support. In some cases other bodies involved in territorial planning and development also participate in this decision: port authorities, universities, public planning organisations, hospitals, chambers of commerce, etc.

In 2008, France was home to **51 agencies** – 4 of them in the overseas territories – catering to areas with populations often of around 200,000 to 300,000, sometimes from 500,000 to over a million, and up to 11 million in the case of Paris-Ile de France.

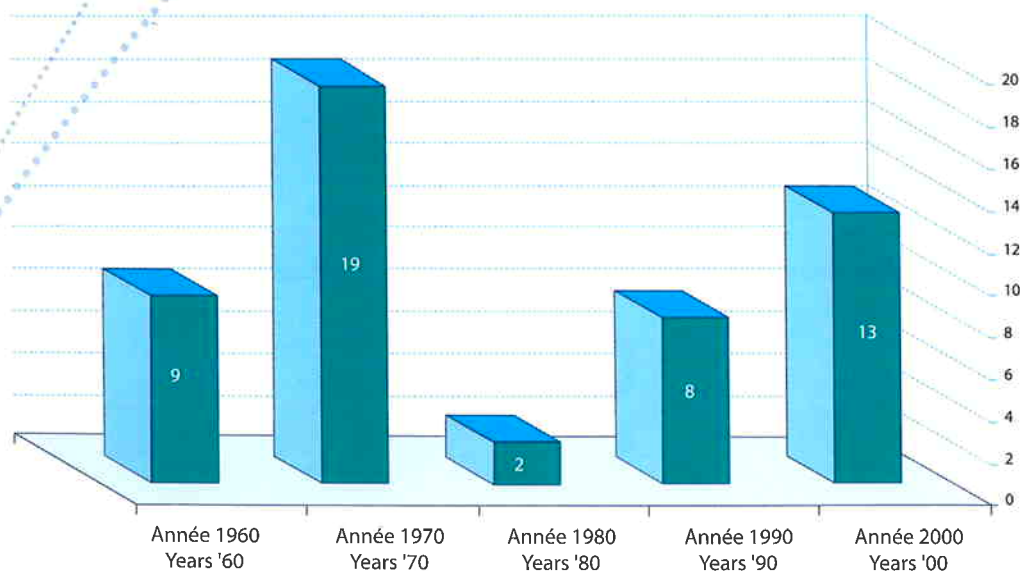
All the agencies have the legal status of non-profit associations under the legislation of 1901 – the sole exception being the IAU in Ile-de-France, which is a public interest foundation – and are made up exclusively of public-sector authorities and other bodies. Half of them were set up in the 1960s–1970s; the 1980s–1990s were something of a down time, but recovery came along and a quarter of all today's agencies have been founded since 2000.

Finance is mainly ensured by subsidies from member authorities and the state. However, agencies can also complement their budgets with studies under contract and specific missions, some of them abroad.

La Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme



Creation of the agencies



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