

## Between heritage conservation and urban renewal.

### A case study: Paris, from Haussmann to the present day

#### Introduction

The long evolution of cultural heritage till today's wide meaning is intimately linked to France, where this concept was born in 19th century, during the Revolution, Empire and the Restoration. It originates from its recognition as expression of national identity and progresses through a sequence of legislative acts: initially linked to the preservation of individual monuments, later of the sites and protected areas, and then of the historic centers. This has been done by gradually increasing the reasons for such interest, initially founded on urban décor concerns and finally on the awareness that heritage would be a powerful contributor to social stability and sustainable economic development.

If, in general, this improvement is not very dissimilar from that of other European countries, the "French exception" is here reconfirmed and expressed by vigorous debates and a special attention paid to urban areas to which correspond administrative bodies and specific legal instruments (Choay, 2009). Since the Haussmann's decree of 1852 in which, although linked to a radical need of modernization, the notion of ensemble historique came, for the first time, into sight, France has constantly pursued its innovative vision of patrimoine urbain, by enacting the Malraux law on the safeguarding and valorisation of historic centres (1962) and introducing the zones de protection du patrimoine architectural et urbain (1983). In more recent years, following the guiding principles of the 2002 Solidarity and urban renewal law (SRU), the notion of "heritage" has been integrated into an overall urban vision, striving to bring it into line with town planning traditional data. Moreover, the process of patrimonialization now also concerns many buildings of 20th century, including the big social housing estates created during the Post-war economic boom. Privileged witnesses of the modernization of France (after 1945), the grands ensembles arouse today the interest of some extremely nostalgic person claiming their maintenance.

At a time when the future of its main cities has moved center stage onto French policies and strategies, this work intends to present the conceptual advancement in national urban heritage protection mechanisms and their applications, with special regard to Paris case. It thus will retrace the city's modern developments: from the Grands Travaux to today, through the implementation of large urban projects, the reconstruction carried out after the Second World War, the urban renewal of the second half of the 20th century characterized by extensive demolitions. The objective is twofold: while focusing on the destruction operated on the Capital, it is equally possible to understand the progression of the opposing conservative thoughts. This, because the idea of protection clearly appeared when town's changes initiated to be considered a threat for its homogeneity and historical character (Pinon, 1999, 2011). The ultimate purpose of this paper is to analyze the current situation and highlight the new tendencies in urban (regeneration and conservation) strategies.

#### 1. From the Grands Travaux to the beautification of Paris

Between 1852 and 1870 and furthermore in the following years (but as a continuation of a program dating back to the Second Empire) Paris has been interested by important transformations that shaped its look into the one that people currently know and appreciate. Commissioned by Napoleon III and implemented by the Baron Haussmann, the prefect of the Seine, joint in a shared futuristic vision of the city, the renewal of Paris was based on the idea of developing major road networks, to improve and encourage the circulation.

The so-called grands travaux were also motivated by health and security reasons. During the last years of the July Monarchy, in fact, the improvement of industry and commerce had resulted in a rapid population growth, focusing mainly in the big cities. Factories and ateliers haphazardly peeped out almost everywhere; the workers, forced to live in the same place of production, crowded in historical but unsafely buildings. Already in 1810, Napoleon I in an attempt to improve physical conditions and

solve safety problems in residential areas had promulgated a decree. Nonetheless, it is only forty years later, under Napoleon III, that a new legislative act will mark a real progress, also taking into account the "aesthetic value of cities".

If Haussmann's intentions were certainly focused on other issues, however, the embellishment of Paris was somehow still present in his discourse and action (Pinon, 2002). His idea on the subject was based on the principle of the "overall perspective", stressing the need for a coherent vision on the territorial scale. Street blocks had to be designed as homogeneous architectural wholes, while buildings, treated as independent structures, would together create the urban landscape. Haussmann considered that a "monument" was not the individual building but the city itself, i.e. the sum of all its elements.

Therefore, by the decree of 26 March 1852 and the ensuing regulations of 1859 concerning Paris, Louis-Napoleon provided the Administration with special expropriation powers. This instrument also introduced into the French law, the concepts of zones and "urban complexes". In the public interest, it obliged house builders to comply with alignment plans and streets leveling and to require a sort of construction permit; the law also foresaw a mandatory periodic cleaning of the facades. The principles of classical architecture were then recognized and honored. Monumental perspectives (i.e. the Avenue de l'Opera traced in the axis of the famous theater) were opened; streets and squares subjected to appearance constraints (i.e. Place de l'Etoile). But it was only at the beginning of 20th century that real debates between the "conservatives" and the "modernists" would take place.

#### 2. The beginning of safeguarding measures

With regard to the capital, publications such as *La beauté de Paris* by Paul Léon (1909), *Des moyens juridiques de sauvegarder les aspects esthétiques de la ville de Paris* by Charles Magny (1911), *La Beauté de Paris et la loi* by Charles Lortsch (1913) were all focused on urban aesthetics matters. The beauty of cities, and, above all, of a city like Paris, became a key question for artists and men of letters. A new awareness related to the protection of more than just an isolated monument, began to take form and, in compliance with such movements of thought, new laws were elaborated.

In the Finance Act of 1911 a provision concerning the protection of the "monumental perspectives and sites" was included. Subsequently, this new cultural sensibility would also be conveyed in what most people consider to be the first French planning law: the loi Cornudet of 14 March 1919 which created the "zones of architectural protection" in the areas near historic monuments. Later, the law of 2 May 1930 on the safeguard of natural monuments and sites of artistic, historic, scientific, legendary or picturesque interest was enacted. Its 3rd title defined the "protected areas" and entitled authorities to impose constraints on the surroundings of prestigious monuments but also to control the development of villages or small towns. However, based on a very complex procedure and focused only on the buildings appearance, this legislation would be unsuitable for larger urban sites (Frier, 1979). Unfortunately, the idea that the monument could find its ideal set, only through a suitable "isolation", was still so rooted in the mentalities of that time, to allow conservative considerations at urban scale.

Shortly afterwards, nevertheless, new reflections on the subject were conducted by engineers and intellectuals competing on the controversial issue of historic districts conservation. Between the two World Wars, a growing sense of militancy developed in favor of the protection of urban heritage, especially among the members of private associations such as the Parisian Ligue urbaine et rurale. If the position of hygienists slightly softened, acknowledging the need to protect from demolition the groups of buildings (Charter of Athens, 1933), the cultural conservative parties continued, slowly but steadily, to gain new consensus.

In 1942, the architect Jean-Charles Moreaux published an essay, prefaced by Louis Hautecoeur, in which he condemned the excessive demolition work around the monuments and supported urban areas safeguarding. By using the expression "insulating a building (...) is to violate the history", he carried out a new vigorous combat against the 19th century's theories. In particular, Hautecoeur, at that time State Secretary for Education, denounced the devastation caused by the practice that used to create voids in front of the buildings of the Middle Ages, i.e. the

square of Notre-Dame de Paris, widely considered as the epitome of the space "that should not have been cleared".

During the Vichy regime, substantial changes were then made to the legislation. The above mentioned reflections led, in fact, to the approval of the law of 25 February 1943. This act amended the 1913 one on Monuments Historiques, which initially provided that the designation as monument classé could extend to buildings or vacant lots located within the abords (environs) of a monument classé. The 1943 law assimilated to the concept of monument even its urban environment. It also imposed a supervision and control system on projects related to buildings located within 500 meters of a historic landmark and within its field of visibility. The same year, the essay *Destinée de Paris* became a kind of manifesto for the safeguarding of the historic quarters, finally considered as essential and active entities within the towns. After years marked by radical demolition operations, the îlot n.16 situated in the Marais district of Paris, benefited from a preferential treatment. The architect Michel Roux-Spitz, responsible for the supervision of the renewal work, focused on the preservation of part of the popular buildings too, as components of the built heritage. A praxis founded in the liberation of the courtyards, in the restoration of the gardens and in the opening of public walkways within the blocks, was developed and considered as the ideal solution to "save the appearances", while keeping intact the historic landscape.

#### 3. From the urban renovation to the protected areas

In the first years after the World War II, France experienced a serious housing deficit, requiring a massive building policy. The Government, in the purpose of rapidly modernizing country's infrastructures to enhance economic growth, introduced important changes in the new 1958 Constitution which gave life to the 5th Republic. In the same period, the first Code de l'Urbanisme was created and, the so-called urbanisme opérationnel (i.e. characterized by a proactive approach rather than just regulatory and reactive), launched. After a long period devoted to the development, in the cities suburbs, of the ill-famed grands ensembles, France was constrained by the scarcity of land, to look again towards the old districts, trying to remake cities on themselves. To this end, the decree of 31 December 1958 concerning urban renewal was proclaimed, offering both new opportunity and financial means to clear inner-city areas (the îlots insalubres) and to replace them with new structures. Unluckily, this procedure was undertaken through brutal actions that, breaking with the existing urban fabric, left deep scars on the cityscapes. Actually, since the theory proposed by Le Corbusier in 1925, French architects had envisaged to quickly resolve Paris unhealthy problems by radical urban renewal processes, like those already developed for the suburbs. The Plan Voisin (1925) proposed demolishing of the whole Marais quarter (described as antiquated and unhealthy), and its reconstruction as a new commercial neighborhood with eighteen skyscrapers together with the rebuilding of a separate residential neighborhood to its west (Rodwell, 2007). If this project was never carried out, it still inspired the interventions undertaken in three other areas of the French capital aiming at reestablishing more livable and healthier areas: the Place des Fêtes located in the 19th district, Beaugrenelle in 15th and the Olympiades in the 13th.

By chance, very soon it appeared that, due to the comprehensive character of the operations made possible by this legislation, good blocks were being demolished together with the bad ones. Hence the idea of rehabilitating whole urban areas evolved, together with a major concern about the historic districts protection. From these preoccupations flow the 1962 law, which introduced the concept of secteur sauvegardés: homogenous areas designated when having a character of historic or aesthetic value or such to justify their conservation, restoration and enhancement. This instrument was conceived in order to limit the systematic practice of renewal of that time, reducing the number of house demolitions and the phenomena of specialization and spatial segregation, while launching urban regeneration projects. If the previous legal texts operated in a sort of closed circuit based on constraints and prohibitions, this innovative law aimed at preserving architectural and historic heritage and improving the living and working conditions of the French people. Its 1963 implementation decree introduced the Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur (PSMV), a kind of master plan characterized by a cultural "vocation", imposing strict

controls on all works undertaken in the designated area, creating obligations for both public and private sectors and opening possibilities for the release of subsidies. However, despite the original objectives proposed by the loi Malraux, its first implementation decade was characterized by the mechanism of îlots opérationnels that, based on large-scale thinning interventions have undergone profound changes in whole historical quarters and transformed their urban design. These procedures have also led to numerous problems at the social level: in particular, they often caused the abandonment of these territories by the poorest populations, due to the increased costs of renting and/or sale of restructured buildings.

This is what, for example, happened in the Marais district in Paris, one of the first secteur sauvegardé in France, located in an area covering 126 ha, between the 3rd and 4th arrondissements. Until the early 18th century, it was the fashionable aristocratic quarter of the French capital. A century later, it became an artisan sector, and the former hôtels particuliers were transformed into workshops and apartments; their courtyards often built over to form warehouses. By the end of the World War II, the Marais had become seriously dilapidated: around 60% of its dwellings lacked toilets, 30% running water; and 15%, electricity (Rodwell, 2007). Designated in 1964, the PSMV was approved only in 1996, after several difficulties. Restoration works caused a big change in the social composition to the benefit of the wealthier classes and the disappearance of much of the quarter's small businesses. They also sometimes produced contradictory results at architectural scale: many stylistic restorations and falsifications, grafts of new construction on the ancient architecture, not always carefully screened in their modes of expression (Fig. 1).

#### 4. Towards a sustainable conservation in historical cities

At the beginning of '70, the secteurs sauvegardés policy has been radically called into question. The first PSMV were reviewed and their regulation mitigated. Moreover, in the following twenty years fundamental changes in the protection of the built heritage, as well as in urban planning and in attitudes towards architecture, were made. They were, essentially, a reaction to facts which garnered national media attention and public opinion: the large developments of the 1960s such as the Montparnasse tower in Paris, numerous housing estates throughout France, and the demolition in 1971 of the Pavillons in Les Halles built by Haussmannian architect Victor Baltard.

The French decentralization policies undertaken in the years 1982-1983, also resulted in the improvement of heritage legislation that further expanded its geographical coverage not only to architectural groups but also to large urban, rural or natural sites. The law of January 1983 introduced the Zones de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural et Urbain (ZPPAU) to enable the protection and management of the urban and rural heritage, of built areas and landscapes, on a contractual basis, allocating the responsibilities between central government and local authorities. A further law of 1993 extended the protection to landscapes, adding the word paysager to the tool (ZPPAUP have recently been renamed aires de mise en valeur de l'architecture et du Patrimoine).

In December 2000, the French Parliament voted the "Solidarity and urban renovation" law (SRU), in order to deeply renew national planning tools and rules. Its great ambition was to organize the development of French cities, towns and villages, based on habitat, planning and transportation. This policy introduced the term "urban regeneration" and aimed at upgrading degraded, abandoned or impoverished urban sites by the implementation of the principles of mixité sociale and urban diversity. Its main purpose was to correct what was regarded as past mistakes and deal with new problems (Jaquot, 1992). The SRU also introduced the plan local d'urbanisme (PLU) to simplify the whole process and so reduce the complexity of the local plan. This instrument divides the commune into four zones, one of which - the N zone - concerns protected areas where no new construction are permitted by virtue of their sensitive historical, ecological or environmental nature. Because of this approach, the PLU can be considered as a third mechanism concerning the safeguarding of urban areas. Thanks to its easier elaboration and adoption, the question arises as to whether this is the urban planning tool to which will be assigned one day, the protection of historic centers in France.

## Conclusions

The PLU of Paris has been approved in 2006 and, in order to comply with its strategy and orientations, the PSMV of the Marais district is now under revision. The new version would contemplate a most modern and extensive protection vision, taking into account the city's needs in terms of housing, diversification of urban functions and sustainable economic development, as well as its necessary anchorage dans la ville de demain (fig. 2). In the case of Paris, as in general everywhere in France, urban conservation policies are heading towards simpler procedures, really focused on the people who live in (and use) the historical centers. Their re-appropriation by the poorest families and the integration of patrimonial component within the metropolitan urban policies are regarded as "essential elements" in the relationship of civil society and the process of democratization. In recent years there has been a vigorous revival of urban renewal procedures through traditional practices of demolition, especially related to the urban ghettos (the 2003 Law for the City and Urban Renovation set up a five-year program of renovation) or to other expressions of the architectural culture of the second half of the 20th century, considered as a "shame" by the elite of the country (see the demolition of the Forum des Halles shopping center begun at the end of 2011). However, now France seems to move towards more equilibrated and concerted policies. The example of the city of Paris highlights a kind of duality in urban strategies, even if based on a single metropolitan project. On one side, the safeguarding of historical buildings and centers is clearly affirmed by the Government and Municipalities. On other side, urban renewal operations are carried out in both peripheral and central areas. The future of Paris is moving in balance between these two aspects. An audacious Paris is thus expected, as shown by Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential ambition to reinvent a greater Paris. Forty years after the approach launched by General de Gaulle, France seeks to transform a vast region, larger than the département of Ile de France, into a model city for the 21st century, sustainable, visionary, "post-Kyoto" and polycentric. At its center, it would of course be Paris, le Vrai, le Beau, le Grand.

## Legenda

Fig. 1 Grafts of new construction on the ancient architecture of Marais.

Fig. 2 The PSMV of the Marais district under revision.

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