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## **Public Space and the Metropolis. The Changing Governance of Public Spaces Around the *Grand Paris Express*'s New Metro Stations**

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### **Abstract:**

Megaprojects and their public spaces have often been criticized as sites of commodification and privatization. Without questioning these trends, a growing body of research affirms the contingent nature of projects, requiring in-depth empirical studies. This paper focuses on the implementation of Grand Paris Express, a transport mega-project, from a public-space perspective. We draw on the case of La Courneuve Six-Routes station to analyze the growing complexity of public space governance in Greater Paris. In so doing, we offer an additional contribution to the literature. The main driver of change in public space policies is interterritorial governance between local, metropolitan and national levels, not private actors. Moreover, the design principles and implementation processes do not provide for iconic, commodified and sanitized public spaces. However, in their current configuration, the politics of these public spaces remains ambivalent, because of the importance of real estate development in the network's future implementation.

**Keywords:** design; public space; governance; megaproject; planning, Grand Paris Express; Greater Paris

## Introduction

In 2007, French President Nicolas Sarkozy launched an initiative called “Grand Paris” to restore the attractiveness of Ile-de-France<sup>1</sup> and to improve Paris’s global ranking. Its centerpiece was the construction of a regional, ring-like automatic metro system, the Grand Paris Express (GPE), approved in 2009. With over 200 km of railways, and 68 stations, the network should unify the very fragmented peripheries of Paris and impel large (re)development opportunities. Thus, the GPE is an urban development project, rather than a *mere* infrastructure mega-project. These ambitions are visible in the governance set up for its implementation. The national government created the *Société du Grand Paris* (SGP) in 2010 to oversee the network’s funding, design, and construction. Gradually, its scope expanded to the construction of new stations, real estate development, culture and arts endowments, and development of surrounding public spaces and intermodal platforms.

Urban megaprojects and public space are longtime companions and in cases such as Barcelona’s 1992 Olympics or Lisbon’s 1998 World Exhibition, public spaces are at the core of urban regeneration strategies. Contrary to area-based urban regeneration projects, the GPE has a network and archipelago-like effect on the whole of the metropolitan territory. Each new station is a (smaller) redevelopment opportunity: the GPE is a transport megaproject giving way to dozens of urban development projects of different sizes, both greenfield and brownfield. In every setting SGP addresses the articulation of stations with their surroundings – including public spaces – and the creation of real estate development opportunities. Like many other megaprojects, the Grand Paris Express is implemented through state-sponsored governance exceptionalism and new partnership arrangements (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002; Baptista, 2013; Hanakata & Gasco, 2018). Yet, its archipelago-like quality multiplies the interactions between SGP and local and metropolitan actors, both public and private. GPE’s implementation consists of 68 contingent processes in different contexts.

In this paper, we provide a thorough empirical account of GPE’s implementation from a public space perspective. We demonstrate that the SGP brings about new design concepts which will guide the transformation of a wide array of spaces, including squares,

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<sup>1</sup> Ile-de-France is the name of the region to which Paris belongs.

streets and large thoroughfares. SGP's design philosophy advocates for livability, comfort and intermodality. This approach, anchored in landscape design, might be at odds with existing planning practices at the local level. As a new player in public space governance in the Paris region, the SGP creates new implementation processes with additional coordination bodies, gathering regional and local public authorities. Through negotiation, technical support and financial carrots, the SGP seeks compromises leading to the implementation of its design philosophy. With this perspective we offer an additional contribution to the planning literature on public space governance. We show that the main driver of change in Greater Paris is the joint action of the different levels of public governance, rather than the redefinition of boundaries between the public and private sectors. Moreover, current intentions in terms of public space design differ from the commodified, sanitized and securitized visions usually associated with megaprojects.

We utilize a broad definition of governance as “a form of coordination in the taking of collectively binding decisions within a certain community” (Van Assche, Beunen, Barba-Lata, & Duineveld, 2015, p. 4). To link this definition of governance to public space, we define the latter as a category of public action (Gomes, 2022). In political sociology, public action is “the action undertaken by a public authority (alone or in a partnership) to deal with a situation perceived as a problem” (Lascoumes & Le Gallès, 2012, p. 7). Urban planning and design is a particular form of public action, because its main objective is the material transformation of space. Then, a category of action in urban planning is a term used “to explore, generate, and determine objectives, as well as choices relating to the transformation of spaces” (Arab, 2018, p. 225). Thus, categories of action play a role which is simultaneously cognitive (interpretations of problems), normative (identification of desirable outcomes) and spatial (transformation of urban artefacts).

This perspective is different from the widespread use of public space as analytical category in urban studies. We do not refer to a notion of publicness to analyze actually existing spatial practices (see for instance Koch & Latham, 2012; Qian, 2014). Still, public space as a category of action correspond to production processes which integrate spatial practices, social interactions, and diversity of uses and users, departing from previous technical and traffic-based approaches of the public realm (Dessouroux, 2006; Fleury, 2007). Such a transition is a challenge to preexisting governance arrangements, work methods and professional expertise. Thus, our approach of public space governance investigates the relationship between the content of policies, designs and management

schemes (what public spaces are produced) and the coordinated action that constitutes their governance (which actors are involved and how, when and why they participate). In so doing, we parallel Arab's (2018) theory of the urban project, whose foundations in action sociology allow for efficient analyses of the contingency of planning activities and the mechanisms of coordinated action between different stakeholders.

The Grand Paris Express is interesting from a public space governance perspective for several reasons. SGP's intentions might be at odds with existing policies and practices. What are the visions of public space at play? How do negotiations unfold? Moreover, Greater Paris<sup>2</sup> is a governance context characterized by institutional fragmentation and unfinished integration, myriad infrastructure and urban development projects, and increasing polycentrism (Desjardins, 2018). How does SGP deal with complex governance and what kind of public space does this create? Finally, could SGP's intervention in the public spaces of 68 stations act as a mechanism of metropolitan integration in terms of public space policies?

This article is an account of the megaproject seen from below. We draw on the case of the La Courneuve Six-Routes station to substantiate and analyze the growing complexity of public space governance in Greater Paris. This particular project, in which a heavy-traffic roundabout will be transformed into a standard intersection with large expanses of pedestrian areas, has been marketed as a perfect example of SGP's ambitions. Therefore, it provides a suitable case for studying how SGP's definition of public space can be successfully implemented in a territory with visibly different preexisting conditions.

Our analysis is based on 13 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2017 and 2019 with representatives of the major institutions involved: directors, project managers and designers. The paper also draws on participant observation by one of the authors as a member of the Atelier des places, an external consultancy for the SGP (see below). His role as an expert allows for perspective on the representativity of La Courneuve's case. Our analysis covers the early stages of the process: inter-institutional

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<sup>2</sup> By "Greater Paris" we refer broadly to the space of metropolitan influence of Paris. When referring to the administrative metropolitan area created in 2016, we use its official title: *Métropole du Grand Paris* or the abbreviation MGP.

coordination and definition of design principles. Implementation of this and other GPE public spaces awaits the construction of the metro network itself from 2024 onwards.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin by presenting a literature review on public space governance, megaprojects and the Grand Paris Express. We continue with a section on the city of La Courneuve before proceeding to three empirical sections on i) SGP's actions in public space; ii) the negotiations between SGP's actions and the preexisting public space governance landscape; iii) a nascent interterritorial public space policy at the metropolitan level because of GPE implementation.

### **Public space governance and urban megaprojects**

The roles and complex relationships of public and private actors in the production of public spaces evolve over time (Madanipour, 2010). Over the past three decades, research has focused on privatization and its effects. From a governance point of view, privatization designates the transfer of ownership and/or management prerogatives from public to private actors. In this sense, privatization is not a synonym of commodification and sanitization, even though they often go hand in hand. These relationships have actually been open to debate, with some authors criticizing the pseudo-public nature of such spaces, that cannot replace real public spaces (Sorkin, 1992; Boyer, 1993; Kohn, 2004). Conversely, others consider that private sector involvement as an opportunity for improving the quality and the management of public spaces (Banerjee, 2001; Carmona & Wunderlich, 2012).

From this founding—and ongoing—debate centered on the “end of public space” because of private encroachment (Bodnar, 2015) stemmed a strand of literature on the governance of public spaces (De Magalhães, 2010; De Magalhães & Freire Trigo, 2017; Langstraat & van Melik, 2013; Zamanifard, Alizadeh, & Bosman, 2018). These authors draw attention to the complex redistribution of public space rights and responsibilities along public and private lines, a situation often overlooked by a debate exclusively focused on private encroachment. In so doing, they emphasize the complexity, multi-scalar character and diversity of governance models where specific configurations depend on spatial contexts and are not necessarily profit-oriented nor detrimental to the publicness of public spaces. The changing governance arrangements *inside* the public

sector, however, remain largely overlooked by the literature which still relies on the privatization debate as a frame of reference.

Thus, the literature on public space governance challenges the focus on privatization. For some authors, the privatization debate over-emphasizes Anglo-American contexts and certain flagship projects and ignores the quasi-exclusive role of public actors in public space production, namely in Western Europe (Dessouroux, 2006; Fleury, 2007; Langstraat & van Melik, 2013; Martí Casanovas, 2013). Besides international differences, it has also been noted that public authorities are the main actors outside commercial and touristic hotspots, especially in local residential districts. More generally, the literature on the production of public space has done little to “take the city at large” (Paddison & Sharp, 2007, p. 88) limiting empirical research on public spaces within urban peripheries (Gomes, 2017).

There are strong parallels between the trends described in the public space literature and in research on urban megaprojects. In many ways, urban megaprojects face the same critiques that fuel discussions on the end of public space. Sometimes, the actual commodified, sanitized, revanchist spaces are part of the megaprojects. Specifically, the 2000s saw a surge of literature on the new generation of megaprojects, a spatial manifestation of globalization and entrepreneurial urban policies (Jones & Moreno-Carranco, 2007) emerging since the 1980s (Lehrer & Laidley, 2008).

Analysts critically engaged with different facets of megaprojects, including their political and socio-spatial implications. Politically, authors pointed out the exceptional governance regimes that often underpin urban megaprojects (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Baptista, 2013) bypassing existing mechanisms of democratic control (Kennedy, 2015). This exceptionalism, as it emphasizes ideas of necessity and progress, contributes to the depoliticization of urban megaprojects. Project initiators further create consensus by presenting projects as multidimensional, integrated solutions to a wide range of urban issues while curtailing the scaling up of protests against projects to a city-wide scale (Lehrer & Laidley, 2008; Strauch, Takano, & Hordijk, 2015; Majoor, 2018). Such an exceptional rolling-out of state action has been interpreted as a facet of neoliberal urbanization, pushing the frontiers for real estate development and market logics (Swyngedouw et al., 2002) and/or in engaging private actors in different configurations (Hanakata & Gasco, 2018).

From a social and spatial perspective, most megaprojects since the 1980s have been brownfield developments in the outskirts of growing metropolises. Thus, megaprojects contribute to the restructuring of peripheries (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Savini, Majoor, & Salet, 2015) and produce urban fragmentation and polarization (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Jones & Moreno-Carranco, 2007). They also create series of commodified and sanitized landscapes deprived of urbanity (Fainstein, 2008; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008).

Like in the public space literature, these prevalent views have been met with calls for nuance. For instance, ethnographers of social life have shown forms of everyday resistance (Jones & Moreno-Carranco, 2007; Simões Aelbrecht, 2010). Other authors have insisted on the contingency of megaprojects impelling thorough empirical studies of social, spatial and political contexts (Doucet, 2013; Kennedy, 2015; Hanakata & Gasco, 2018; Majoor, 2018). Our view of the megaproject from below recognizes the contingency of project implementation. At the same time, it explores the changing public space governance through arrangements inside the public sector.

### **Around Grand Paris Express: the metropolis, mega-projects and public space**

The early stages of the Presidential Initiative Grand Paris have been interpreted as the right-wing government's attempt to gain back control over the Parisian metropolis (Subra, 2009). Indeed, following the decentralization laws of the 1980s, the region and municipalities (many of which were left-wing) had gained reasonable power in planning and development policies.

The founding initiative of Sarkozy's Grand Paris was an international architecture competition for renowned architects called Grand Pari(s),<sup>3</sup> with submissions displayed in a highly mediatized exhibition criticized as a "a populist fantasy of grandeur, economic growth and regional unity" (Enright, 2014, p. 384). More importantly, the same author argues, Sarkozy's Grand Paris contributes "to legitimate the central state, to create an image of Grand Paris where one did not before exist, to engineer public support for the global city and to provide a theoretical and representational basis for new metropolitan policies" (Enright, 2014, p. 401).

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<sup>3</sup> A wordplay with "*grand pari*" (major bet).



This largely neoliberal re-envisionment of “the city as a network of flows has become central to political rhetoric promoting the city’s economic development” (Belkind, 2013) and found its material translation in Grand Paris Express, a transport megaproject. The locations of its stations include a mix of existing and future economic hubs, derelict industrial sites, and residential areas in the periphery. This location strategy “equalize[s] the territory by opening everywhere up to investment but must also differentiate districts as a means of facilitating particular types of growth” (Enright, 2013, p. 802). The real estate developments in the stations’ surroundings contribute to the financing of the network substantiating President Sarkozy’s “new forms of project design and finance” (Halpern & Le Galès, 2020, p. 314) including public-private partnerships with major French companies and land transactions.

Like many other mega-projects around the globe (Lorrain, 2011), especially transport ones, Grand Paris Express required different levels of government to collaborate—or not. GPE was a source of important conflicts between the state and the region. Whereas state plans designed a network between airports, core business centers and scientific clusters, the region’s competing (and preexisting) proposal called *Arc Express* emphasized connections between residential areas in the peripheries closest to Paris. Thus, President Sarkozy’s unified vision of the project clashed with the views of lower tiers of government with whom the state had to negotiate in the aftermath of the public participation process (*débat public*) (Belkind, 2013).

For Halpern and Le Galès (2020, pp. 304, 323) this conflictual relationship between the state and region “reveals the emergence of a form of regional governance,” i.e., “the incremental organisation of incipient governance through an ambitious transportation project on the one hand, and on the other, a political competition leading to gradual adjustments.” These negotiations result in a stronger commitment towards reducing social and spatial inequalities. Moreover, the development contracts signed between the state and local government (*Contrats de développement territorial*) provided additional resources for pre-existing local policies and a means of influencing the Grand Paris project (Gallez, 2014). Also, plans for institutional reform were put on hold delegating network construction to a new, *ad hoc*, state agency (*Société du Grand Paris*).

Two main strands of academic interpretations of the Grand Paris Express are in evidence. On the one hand, critical urban researchers have investigated the ideological foundations of both Grand Paris and Grand Paris Express by focusing on the visions

conveyed in the initial stages of the process and anticipating their social and spatial impacts. On the other, there is work by policy analysts that is less concerned by “visions”<sup>4</sup> than by coalitions, institutional and partisan contexts and metropolitan governance modes. Our approach of public space as a category of action brings them together by paying attention to both the material content of projects and implementation process. In the case of the Grand Paris Express, this approach updates research done on initial project stages<sup>5</sup> and, of particular interest to us, shows the interplay of national, metropolitan and local government levels.

### **Investigating the implementation of the Grand Paris Express at La Courneuve**

The future La Courneuve Six-Routes station is located in La Courneuve (see Figure 1), a municipality north of Paris and a symbol of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *banlieue rouge* (red belt): industrial, working class, and Communist-led municipalities surrounding the French capital. Since the 1980s, social and ethnic segregation has increased in these areas (Bacqué & Fol, 1997), further amplifying the urban fabric’s fragmentation initiated from the post-war period by major road and rail networks, industrial districts, and large social housing estates.

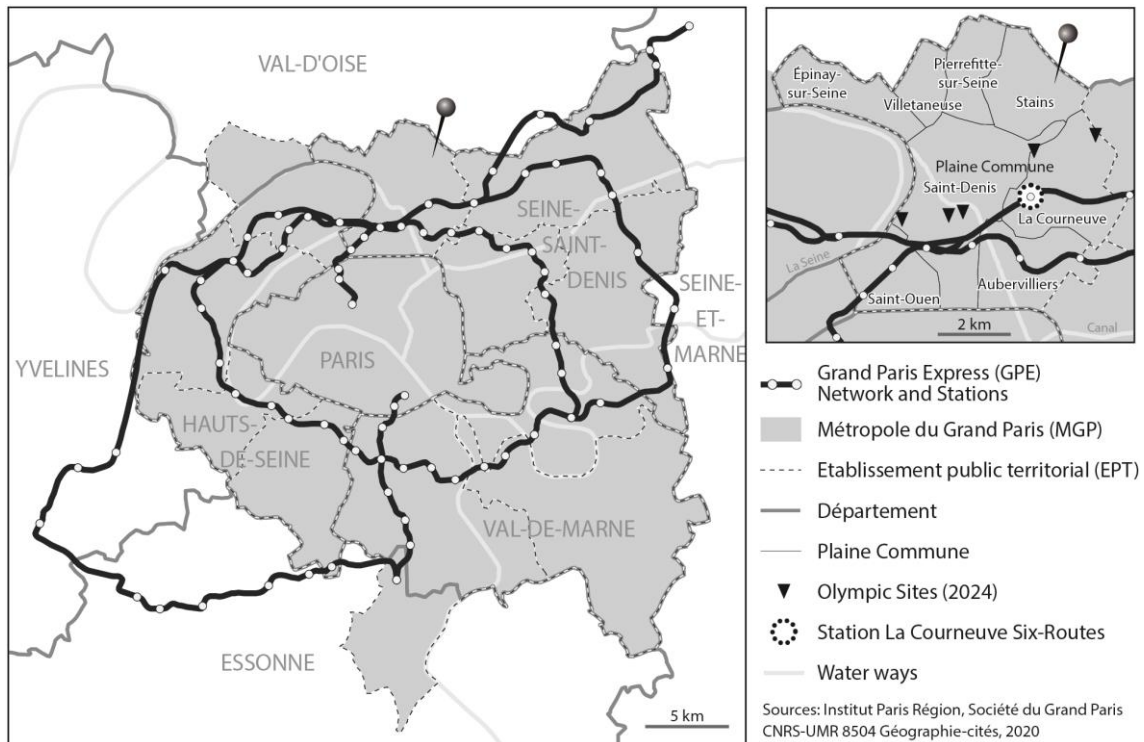
La Courneuve has been a site of consistent intervention for the national urban renewal program, including demolition and reconstruction of estates and a redefinition of boundaries between private and public spaces. Despite the impact of urban renewal in population make-up and the urban fabric of the northern *banlieues*, the impact of urban megaprojects such as the Stade de France has arguably been greater. Consequently, increasingly precarious neighborhoods coexist with others undergoing fragile budding gentrification (Raad, 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> Halpern and Le Galès (2020, p. 314) dismissed *Grand Pari(s)* as a “very mediatic competitive process, but of little importance.”

<sup>5</sup> More than ten years have passed since the GPE was announced; the *Société du Grand Paris* exists, many tunnels have been dug, and construction has begun for some of network’s future stations. First inaugurations are expected in 2024.

Figure 1. The overlapping institutional landscape of Greater Paris and location of La Courneuve Six-Routes station



Both the GPE and the upcoming 2024 Olympics extend the logic of using urban megaprojects to redevelop peripheries, improving accessibility and opening up new fronts for real estate development. The Six-Route district is one such area and emblematic of the fragmented landscape of La Courneuve. The station will be partially built on a roundabout, rather unfriendly to pedestrians and cyclists, connecting six roads including two major thoroughfares. The roundabout is surrounded by a social housing estate (*Cité des 4000*), a factory and lower-density housing. A large urban park is a few hundred meters away on the other side of a highway. The new station will considerably reduce travel time to major metropolitan centralities and answer to planning objectives reminiscent of transit-oriented development principles. Moreover, it will provide access to one Olympic venue and, in the long run, participate in making the district a “place of destination” (Ville de la Courneuve, 2018). Symbol of the new centrality, a landmark building, almost 55 meters high, will be built on top of the station. The construction of the station began in 2019 and other projects should follow shortly, eventually resulting in a much denser built environment.

## **Connecting stations to the territory: the public spaces of Grand Paris Express**

As the implementation of the GPE began, SGP gradually considered the network's connection to the surface aboveground. Public space became a strategic element of the project from a design point of view (the projects themselves) and in the governance to be set up (pole committee and financial carrots). In this section, we show how SGP developed its vision of public space and how its implementation envisions intersecting the pre-existing landscape of public space governance.

### ***From iconic architecture to public space***

The GPE's urban ambitions are visible in the choice of building distinct *gares*, rather than uniform *stations de métro*.<sup>6</sup> The new *gares* were imagined both as symbols of the Parisian global city and as flagships of the future neighborhoods. Accordingly, initial ideas on the network's public spaces proposed a metropolitan identity common to the stations and their immediate surroundings through homogenous design elements drafted by architect Jacques Ferrier (Société du Grand Paris, 2012).

International design competitions were launched for the stations and first results were announced in 2015. The relationship with surrounding urban fabrics and issues of intermodality were scarcely explored; in the winning designs, public spaces were used primarily to showcase the stations. This was a pivotal moment for SGP for whom project success was now dependent on how the network would “land” in each context. That same year a report (Société du Grand Paris, 2015) displayed a new attitude towards public space, keener on a “new form of intermodal transport” and “quality urban spaces, accessible, comfortable and inviting.”

This led to the creation of the UEPI, *Unité espaces publics et intermodalité*, (Public Spaces and Intermodal Transport Unit) within SGP in 2016. The unit began by clarifying SGP's goal: network consistent public spaces offering standard quality of service and user comfort as well as efficient intermodality. To achieve this objective, the

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<sup>6</sup> Both words translate as “station” in English. Yet, in French, the word *station* is employed for everyday metro stations, with no/little exterior construction and a mostly functional architecture. The word *gare* is used for train stations thus invoking an imaginary of urban and architectural landmarks.

unit relies on a small number of employees (4 Full Time Equivalents before extensive internal reorganization in 2019) and for defining its action principles and steering project implementation is supported by a large number of external consultants, a common practice in French urbanism.

Among UEPI's external consultants, Transamo, an *Assistance à la maîtrise d'ouvrage* (AMO),<sup>7</sup> provided continuous support with several employees working directly at SGP's headquarters. The "atelier des places" also played a key role. This expert group led by the architecture and urban design studio TVK was commissioned to study "the needs of current (...) and future travelers, new mobilities and public space design methods, in order to make proposals and set guidelines to [SGP's] partners, who will steer the design of future poles" (as written in the specifications of the 2016 tender). While Transamo is specialized in mobility issues, this expert group was largely multidisciplinary.<sup>8</sup> Working closely with UEPI (and Transamo) between 2017 and 2019, the "atelier des places" produced a design guide that set a departure from a uniform vision of metropolitan identity to better address user comfort and the variety of urban contexts (TVK et al., 2019).

### ***Carrots and collaboration: engaging with a fragmented local government landscape***

This attention to context is reflected in the dispositive set up by the SGP to intervene around its stations and on public spaces. From 2015, SGP set up "pole committees" for each station. Such committees were a familiar instrument frequently used by the regional Transport Authority in coordinating the implementation of intermodal hubs and transport lines. For Schorung (2021), pole committees epitomize SGP's "pragmatic approach," given its small public space team. However, unlike their regional predecessors, SGP-initiated committees seek to "integrate public spaces and the development of surrounding areas in order to move away from a purely functional logic and a segmentation of public

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<sup>7</sup> AMO defines a practice in which the institution steering a given project (the *maîtrise d'ouvrage*) hires external input to assist in steering activities.

<sup>8</sup> The group includes two other landscape design and urban planning studios, a light designer and consultants on mobility, climatic comfort, temporary urbanism and public participation.

space and public action” (Schorung, 2021). In each committee, state and regional services, SGP, local authorities, public transport operators, and *Ile-de-France Mobilités* (Transport Authority) work together to build a program for the public spaces within a 300-meter radius around the station.<sup>9</sup> A local partner steers the committee and UEPI together with the Transport Authority monitors each pole’s progress. Thus, pole committees further illustrate the changing relationships between state and other government levels, different from top-down, authoritative methods often used in the Parisian *banlieue* in the past (Bourdeau-Lepage, 2013). Unlike in many megaprojects, the purpose of GPE’s *ad hoc* institutions (SGP and pole committees) is not to circumvent existing legislation and institutions, but to encourage collaboration in order to overcome the fragmented property lines and attributions of different public authorities in the immediacy of the future stations. The pole committee’s end goal is a reference plan setting guidelines for the operational phase and for the co-financing of its implementation.

The fragmented landscape of public space governance in Greater Paris is dominated by many public institutions – in particular municipalities and *départements* – with different policies and motivations present at any given time. At the local level, there is considerable geographic variation in governance arrangements dependent on intermunicipal cooperation and on the presence of public or semi-public development corporations and even the central state itself. The latter remains involved not only through the SGP, but also in specific areas such as public order and urban renewal<sup>10</sup> or in sites of high cultural value. Finally, no metropolitan institutions intervene in public space apart from the regional Transport Authority.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Generally, pole committees work between two and four years, delivering a reference plan at the end. As construction approaches, design teams are appointed to create the new public spaces (2–4 years), which are subsequently implemented (2–4 years).

<sup>10</sup> The National Agency for Urban Renewal (ANRU, see Boisseuil, 2016) finances and co-determines public space refurbishments in neighborhoods undergoing state-sponsored renewal.

<sup>11</sup> The *Métropole du Grand Paris* has no competence over public space. More generally, it has low political clout and struggles to subsist, as preexisting local government institutions—in particular the *départements* it was supposed to replace—maintain considerable influence (Lefèvre, 2019).

The SGP must deal with this extreme fragmentation around each station, including at La Courneuve—see Table 1. Here, the municipality is a member of an *Etablissement public territorial* (EPT)<sup>12</sup> called *Plaine Commune* (see Figure 1). This intermunicipal cooperation authority assembles seven member municipalities<sup>13</sup> to whom the EPT is accountable for providing specific services including public space planning and management. Moreover, as in all Parisian peripheries, the *département* is responsible for the major axes of the road network, as well as the largest parks and green areas. Thus, in Six-Routes, the *département*, the EPT and SGP will each oversee the construction of public spaces around the station. UEPI focuses on curbing any significant difference in design that might stem from these complex property and legal arrangements.

Table 1 shows the different motivations pursued by participants in Six-Routes' pole committee who might challenge UEPI's goals. Although UEPI does not steer pole committees, it is able to influence their development projects through the co-financing of plans up to 100,000€. Other project influencers include SGP and the Transport Authority who may co-finance public space redevelopment depending on the projects' adherence to their principles. These financial carrots give UEPI bargaining power especially in times of constrained local budgets.

Throughout the process, UEPI and its consultants champion their public space objectives and design principles. Besides financial carrots, collaborative work methods aim at creating a shared outlook on public spaces. Taking advantage of these various incentives, SGP reinvents and displaces state intervention in Greater Paris's public spaces: influencing design and long-term management in spaces over which the local governments have direct control.

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<sup>12</sup> EPT were created in 2016. They are legally responsible for providing a limited number of competencies (sanitation, water and waste management...) to member municipalities. Other infrastructure management services, including those related to public spaces, are left to local power balances.

<sup>13</sup> These seven municipalities bring together 429,000 inhabitants in a territory corresponding to half the area of the municipality of Paris.

Table 1 - Roles and motivations of pole committee members in La Courneuve Six-Routes

	Actors and stakeholders	Roles	Motivations
Local and intermediate levels	La Courneuve (Municipality)	Political management of urban policies led at the EPT level	To guarantee municipal objectives of urban renewal, social inclusion and residential attractiveness/social mix
	Plaine Commune (EPT)	To implement a coherent public space policy within its borders To oversee the implementation of urban projects (brownfield)	To accompany the GPE and guarantee its adherence to local policies To catalyze national flagship projects to support local dynamics
	Seine-Saint-Denis (Département)	To design and manage main thoroughfares To manage large urban parks Steers the pole committee <sup>14</sup>	To guarantee the articulation of the station with surrounding thoroughfares To guarantee road network performance, traffic-wise
	Vera Broëz urban design agency	To design the reference plan	To overcome the existing configuration and to create generous and inclusive public spaces
Regional level	Transport Authority (Ile-de-France Mobilités)	To oversee the design, implementation and management of intermodal hubs	To guarantee adherence to technical guidelines, mobility best practice and existing regulations of public transport operations
	Transport operators (RATP and Transdev)	To operate public transportation services	To guarantee that proposed designs are suitable for future operation
National level	Société du Grand Paris / Unité espaces publics et intermodalité (Public Spaces and Intermodal Transport Unit)	To develop and implement an intermodality and public space policy for the areas surrounding GPE stations (Co-)finance and supervise pole committees	To go beyond a strictly technical approach to mobility and intermodality To create a shared vision among all partners, external and internal to SGP To conciliate public space plans and deadlines of network and station delivery
	Société du Grand Paris / Other services	To steer the design and implementation of the rail network and stations	To respect deadlines and budgets To ensure the proper functioning of the station and the network, in particular in terms of security To create landmark stations

<sup>14</sup> Technically, both the *département* and the EPT have overseeing powers, as they are both affected by the station's future perimeter. However, the *département* was given executive responsibilities on the matter.



## **The Grand Paris Express seen from below: remaking public space in La Courneuve Six-Routes**

The implementation of the Grand Paris Express' includes its network and stations as well as their surroundings, future development and use of public space. UEPI's negotiation-based approach to the production of public spaces relies on the proactivity of local counterparts. While implementation involves adjustment to existing local policies, changes therein may also be promoted, especially where overlaps exist between public authorities as in La Courneuve. However, far from a revolution, the workings of pole committees take place within the continuity of existing practices while exploring opportunities for change. In this section, we analyze the two most involved local authorities: the EPT of *Plaine Commune* and the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis (see Table 1 again).

### ***Plaine Commune: fostering a public space policy through megaprojects***

The history of intermunicipal cooperation in *Plaine Commune* was initiated as urban megaprojects—specifically, the Stade de France for the 1998 FIFA World Cup—sought ways to overcome the barrier effects of major road infrastructures and large industrial brownfields. Cooperation began between two municipalities; progressively others joined, and more public services were mutualized, including public spaces in 2003.

For the EPT, as the Stade de France before, the GPE and the 2024 Olympics are levers for urban development expanding to areas where few projects of metropolitan scope had been developed thus far. Indeed, municipalities such as La Courneuve had been largely overlooked by previous urban megaprojects focused on areas close to Paris. The SGP's wide resource base make it a relevant partner, the stake being of guaranteeing that local policies are enhanced, not undermined, by such projects.

Thus, for *Plaine Commune*, the GPE is mostly an opportunity to reinforce its pre-existing public space policy. Public space responsibilities are held by the EPT's Direction for Public Spaces and Mobility and as a result issues of accessibility and (active) mobility are paramount in the EPT's actions. Economical design and rainwater management are other priorities, while the EPT also tackles emerging issues such as gender or nature-based solutions, temporary urbanism and incremental design.

As *Plaine Commune* is adamant about guaranteeing cohesion throughout its territory—a “right to centrality for all” (Plaine Commune, 2014)—one single design philosophy should be applied to all areas, from inner cities to housing estates, albeit in context-sensitive ways. Strategic objectives are synthesized in a public space *schéma directeur* (masterplan) and technical recommendations in a toolkit given to all designers operating within the EPT’s borders.

Despite the objectives for territorial equity, policy implementation is highly dependent on project dynamics (urban megaprojects, state-sponsored urban renewal, and road requalification). According to our interviewees, this leads to an unequal distribution of public space projects between the EPT’s municipalities. The Grand Paris Express is a way of expanding policy implementation backed by increased resources to new areas. Given *Plaine Commune*’s priorities, when the location of the La Courneuve Six-Routes station was decided, most local planning documents had provided for the transformation of the roundabout (among other public spaces).

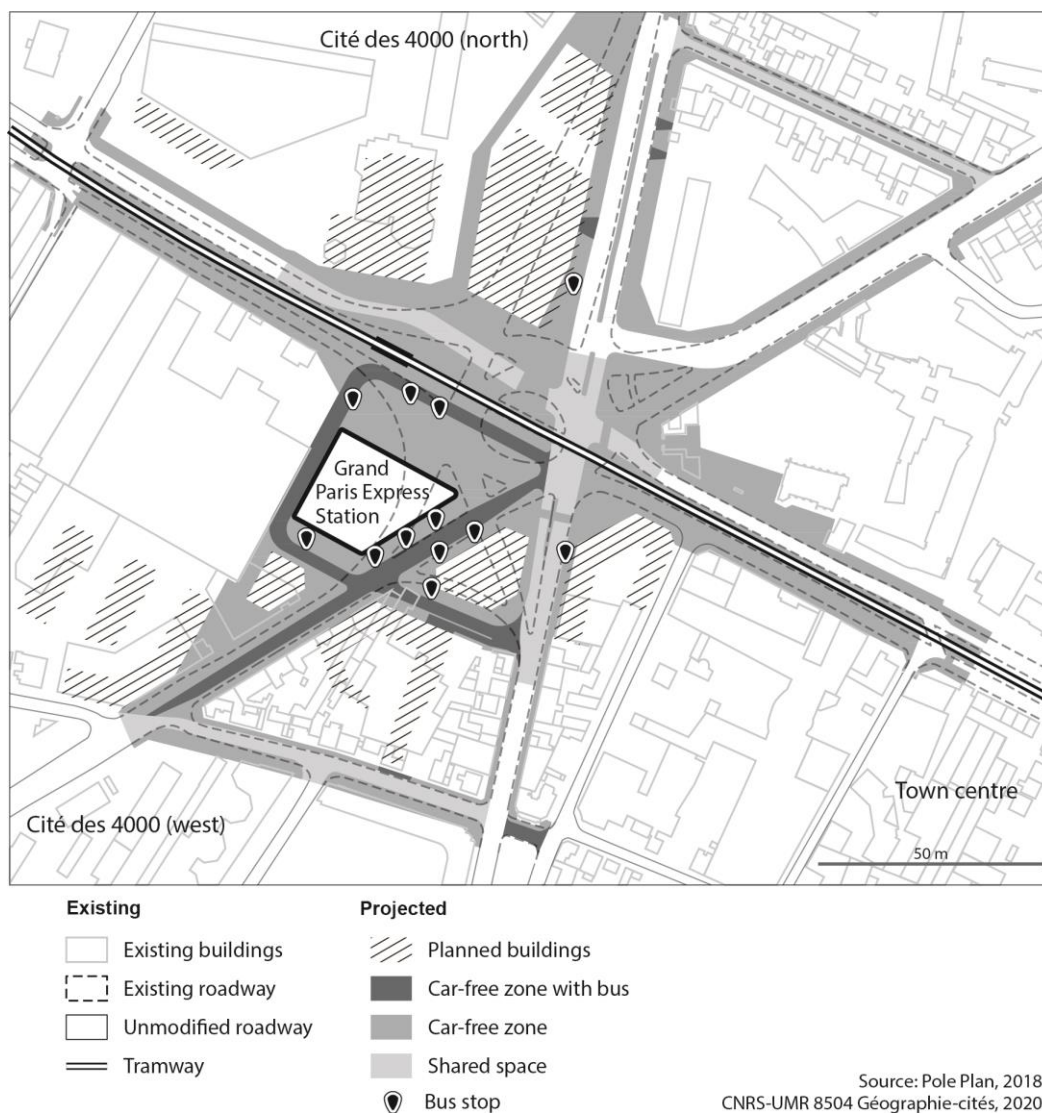
### ***The département of Seine-Saint-Denis: La Courneuve Six-Routes as the starting point for a new policy***

Unlike *Plaine Commune*, the *département* implemented a public space policy only recently. As we have seen, the *département* is responsible for a specific portion of the road network which partially explains its overwhelmingly technical, traffic-based approach. Although active mobilities became an integral part of its network planning throughout the years, input data on circulation and the optimization of road performance remained the core of its approach which mostly ignored urban and social objectives. Therefore, many avenues in Seine-Saint-Denis, despite being among the busiest commercial streets in the area, remain unfriendly to pedestrians and cyclists.

However, the announcement of the Grand Paris Express and the possibility (confirmed in 2017) of hosting several Olympic venues in its territory led to rather swift policy changes in the areas most affected by these megaprojects, the Six-Routes district chief among them. Interviewees agreed on the spectacular and unforeseen ambition of the pole project steered by the *département*. The initial space, fragmented by six roads leading to a large roundabout of “*highway-esque character*” (interview, public servant, *département*, 10/01/2017), gave way to an intersection and a large open space in front of

the station’s main entrance—a “square scenario,” an entirely new proposal<sup>15</sup> (see figure 2). Its approval is a major change in the *département*’s practices if less so for the EPT. The approved plan privileges an “urban logic” as opposed to the “highway-esque” one, with the *département* accepting that its roads could be designed for other purposes than traffic optimization: they could be public spaces.

Figure 2: The public spaces surrounding the future La Courneuve Six-Routes station: initial situation and redevelopment plan



<sup>15</sup> The initial contrasting planning scenarios were less ambitious: “diffuse” vs. “dense” station designs in reference to the location of other transport modes (mainly bus stops, but also electric cars and bicycle parking).

To reach this point, the *département* rebalanced the power dynamics between its different technical services, namely those of urban development and the road network. The appointment of an architect and urban planner as project manager for the pole plan was instrumental in this. Initially employed by the planning division, she joined the department in charge of the road network in 2017 with the mission to oversee all projects relating to megaprojects, including the Olympics. Notably, she was the first architect in this department. The new project manager and her partners immediately hired an urban design team, rather than consultants in infrastructure design, to formalize the project. The project manager, UEPI's director and the urban design team shared a vision of public space but anticipating resistance from the remaining stakeholders, especially those with transport planning backgrounds, they did not directly impose it.

According to our interviewees, the *département's* new outlook on their network is partly due to the work methods used. Working in project mode, the pole committee involves myriad partners and requires consensus building in technical committees before political validation. The multiplication of stakeholders around the table, in contrast with the traditional "silo" approach, nuanced the authority usually held by the *département's* traffic planners. Inclusive interactive design workshops were added to the usual project presentations and discussions. Furthermore, to foster consensus, the project manager and design team systematically justified every decision from both an urban *and* a mobility point of view.

More generally, in a context where its sheer existence was being called into question, the *département* appears to be moving towards comprehensive approaches to its territory beyond mere management of its estate (see footnote 11). The Olympic bid mobilized all services, calling for urban responses to the expected influx of spectators and redevelopment opportunities. Moreover, the appointment of a new Assistant Director-General, brought out from the municipality of Paris, has apparently also contributed to cultural change within the institution. These changes within the *département* both follow and lead the implementation of the project.

### **The making of a metropolitan public space policy: a fragile result of the megaproject**

The fragmented institutional landscape of Greater Paris results in numerous public space

policies that occasionally overlap and sometimes ignore certain territories altogether. However, the GPE is showing itself a powerful vehicle for the transformation of Parisian peripheries and their public spaces. We argue that a metropolitan policy is emerging partly due to UEPI's actions and its "interterritorial" (Vanier, 2008) approach to the production of public spaces. At this stage, this metropolitan policy is being constructed without the public at large and its perennity is quite unclear. Still, it illustrates a rebalancing of the GPE's objectives, a focus on quality of life rather than the affirmation of Paris as a global city.

### ***Fostering a shared culture to improve public spaces in Greater Paris***

The *atelier des places* represents an additional contribution to studies of public spaces at a metropolitan scale led by planning institutions (for example, Atelier parisien d'urbanisme, 2015; Société du Grand Paris, 2015). The *atelier's* work, carried out in parallel with pole committee efforts, supplied sustained evaluation of existing methods and policies and proposed improvements into the UEPI framework. The *atelier's* efforts also introduced collaborative methods and intense exchange with SGP, the Transport Authority and SGP's partners; workshops and conferences gathered technicians from institutions intervening in different poles including *Plaine Commune* and the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis. The objective was that stakeholders would have accepted design guidelines even before the *atelier* delivered them. The *atelier* and UEPI regularly mobilized La Courneuve Six-Routes as a case study in their presentations to illustrate design principles and the transformative potential of the Grand Paris Express's future public spaces. The case has come to embody the ambition and expected outcomes of UEPI's policy.

Having defined an ensemble of design and management principles and guidelines to be shared with all partners (TVK et al., 2019), the *atelier* effectively moved closer to the development of a metropolitan public space policy. The guide promotes the creation of generous and inclusive public spaces around stations taking local contexts into account including existing uses and residents. It also calls on local authorities to implement projects reconciling mobility, diversity of uses and publics, and ecological challenges by moderating traffic, installing free amenities (fountains, benches...) and leaving enough space for nature in all its forms (ground permeability, trees...). Finally, the guide emphasizes user engagement at several points in the design process, inviting project

owners to implement a global “strategy of consultation” including the public and experts in these fields (TVK et al., 2019, p. 57).

The guide is not prescriptive and local authorities remain free to decide whether to apply the design principles. Its main aim is to disseminate a design philosophy and references in terms of design, management and governance. For its implementation, once again SGP and the Transport Authority opted for a double strategy: collaborative working methods and financial carrots. The guide will be used as a basis for negotiations between SGP, the Transport Authority and other stakeholders, thus adapting principles to local situations. Finally, subsidies will be conditional to the application of these principles in the final development project.

Moreover, the guide seeks a step-by-step dissemination of several design principles within Greater Paris as a whole, for example in terms of pedestrian and cycling continuities. Like the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis, other local authorities are expected to change their policies and continue to improve public spaces beyond GPE stations. Thus, the guide’s purpose is to contribute to a shared culture at a metropolitan scale, although, the emergence of a metropolitan policy remains uncertain.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of an interterritorial policy***

SGP’s focus on soft acculturation mechanisms acknowledges the fragmentation of metropolitan governance and constitutes a form of interterritorial governance aiming for effective and long-lasting implementation of its objectives. The term “interterritorial” (Vanier, 2008) emerges from French debates on the appropriate administrative organization of the country as an alternative for effective governance based not on the definition of administrative maps but rather on the object of governance (networks, for example). Interterritoriality thus designates the interaction and cooperation between administrative territories to manage and govern a given object or issue.

In interterritorial governance the outcome of power relations between stakeholders remains largely unpredictable, especially in the absence of a dominant actor. As seen previously, SGP is neither in charge of the public spaces it seeks to influence, nor capable of lobbying indefinitely because it is legally bound to dematerialize once the network is operational. Furthermore, the financial resources devoted to public spaces, as

relevant as they may be for cash-strapped local authorities, are small compared to the sums involved in the whole of the GPE network.

By securing the support of the Transport Authority, however, UEPI has already partly succeeded in its gamble. Indeed, the *atelier des places* guide is also the result of the positive evolution of collaboration between the two institutions since 2017. By reconciling technical constraints, user comfort and spatial qualities, the principles of the guide devoted to intermodality (TVK et al., 2019) embody a real convergence between the two institutions. Their alliance is a powerful driver of change in public space policies and a first step towards the development of a metropolitan policy. The involvement of the Transport Authority is all the more important since, unlike SGP, it will remain in existence beyond the delivery of the network. In an optimistic scenario, local authorities all around Greater Paris would follow *Plaine Commune* and Seine-Saint-Denis in introducing design philosophies focused on communities, pedestrians and cyclists. This would allow for better coordination and even convergence between policies at different scales. Despite institutional fragmentation, this interterritorial convergence would ultimately pave the way for a metropolitan policy.

Nonetheless, the diffusion of their methods and principles depends on their appropriation by local government, thus on political choices. Given the fragmentation of local government in France and its tendency to focus on highly localized issues, there are big challenges in the future of a metropolitan approach to public spaces. Even more so as GPE is an initiative of the central and regional state deployed throughout a vast territory, making it an easy target for political instrumentalization by local officials, for power struggles among themselves and/or with regional and national authorities. Finally, this diffusion is also very pervious to resistance from other stakeholders—most notably regarding the importance given to the car. In cases such as La Courneuve where pre-existing policies and stakeholders were receptive to traffic reduction targets, significant change occurred in public space philosophies. However, in other contexts with uncooperative local authorities, UEPI's actions are ineffective. Several mayors are adamant about creating underground car parks along with the stations or in maintaining major thoroughfares. In richer municipalities, such practices of resistance can block UEPI in its intentions, as the financial carrots it proposes are of little appeal.

To this day, public participation remains a major blind spot of this interterritorial policy. The emphasis on inter-institutional cooperation led to a bypassing of citizen

participation in agenda-setting, which had otherwise been widely developed in French local cultures of public space. Certainly, taking uses and users into account—with respect to social, gender and age diversity—is central to the design principles defended by the SGP and the Transport Authority (TVK et al., 2019, 61), and participatory formats should not be excluded from the later phases of the process, but like the implementation of the other principles, the use of participatory formats depends on the goodwill of the project owners. Finally, the absence of communities from these early stages of project implementation indicates a gap between metropolitan action and community involvement.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis contributes to research at the intersection of public space governance and urban megaprojects. Firstly, our analysis has shown that the main driver of change in public space policies and planning in the Paris region is a form of interterritorial governance. La Courneuve Six-Routes illustrates the gap that can exist between SGP's design objectives and the urban fabric of the Parisian periphery and how a mix of bargaining, financial incentives and technical support negotiations can bridge such a gap. Interterritoriality is a promising concept for thinking through public space policies beyond the local level, as metropolitan scales of government consolidate, in Paris and elsewhere. These findings contrast with the literature in public space governance, which has mostly analysed urban settings where public-private and private governance arrangements dominate. This exemplifies how the study of varied public space governance contexts dislocates research questions and opens new avenues of investigation beyond privatization.

Secondly, our analysis adds nuance to prevailing views of public spaces in megaprojects. Indeed, the design principles and the implementation processes we have analysed are far from the iconic, commodified and sanitized public spaces usually associated with megaprojects. *Atelier des places'* proposals and projects such as Six-Routes explicitly seek to improve public space in neighbourhoods where they are either inexistant or excessively traffic-oriented. Our work also brings an important update to initial analysis of Grand Paris, which focused on iconic contributions of starchitects. Viewing the megaproject “from below” sheds light on the negotiations and arrangements with lower governance tiers that go into megaproject implementation. When it comes to



public space, the GPE is not a display of state authoritarianism; the SGP adopts a proactive and context-sensitive posture towards policy change rather than mounting displays of force.

To conclude, these results should be consolidated by continuing investigations during the implementation stages of the network, reflecting the diversity of situations around different stations. Until now, the interterritorial public space policy of the SGP has been an overwhelmingly technocratic endeavour, clearing the production of public space from many of its political dimensions, particularly the possibility of public debate and citizen involvement. The latter and the actual implementation of the *atelier des places*' design principles are fundamental in discussing the political dimensions of the network's public spaces.

In their current configuration, the politics of public spaces are ambivalent. The SGP's public space principles explicitly disavow revanchist and exclusionary views. But at the same time, these principles are part of a project that is massively linked to real estate development. This ambivalence is visible in SGP's internal reorganization to include a big division called "stations and cities" (including UEPI) displaying its objectives of comprehensive, context-sensitive implementation as well as a strategic move towards becoming an urban development operator. There is therefore a risk that the generous and consensual public space policy promoted by the SGP could only serve to conceal, at little cost, a policy guided by real estate logics.

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