



The architecture of housing in the municipality of Paris

Taking stock

Paris offers the tourist the appearance of a stable city strongly marked by the 19th century, not to be renewed save by some big renewal projects. But as Norma Evenson¹ has commented, Paris also presents the following paradox: while its image and prestige have been preserved virtually intact through the generations by means of an equilibrium based equally on the site, the urban form and political and cultural centralization, the immense vitality of this city has brought in its wake a constant renewal of its stock of buildings, including its housing. It is known that the population of the twenty arrondissements of Paris has been falling steadily since 1945 (2,725,000 inhabitants in 1946 as against 2,176,000 in 1982). Despite this, 340,000 new homes have been built in 34 years, which is one-quarter of the building stock, the peak being reached in 1975 with 26,000 dwellings built.

At the same time an equal number of dwellings have disappeared in this period, either by demolition or conversion into offices, or by regrouping those small rooms lacking in conveniences that used to be found under the roofs of 19th century buildings and called "the maids' bedrooms," because they used to house the house servants. To which one also has to add 150,000 dwellings either empty or used as second homes. These changes have, of course, been accompanied by changes in modes of dwelling: the average size of dwelling has increased only slowly, a mere 10%, much less than in the other big European cities; the number of people in a house-hold has fallen sharply at the same time, leading to an improvement in the space-per-occupant ratio (1.26 rooms per person as against 0.94, and so close to the national average).

There has also been a rise in ownership, mainly through condominium-sharing which now constitutes 300,000 homes. The housing stock in Paris thus remains fairly old (three-quarters of the dwellings built before 1948 as against only half in the rest of France), cramped (2.5 rooms on average against 3.7 for the whole of France), with three-quarters of them being rented and on the whole not particularly convenient.²

The social make up of the Parisian population has also evolved markedly: a fall in office-workers, manual workers, tradesmen and artisans, with a rise in the executive and professional

classes. This "embourgeoisement" is not, however, peculiar to Paris but it is more marked here than elsewhere in France. The number of workers, for instance, has fallen 50% in Paris as well as in its outskirts. Finally, the demographic structure of Paris is unusual: large numbers of young people (15-30 years) and the aged (20% of the population), few families, many foreigners (20%), 65,000 students from outside Paris, etc...

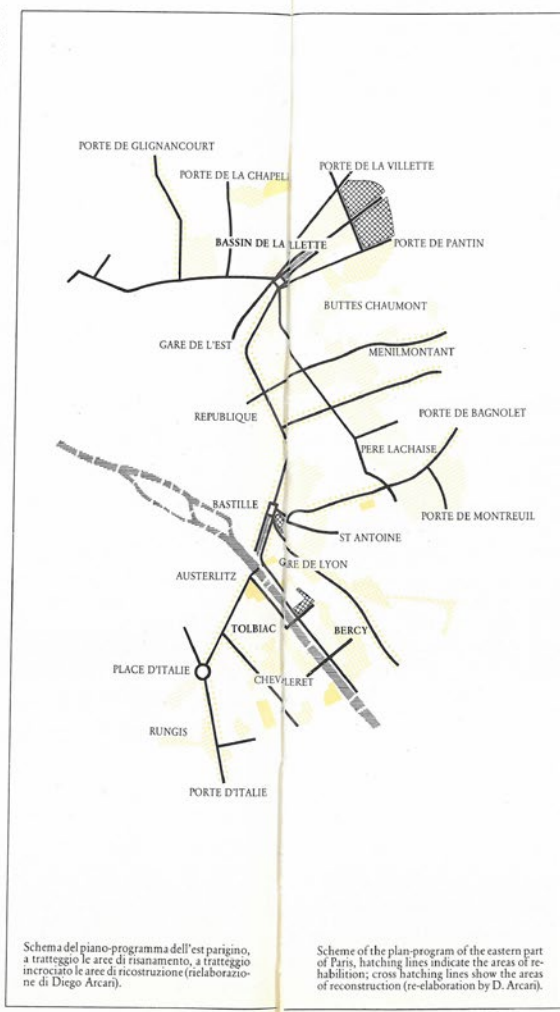
These building renewals and social movements have naturally been most notable in the clearance areas. The large-scale operations launched in the sixties and seventies, now almost completed, ratified a concept of urban planning based on the *tabula rasa* and real estate operations. The *l'île de la Seine* area in the 13th arrondissement, the Seine embankment in the 15th, or the Place des Fêtes in the 20th are the most spectacular instances of this kind of operation which has had the effect of destroying the urban morphology without, however, putting forward any satisfying alternative. These operations often had the quality of a big suburban estate, which seemed to run counter to the specific image of the capital, composed of an urban fabric which is solidly coherent from different periods and on different scales but all related to the traditional street. This policy also raised a wave of protests and the numerous criticism on both the planning and architectural levels were finally heeded by the decision-makers, acting much more responsibly after the application of the new statute of Paris in 1977, which provided for From 1978 on, most of the Zones d'Aménagement Concerté (ZAC) which defined the geographical plan and procedures for these operations have remained in a certain sense much more "urban," thus testifying to a return to more "traditional" but also more intelligent and rational planning concepts — and also more democratic ones.

The main lines of direction of the new policy of renewal, in operations already under way or yet to be begun, were defined as follows.³ The return to a volumetric ratio better related to the existing environment: heights have been fixed at a maximum of 31 metres nearly everywhere, with generally from 4 to 8 storeys; greater respect for the existing urban layout, going so far as to reconstitute the old streets complemented by public spaces and garden areas; maintenance and also extension

of industrial and artisan activities; finally, conservation and amelioration of certain elements in the old city environment. Fifty-five buildings, or 1,040 dwellings, designated for demolition, will thus be preserved. Most of these zones have thus been earmarked for new urbanization. 10,000 new homes are envisaged in the existing ZACs, of which 3,500 are already being built, and about 20,000 more are planned in the medium-term program.⁴ Many of these operations fall within the scope of a program in the east of Paris which aims to "make it as pleasant as the west of Paris within 6-10 years," as the mayor Jacques Chirac put it.⁵ Apart from the recurrent idea (going back to 1830) of "redressing the balance" of Paris to the east, there is the evident political will to retrieve the working-class districts of the capital, even though they have been earmarked for a big slice of welfare housing in the city.

The second important aspect of the new urban policy followed by the city council involves protection and rehabilitation of the existing stock of buildings. The notion of the "centre historique" for the inner city, developed in the fifties and sixties led to protection of the districts of Marais and then the 7th arrondissement (the Faubourg Saint Germain). Then, in 1975, all the central districts plus many of the river-side arrondissements (the 8th, 9th, 16th and 17th) and others on the edge of the inner city were included in a register of sites, which led to control over proposed designs exerted by a special committee. This territorial extension of protective measures was accompanied by a broadening of the scope of protection.⁶ This appeared in the consideration given to the established fabric of the city (old hamlets and villages, ancient villages, pre-Haussmann site division, etc.) and by a critical reappraisal of the architectural and urban legacy of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The policy of strictly protecting historic monuments was thus backed up by measures to maintain the compositional lines and principles of layout of the city, without necessarily going so far as keeping the city unaltered, while enhancing the protected districts. Rehabilitation of the old buildings is therefore aimed not just at improving the level of comfort and inhabitability of the dwellings. It also fits into a process of preserving traditional urban values and hence the identity of a city like Paris. Out of 240,000 dwellings recorded as old, 120,000 will have to be



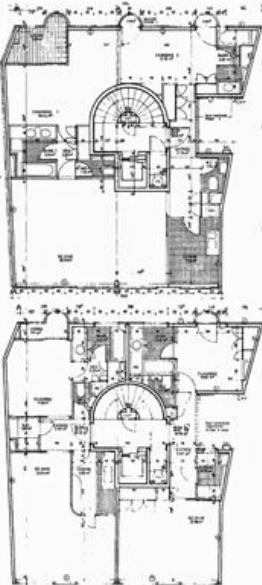
Schema del piano-programma dell'est parigino, a tratteggio le aree di risanamento, a tratteggio incrociato le aree di ricostruzione (rielaborazione di Diego Arcari).

Schema of the plan-program of the eastern part of Paris, hatching lines indicate the areas of rehabilitation; cross hatching lines show the areas of reconstruction (re-elaboration by D. Arcari).



D. Manfras, casa in Avenue de Saxe.

D. Manfras, home in Avenue de Saxe.



co ereditata dai secoli XIX e XX.

La rigorosa politica di salvaguardia dei monumenti storici trova così il suo completamento in misure che consentono di mantenere inalterate le linee costitutive e la struttura organizzativa della città (senza che questo debba necessariamente precludere trasformazioni), e nella valorizzazione dei quartieri sotto tutela. Il restauro dei vecchi edifici non ha dunque soltanto il fine di migliorare il comfort e la qualità abitativa degli alloggi. Si inscende bensì anche in un tentativo di tutela dei valori urbani tradizionali, ed in ultima analisi dell'identità stessa di una città come Parigi. Ciononostante su 240.000 alloggi ritenuti fatiscenti, 120.000 dovranno essere demoliti, dato il costo eccessivo che comporterebbe la loro ristrutturazione. Il ritmo attuale del recupero è di 4.700 alloggi l'anno, di cui 2.000 su iniziativa privata, e 700 ad opera di organismi sociali. In via di principio tale cifra dovrebbe salire a quella di 6.000 alloggi l'anno.

Una parte non trascurabile dello sforzo costruttivo si svolge infine nell'ambito della griglia catastale esistente. Come accade per la maggioranza dei comuni francesi, l'intera area parigina, fatta eccezione per le ZAC, è coperta da un piano di utilizzo dei suoli (POS — Plan d'Occupation des Sols) — attualmente in corso di revisione — che definisce con grande precisione la natura, la densità e la struttura fisica del costruibile su ciascun lotto. Uno dei primi fattori considerati è il coefficiente d'utilizzo dei suoli (COS), che fissa la massima densità di costruzione consentita in base ad una suddivisione in quattro categorie fondamentali: uso abitativo, commerciale, artigianale, per ufficio. La concorrenza fatta da quest'ultima categoria all'uso abitativo è fortemente limitata dall'istituzione di un COS che è in genere per gli uffici due o tre volte inferiore a quello di certi isolati già esistenti. Accanto a questa riduzione del quoziente di densità è stato imposto il rispetto di una serie di severi regolamenti urbani. Quasi ovunque sono obbligatori l'allineamento alle facciate preesistenti e la contiguità dei muri divisorii, il che permette di mantenere praticamente inalterato il tracciato delle strade, ed un senso di continuità. Le volumetrie degli edifici non vengono più calcolate soltanto in base alla larghezza delle vie, ma tengono conto del contesto architettonico preesistente. Si evitano così quelle sproporzioni che venivano troppo spesso a rompere un tessuto dalla mor-

fologia omogenea. Allo stesso titolo le altezze vengono ormai contenute a 25 e 31 metri (cioè 10 piani), a seconda dei quartieri.

A queste costrizioni urbanistiche si aggiungono poi a Parigi due altri esempi di problemi, che rendono più difficile la costruzione di alloggi. Innanzitutto quello dei condizionamenti tecnici: le questioni dei regolamenti di confine nel caso di edifici contigui, le dimensioni ridotte dei cantieri, la necessità frequente di ricorrere a fondazioni speciali, gravanti sui costi di costruzione, ecc. E poi il cruciale problema fondiario dato dalla scarsità di terreni edificabili e del loro costo eccessivo, passabile di giungere fino al 40% del valore commerciale dell'immobile.

Bisogna in tal senso distinguere però l'edilizia sociale o sovvenzionata del settore privato. Quest'ultimo attualmente versa in uno stato di estrema depressione, e quasi scomparso è l'investimento nell'edilizia destinata all'affitto; questo sia per la rarità dei terreni, sia per la normativa estremamente favorevole all'inquinamento promulgata con la legge Quilliot. L'amministrazione comunale spera ora di rilanciare l'iniziativa di coloro che tradizionalmente investivano in questo campo (compagnie d'assicurazione, casse pensioni, società mutue...), ed ha preso a tal fine diversi provvedimenti⁷.

Uno di questi è stato quello di portare da 1,5 a 3 il tasso di densità consentito dalla legge (PLD — Plafond Légal de Densité), cioè il COS, superato il quale gli imprenditori sono obbligati a versare una tassa supplementare all'amministrazione comunale. Per ora sembra tuttavia che il provvedimento abbia favorito essenzialmente i proprietari di terreni, facendo lievitare i prezzi. Imprenditori privati come le compagnie d'assicurazione continuano tuttavia a costruire a Parigi, e perché lo hanno sempre fatto, e perché la consistente rivalutazione del capitale investito compensa la scarsa redditività degli affitti. A questi fattori se ne aggiungono poi altri di carattere psicologico, come un bisogno di credibilità che solo un investimento "nella pietra" può soddisfare. Nel 1982 il settore "non sovvenzionato" ha così prodotto 2.097 alloggi, vale a dire dieci volte meno che nel 1975.

Il settore dell'edilizia pubblica, da sempre quantitativamente inferiore a quella privata, nel 1982 si è anch'esso contratto, portando a termine 1.763 alloggi. Il problema è oggi oggetto di un acceso dibattito tra i partiti di destra

demolished because the cost of rehabilitating them would be excessive. The present rate of rehabilitation is 4,700 dwellings per year, with 2,000 by private enterprise and 700 by the public sector. The figure is envisaged as rising in principle to 6,000 per year.

A considerable part of the drive to build homes has been directed at the existing stock of buildings. Like most French communes, the whole of Paris, except for the ZACs, has been covered since 1975 by the Plan d'Occupation des Sols (POS) — at present undergoing revision — which lays down in detail the kind, density and physical appearance of buildings permitted on a given site. The first factor involved is the coefficient of land use (COS) which establishes the maximum building density on the basis of four main categories: housing, shops, trading activities, offices. Competition between the last-named and housing has been carefully controlled by marking the COS generally three times smaller for offices than for dwellings. The latter have a maximum COS of 3 to 3.5, which is lower than in many existing blocks. Parallel to this reduction in densities, a certain number of strict planning regulations have been applied. Alignment on the existing facades has been retained nearly everywhere, and the same has been done even for walls dividing properties, which in practice makes it possible to preserve the layout and continuity of streets. The outline of buildings is no longer a function of the width of the streets but of the built-up setting, so that here too breaks in scale are avoided, of the kind that too often in the past have denatured complexes homogeneous in their morphology. Building heights, too, will henceforth be limited to 25 or 31 metres (equal to 10 stories) in line with the quarters.

In addition to these restrictions, there are two kinds of difficulties making housing more difficult to build in Paris. First there are the technical restraints: problems of dividing walls, the small scale of construction sites, frequent recourse to special foundations that increase construction costs, etc. Finally the crucial real estate problem of the shortage of building land and their high cost, reaching as much as 40% of a building's cost-price.

Here a distinction has to be made between state provided or assisted housing and the private sector. The latter is at present in an extremely depressed state and plans for rented accom-

modation have almost disappeared, partly because of lack of sites and partly because of the Loi Quilliot's highly favourable treatment of tenants in rent agreements. The city council hopes to re-launch investment by institutional investors (insurance companies, pension funds, mutual insurance funds...) and has taken measures towards this end.⁷ One of them was to raise the legal restriction on density (PLD) from 1.5 to 3, i.e. the COS beyond which the promoters were compelled to pay a supplementary tax to the city. But so far it would seem that this increase has essentially profited only the site-owners, by pushing up the rates for land. Private investors like insurance companies still build in Paris, however, because they have always done so and a big increase in invested capital is capable of offsetting the small return from rent. To this can be added psychological reasons, the need for credibility that can only be provided by investing "in stones." The non-assisted sector has thus constituted 2,097 dwellings built in 1982, one-sixth of the 1975 figure.

Assisted housing, traditionally much less in terms of quantity than the private sector has also decreased, with 1,763 homes built in 1982. The issue is at present being hotly debated between right-wing parties (RPR and UDF), which have a big majority in the Conseil de Paris, and left-wing parties (PS and PC), which are in control of the national government.⁸ Discussion centres mainly on the number of assisted dwellings that should or can be built in Paris and how to go about this.

Urban planning and architectural policy, for their part, seem to have encountered a relative degree of consensus, especially after the abandonment of the brutal clearance policy for renewing the existing fabric. Pierre Merlin, the elderly president of the Université de Paris VII-Vincennes and close to the Parti Socialiste notes in a report on assisted housing that the present rate of construction is too slow in terms of existing needs. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly the funds provided by the state are much below the demographic burden of the capital. This shortfall is mainly due to the impossibility of using the loans for access to home-ownership (PAP) because the price ceilings are too low in proportion to the cost of housing per square metre in Paris.⁹ At the same time, the city's financial undertakings are estimated to be inadequate overall



and too orientated towards "intermediate" housing, intended for a less disadvantaged section of the public. The Merlin report urges that "strong priority be given for assisted housing," by a de facto monopoly of available funds: apart from the ZACs in course, the great reserves of the SNCF (railways), the industrial waste-lands and 800 real estate sales that take place yearly. This would permit construction of 6,000-8,000 new dwellings per year, reckoning of a threefold increase of the city's present financial input. These forecasts are contested by the city council, especially with regard to availability of funds. The goal has been fixed with regard to availability of funds. The goal has been fixed at 4,000 new homes per year, on condition that the state credit coverage is notably increased and that the freeing of public enterprises is accomplished quickly. A convention between the state and the city to raise the number of homes to 10,000 over two years has, however, just been signed.

Assisted housing in Paris is handled by various different bodies more or less directly controlled by the city. Apart from the administration of about 108,000 assisted dwellings existing in Paris (of which 82% come under the municipal authority), the construction of assisted housing is mainly the responsibility of the public office of HLM of the city of Paris (the OPHLMVP), of mixed economy societies connected with the city (SAGI, RIVP, SIEMP, etc.), of various maintenance and repair bodies created for specific operations, plus numerous HLM (welfare housing) companies connected with public organizations or nationalized industries. The OPHLMVP, the SAGI and the RIVP at present command a volume of construction which is roughly the same in each case, with respectively 849, 1,085 and 778 dwellings begun in 1982. But the architectural policies of these three bodies are very different. The OPHLM and SAGI concentrate on big operations, especially in the ZACs. Their heavy structures, closely controlled, act as a definite brake on their scope for architectural creativity and their output is on the whole mediocre in interest, with rare exceptions. For instance, the "Mare et Cascades" project run by the SAGI with Antoine Grumbach as architect, combining rehabilitation with new construction in a sensitive area of the 20th arrondissement, has gone about the work very intelligently

while respecting the urban layout. Close by, the "Cascades-Industries" operation developed by the OPHLM with the same architect displays a similar spirit.

But the most active architectural policy is clearly to be found in the RIVP. This company was set up in 1922 to administer the city's stock of public housing, partly consisting of the HBMs built on the area of the city's ancient fortifications. The city itself held only 37.5% of its capital, the rest being divided up fairly equally between the Paribas and Hénin banks, now nationalized, but it did control the board of directors. Like other mixed capital companies, the RIVP benefits by the city's right to pre-empt land as well as interest-free loans over a fifty-year period to make up for the 30% gap between cost prices and the PLA's ceiling, essentially due to the plus-value of sites and the need to lay special foundations in two-thirds of Parisian districts. The RIVP's architectural policy is to a great extent unquestionably due to the dynamic personality of its director, Michel Lombardini. It was he who, in 1975, risked commissioning Christian de Portzamparc and Georgia Benamo to execute the Rue des Hautes-Formes estate, which is even today a yardstick for sensitive architectural renewal in the capital and counts as one of the "monuments" of contemporary Parisian architecture. The RIVP is at present providing work for 150 teams on 180 projects in course, including Portzamparc, Buffi, Thurnauer, Bouchez, Bardet, Mazzuconi, Ferrand-Fuegas-Leroy, Verbiest-Benoit, Piano, E. Girard, Maurios, Gangneux, Vasconi, Lion, Mauftras, etc. From this series of projects completed and under way there emerges a common architectural philosophy characterized by three elements: firstly, sensitivity to place, attention to the setting, to links with the existing, without simply plagiarizing it; secondly a modern inspiration expressed through very different approaches; finally a scale and quality which are markedly urban in nature, displayed by both a highly traditional typology of the facades combining with wide-ranging recourse to the vocabulary of urban architecture. The RIVP leaves its architects total freedom provided that they avoid "gratuitous architectural gestures": a clear and healthy approach, subordinating architecture to the urban structure. Some critics deplore the slightly mean

character of this policy, partly connected with the small scale of its projects (from 3 to 200 homes per projects, about 50 on average). This is to forget that Paris is not a clear site and that a modest block of flats need not stand out like a public building.

How has the RIVP managed to develop its architectural policy while remaining within the limits of the costs of assisted housing? Lombardini gives three reasons. Mastery of the skills calls for a training and interest in architecture only rarely found in building companies. This presupposes a respect for the division of skills: the architect has to be allowed to express the artistic dimensions of his work. The son and brother of architects, Lombardini knows what he is saying. Then the organization itself of the RIVP allows and even demands maximum responsibility on the part of the architects in respecting costs and deadlines. There are only nine architects in charge of the 180 projects in hand and no technical services. The architects are asked to work right from the start on the chosen project so as to avoid any breakdown in the design by the end of the operation. Finally the choice of collaborators is made on a friendly basis as a rule, but with frequent changes in the teams. Three small restricted-entry competitions are also held each year.

The housing situation in Paris is thus paradoxical. Demand is as high as ever in the past despite the average monthly rents of about 50 francs per square metre in the so-called free market.

The supply of housing, on the other hand, is in a state of crisis, including assisted housing, to the point where one is reminded of the "shortage we knew in the immediate post-war period," according to the mayor of Paris. While there is this problem of housing in Paris, the architectural and urban quality of housing has over the last few years, been rising steadily, as if awareness of the unique value of the city had gradually come home to Parisian builders. It is likely that the effects of this endemic crisis in housing will only be solved in an enlarged Paris — at least taking in its immediate outskirts. The fetish value of Paris "intramuros," the administrative and physical cleavages, the limited extension of the métro outside Paris, all contribute to dissociate the problems of Paris from its outskirts. Paris is a unique, wonderful city, "the most beautiful in the world," so it is said, but probably

destined, like all the great metropolises, to an expansion which will make as many voids within it as on its outermost fringes.

1 N. Evenson, *Paris, cent ans de travaux et d'urbanisme (1880-1980)*, Paris 1983.

2 These figures, as well as many of those that follow in the text, are taken from the very full report by Pierre Merlin, *Pour une véritable priorité au logement social à Paris*, report to the Minister of Urban Planning and Housing, *La Documentation Française*, Paris, December 1982.

3 Cf. "Politique nouvelle de la rénovation urbaine," in *Paris projet*, 21-22, giving details of the 18 ZACs in course (in June 1981).

4 Interview with M. Barthélémy Raynaud, director of building and housing for the city of Paris, "Accélérer le rythme de la construction à Paris," in *Le Moniteur des travaux publics et du bâtiment*, 30 December 1983, pp. 28-32.

5 Cited in "Paris, des projets ambitieux," in *Le Moniteur*, 25 November 1983, pp. 21-33.

6 Cf. "Paris-Rome. Protection et mise en valeur du patrimoine architectural," in *Paris-Projet*, 23-24.

7 "Communication relative à la politique du logement social à Paris," Séance du Conseil municipal du 24 octobre 1983, in *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 29 December 1983.

8 Cf. note 2.

9 At present of the order of 7,500-9,000 francs per square metre of living space taking into account an estate tax of 1,500-3,000 francs per square metre and construction costs of 4,200 francs per square metre (in assisted housing).