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SEEING WATER AS A
SOURCE TO DYNAMISE THE
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38TH PARIS REGION
INTERNATIONAL URBAN
PLANNING WORKSHOP

The 38th Paris Region International Urban Planning Workshop aims to examine the social and economic value of water and landscapes in the creation of resilient metropolitan and local urban development. Shaped by the sharp twist and turns of the River Oise, the atypical territory of Cergy-Pontoise represents the ideal breeding ground for drawing the outline of a unique urban experience, a vision of the city of tomorrow.

This workshop is a continuation of the reflections initiated by Les Ateliers and its partners, as explored by the teams and participants during several of the previous workshops:

The Hillsides of Cergy in 1983; The City and Water in 1991; The River, Future of a Territory in 2009; Metropolitan Landscape in 2012, The Plain of Pierrelaye in 2013; the Campus City in 2015; Economic Activity Zones in 2016, Irkutsk in 2017, Ouarzazate 2018, Happy Fringes in 2019 and Southern Greater Paris in 2019.

WATER AND THE CITY:
Source of inspiration(s)



View of the Base de Loisirs from the Axe Majeur – D. Chavin, CACP

Main rivers and their tributaries are exceptional places in the geography of a city. Unfortunately, they have long been ignored or relegated to “supportive or productive” functions, whether it be defensive, commercial, logistical or that of waste management. Now, however, with the meteorological, climatic, ecological events and uncertainties of the last decades, along with the recent health crisis, it is clear that the relationship between the geography of water and its host territory must be reexamined in a far more comprehensive manner. **What efficient, active and resilient integration(s) of water can be incorporated into urban strategies, especially as ecological, economic, cultural, social and well-being vectors?**

Wild, developed or neglected, waterways have always asserted themselves as privileged spaces for socialization, conducive to the expression of multiple collective and individual practices. They also possess a wealth of treasures that can be capitalized upon. **How can the geography of water contribute to the return of practices of proximity in the metropolis and a connection between the various territorial scales? What new uses can be envisioned for local residents?**

Increasingly, the notion of the “water city” is imposing itself in development schemes as part of policies for travel and mobility, the creation of

eco-neighbourhoods, territorial attractiveness and marketing, as well as in the preservation of natural wetlands or flood risk prevention. **How can “green-washing” projects that ignore the essence of a place be avoided?**

Such policies act as levers. They accompany the development of territories and largely contribute to their image, dynamism and attractiveness. And, in this case, constitute the basis of an “economic” and productive value stemming from the geography of water. **What balance should be struck between the “economic” value and the “common good” value of a river?**

At a time when questions are being asked about the impacts of the health crisis on the design of cities, the strengthening of river navigation and river tourism, the intensification of floods, urban and land pressure, as well as the need to de-densify the city, **the long dormant potential of hydrography is being rekindled.** As such, the choice of Cergy-Pontoise as an area of study is all the more relevant.

Thanks to its location between the metropolis and the Portes du Vexin, its geographical particularities and its morphological and urban specificities, this territory possesses the ideal characteristics to generate and carry out forward-looking urban experiments.

How can the territory of Cergy-Pontoise take advantage of its unique geographical situation and prove to be a model resilient city?

HOW WILL THE PANDEMIC CHANGE THE CITY (LIFE)?

Sources of enquiry

Questioning the role of water and its geographical landscape in the city requires a broader reflection on **the notion of the “common good”** as well as the levels of **reversibility and liveability** of our built environment and territories — from basic housing units to their buildings, their blocks or neighbourhoods to their local environments or inhabited territories.

With the COVID-19 crisis, the 2020 Paris Region Workshop would be amiss if it were to ignore the global experience — **both collective and synchronous** — of lockdown. Marked by changing dynamics, initiatives and behaviours symptomatic of the failure of our urban systems, the experience has also revealed the regenerative and adaptive capacity of our imperfect human societies. **What are the impacts of this global pandemic on the way we think of, live in and create cities?**

There is **the normally hyper-mobile** metropolitan population that now finds itself limited to a less than one-kilometre radius of movement. Within such a small perimeter, what latitudes are available to pedestrians? Are essential needs and resources truly accessible? And what are the limits in terms of autonomy and self-sufficiency? **What does this new urban scale, one reduced to the size of a neighbourhood, reveal?**

There is the emergence of **a new organization conducive to telework, distance learning and the continued production of basic necessities, as well as the reaffirmation of the importance of digital tools, the strengthening of local food supply chains, the spirit of mutual assistance and neighbourliness.** This all comes by questioning the mono-functionality or the difficulty in reversing, transforming or mutualizing public and private facilities and natural or agricultural spaces.

There has also been the birth of **spontaneous initiatives and acts of solidarity**, the strengthening of social ties (despite physical distancing), and

the renewed awareness of **the fundamental importance of essential and structural jobs**, which, as highlighted by the health crisis, must clearly be revalorized.

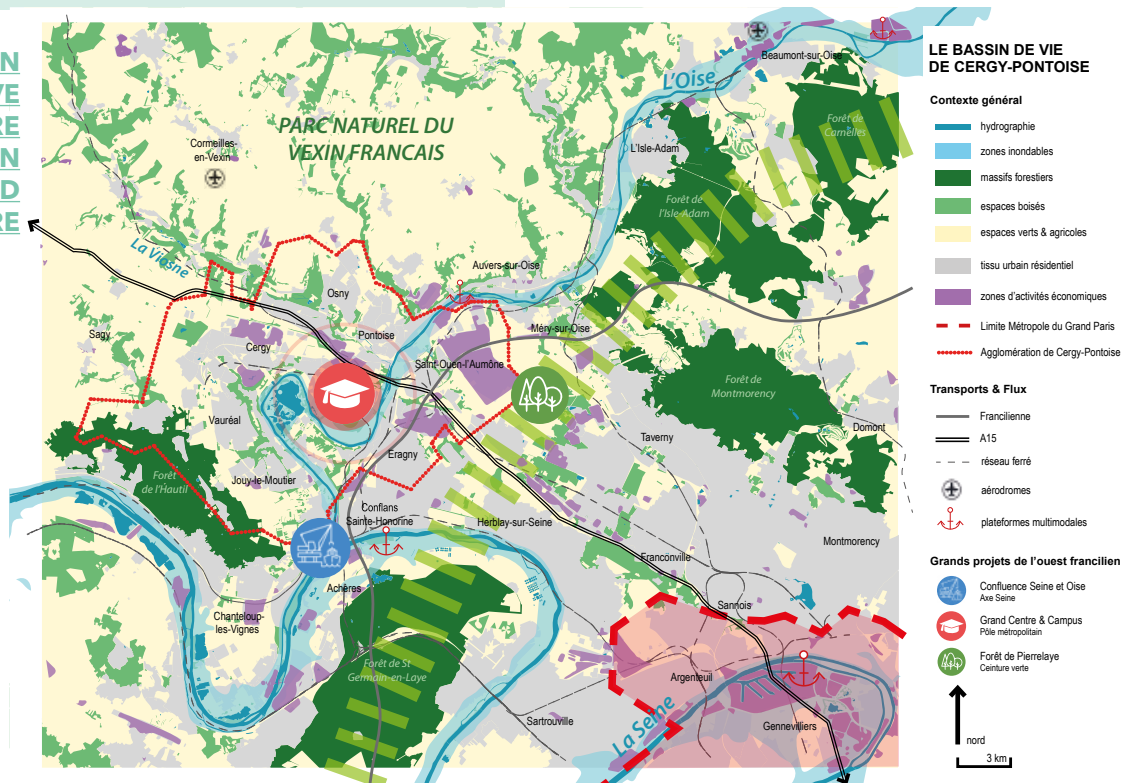
There has been, for those who had the opportunity to do so, **the search for refuge and the escape from dense urban centres to the sanctuary of the countryside. And then, there were others who suffered from isolation and exclusion**, stuck in housing incompatible with lockdown measures and lacking means of transportation and/or digital technology. **How can this reverse rural exodus or “counter-urbanization” be explained? Where are people turning to for refuge? What new urban forms and viable social organizations will there be in the post-COVID-19 city?**

There has also been **the forced slowdown**, during which some people are rediscovering a different relationship with time and are seizing the moment to reinforce bonds with those close to them and to ask themselves questions about society. There are also those who are taking **the newfound time to express their passions, viewing this new temporality as a promising opportunity.**

And finally, there has been the unexpected respite **for nature to regain its rightful place and express its full majesty. This has been achieved by the clear decrease in pollution.** As a result, in addition to the notion of the “right to the city” (so dear to the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre), we are now talking about the “right to nature” for all.

What role(s) can the Oise play in the development of a “hygiene city” of the 21st century?

AN ATTRACTIVE CENTRE BETWEEN THE CITY AND NATURE



Hanaà Msallak Jobbé-Duval & Bastien Vernier - March 2020

CERGY-PONTOISE: Opportunities for reinvention(s), fields of experimentation(s)

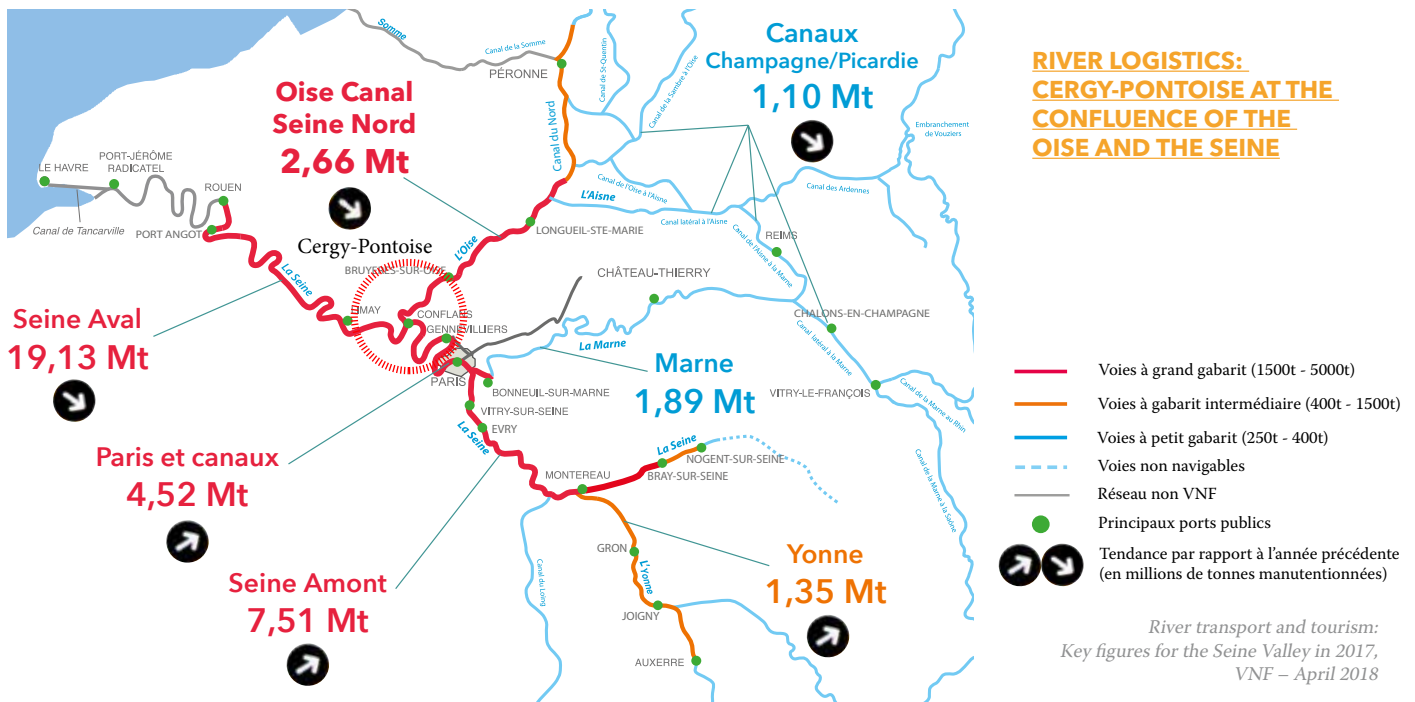
A territory to the northwest of Grand Paris, Cergy-Pontoise is structured around a geographical backbone: the River Oise (**previously known by its Latin name Isara**). In the past, it was a strategic site for trade and defence, a former administrative boundary at the crossing of the Seine in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, a popular holiday destination for metropolitans and a land of inspiration for the Impressionist painters of the late 19th century. Then, in the 1970s, the New Towns programme took the specific landscape features of the Oise's meanders to establish what would become Cergy-Pontoise.

Led by the State, the New Towns project was designed to limit congestion in the hyper-centre of metropolitan Paris through the creation of 5 peripheral urban centres (15-30 km away). Today, the conurbation of Cergy-Pontoise has nearly 205,000 inhabitants (compared to 45,000 in the 1970s). A young territory in which nearly 37% of the population is under 25 years of age, it is **one of the main employment (90,500 jobs and 20 business parks) and university (30,000 students, 15 establishments and 23 laboratories) hubs in the capital region.**

Fifty years after its creation as a new town, natural, agricultural and forest areas still represent 40% of its surface area. The original choice to limit urbanization on the banks of the Oise and to preserve the authentic setting of the former urban settlements (towns, villages) are all elements that set this area apart as the “gateway” to the French Vexin Natural Park and metropolitan Paris.

However, this same choice for an urbanization that was essentially concentrated on the agricultural plateau raises questions **about the possible future for the area's open expanses of land. What fate awaits them in the face of the challenges of urban and economic pressure on the metropolis, the development of river transport and tourism as well as the International Campus project, environmental risks and an identification as a so-called “Landscape City”?**

Mobility plans, integrated management and the safeguarding of green spaces and river banks, urbanization mitigation policies, a territorial food plan and the event L'Oise en Fête are just some of the many concrete actions and initiatives that have been launched. In order to reinforce this comprehensive strategy, Cergy-Pontoise is currently redefining its territorial development plan (SCOT). And for many local stakeholders, they see the Oise playing an important role.



A GEOGRAPHY OF WATER AND BASSIN DE VIE FOR A MODEL RESILIENT CITY
The Oise Valley

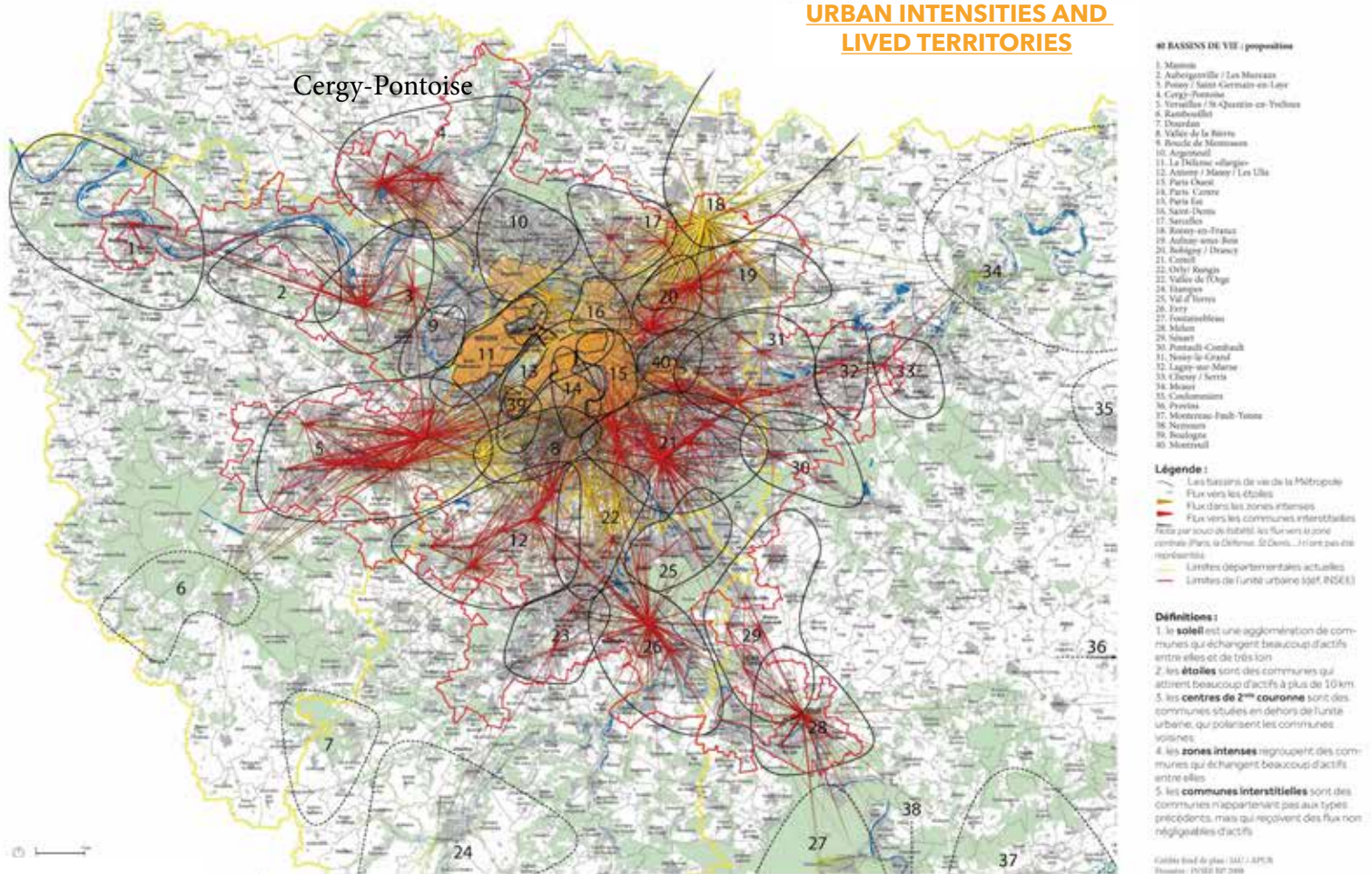
The Oise Valley and its 20,000 km² is part of a larger river valley — that of the Seine and its 80,000 km² surface area. Travelling a length of 341 km, the River Oise begins its journey at an altitude of 309 m in Chimay (Belgium) before emptying into the Seine in Conflans-Ste-Honorine at an elevation of 20 m. Observing an average flow of 110 m³/s, it is shaped by gentle reliefs composed of a dozen islands, about thirty small tributaries and streams, wide plains, forest massifs and a few hillsides.

These geographical characteristics and the river’s canalization (which was buried in the 19th century) give it definite advantages in terms of navigability, land circulation and the establishment of urban, industrial and agricultural activities. These specific features, which are conducive to the development of various establishments, should not, however, undermine the important risks that are present: the risk of flooding, especially during winter rainy periods (where the flow can reach up to 700 m³/s) but also the risk of pollution and health hazards linked to farms (large cereal crops) and the urban economy (industries, waste, construction). In this respect, the valley has one of the highest pollution rates in terms of its surface water. In 2019, more than 50% was judged to be in a “mediocre” or “poor” state (DRIEE – Inventory 2019).

The third most important river route in France, it recorded nearly 3 million tonnes of annual freight in 2017. While it has been facing a drop in freight traffic since the 1990s (due to the underdimensioned size of its canalization upstream), it still remains an active waterway downstream from Compiègne to Conflans-Ste-Honorine (100 km). The development and construction of new marinas as well as the desire to develop and resize the canals between Compiègne and northern France (the Canal Seine Nord Europe project) are all part of a revival and intensification of river navigation. **What is the relationship between the Oise and the Seine and what links can be made with development strategies on a metropolitan scale?**

In the Île-de-France, the Oise “Axis” structures the northwestern part of metropolitan Paris and has been an integral part of the major development plans and intentions of the last century. The choice of location for some new towns and the proposals for the Grand Paris of the 21st century have had the distinction of drawing on geographical singularities and of reconsidering the role of water and its own geographical landscape: examples include the Seine Valley, the Marne and along the curves of the Oise. **What new value(s) does “water” have in a metropolitan area?**

URBAN INTENSITIES AND LIVED TERRITORIES



The 40 bassins de vies of the Grand Paris / Pôles-Réseaux-Territoires – Cabinet Devillers, 2010

From a bassin de vie to a bioregion

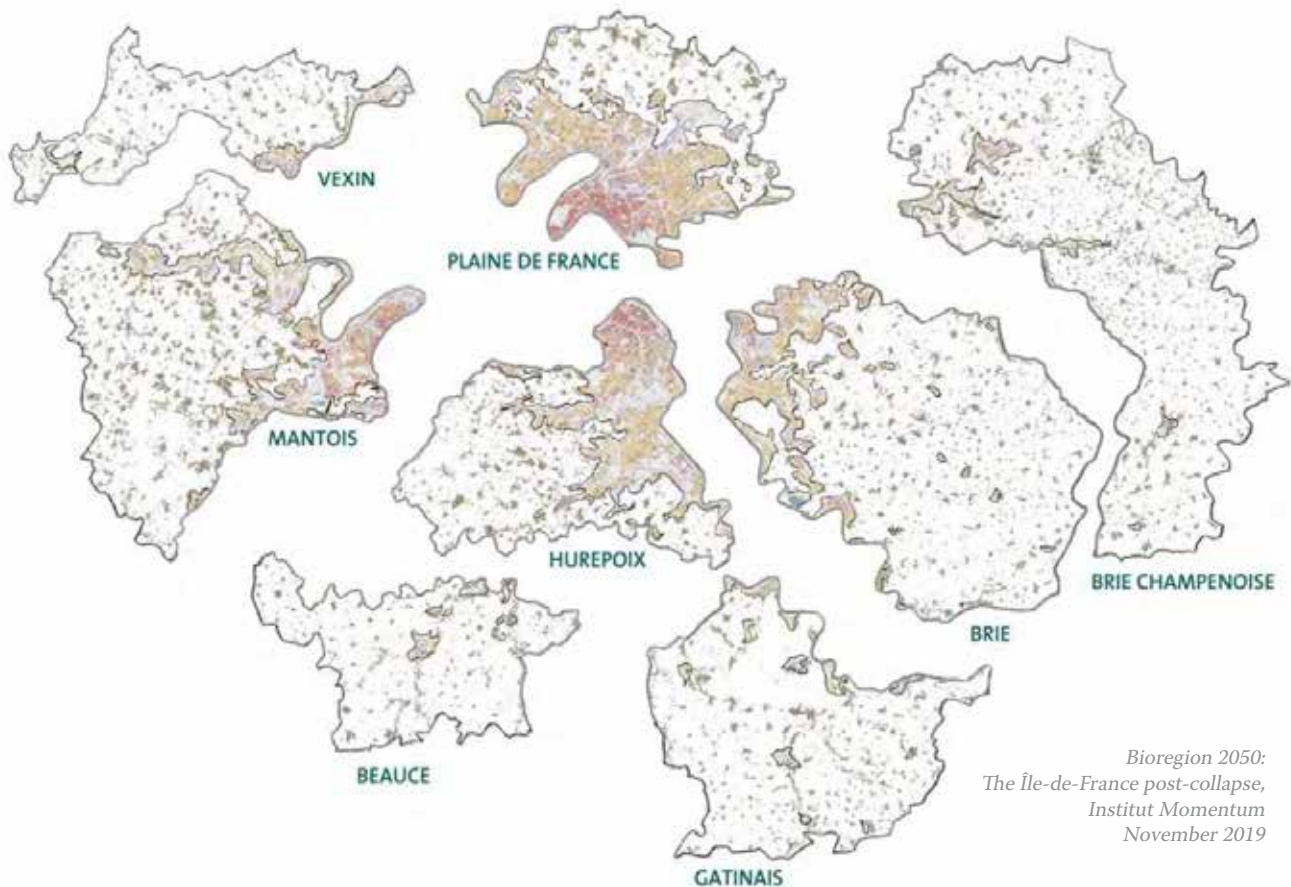
An attractive center... - With nearly 300,000 inhabitants (205,000 for the urban agglomeration), Cergy-Pontoise's bassin de vie (a French term encompassing a population catchment area and its area of influence, roughly translated as a living area) owes its dynamism and its home-work balance to the onsite presence of business parks, administrative functions, offices and universities (i.e. nearly 100,000 jobs and 30,000 students). **The urban intensity is reflected by a rate of nearly 45% for home-work commutes within the bassin de vie**, thus allowing for the development of a residential economy and local life. As for the remainder of the population, it commutes mainly towards Paris and the La Défense business district.

Urban attractiveness is characterized by a zone of influence (labour pool) that stretches from the Montmorency Valley to the Oise Valley and as far as the French Vexin (i.e. nearly 80,000 inhabitants) and the southern tip of the Oise Department (to the north). These elements attest to a certain vitality and are confirmed by an analysis of the number of establishments and frequency rates of restaurants,

cultural venues, shops as well as sports and socio-cultural facilities. Nonetheless, they also reveal spatial discontinuities and disjointed lifestyles linked to different practices and visions. **What effective urban strategies integrating the River Oise can be adopted to reveal the identity of this territory?**



THE EIGHT BIOREGIONS OF THE ÎLE-DE-FRANCE IN 2050



*Bioregion 2050:
The Île-de-France post-collapse,
Institut Momentum
November 2019*

... **between the city and nature** - Sitting on an agricultural plateau at the very limit of the built urban area of Paris, the territory is seen as a gateway to the west and the Parc Naturel Régional du Vexin Français; **while to the east, it is separated from the urbanized metropolitan continuity by the ecological corridor formed by the great forests in the northwest of the Paris Region** (see Plaine de Pierrelaye project and PNR Oise Pays de France expansion); then, to the south and southwest, it is bordered by the Hautil Forest and the Seine Valley. How can the broader unity of the Oise be promoted given the diversity of its uses?

One option is to consider that the Cergy-Pontoise population catchment area and its area of influence possess the constituent elements of what many theorists, from Patrick Geddes (biologist) to Alberto Magnaghi (architect), call a “bioregion”; a territory that should be defined above all by its ecosystemic, geographical, human and landscape

realities before being delimited by administrative boundaries. This approach is particularly relevant at a time of diverse societal challenges, the increasing vulnerability of our globalized cities and metropolises, major crises and the early stages of a forward-looking reflection of a society that wants to be carbon-free and resilient. **Are we heading towards a new reorganization of rural localities and the identification of a bioregion federated by the Oise?**

What spatial translation(s) of a resilient development integrating risk prevention, a smaller carbon footprint, a frugal approach and a zero artificialization objective are needed?

FROM NEW TOWN TO INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS: THE OISE FOR ALL

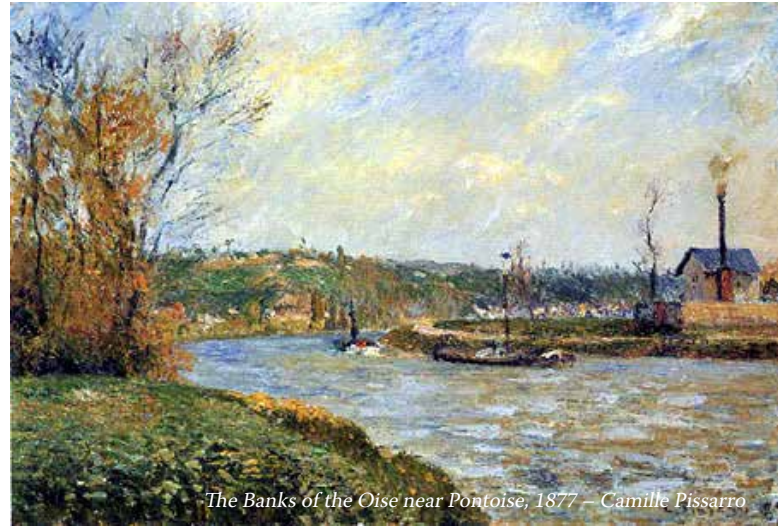
A shared heritage

The major decisions of past developments in the Paris urban area question the place of the human being in the metropolis, and many projects are now advocating a return to a scale that is more respectful of the perceptible geography, localities and soft mobility.

From the cadastral organization of agricultural land to the urbanization with its singular geomorphology around a natural amphitheatre and passing through Auvers-sur-Oise, which retraces the history of Impressionism, to Pontoise, a royal and medieval town labelled a “City of Art and History”, to the Axe Majeur (designed by the sculptor Dani Karavan), **the area enjoys a remarkable natural landscape and a rich urban and architectural heritage.**

Facing urban pressure, how can large tracts of agricultural, natural and scenic areas be recognized for their social and ecological value and not simply for their land and economic worth?

The curves of the River Oise... There are two main meanders, the first of which remains natural and is used mainly for recreation (Base de Loisirs, the green lung in the heart of the new town), leisure and tourism (Major Axis, Cergy Village and Port Cergy); whereas the second is more urbanized (Grand Centre district) but also has natural and



The Banks of the Oise near Pontoise, 1877 – Camille Pissarro

agricultural (Bois de Cergy and market-gardening plain) components.

...between an inherited river patrimony...

Culturally rich through its urban and architectural history, the Oise has been marked by the presence of Impressionist painters in the 19th century and popular holiday villages in the 20th century. But it is also economically rich, its past linked to the establishment of industrial activities and river navigation (made possible year-round since the



Aerial view of the Seine–Oise Confluence today – CCI Île-de-France

...and an industrial valley west of Paris. The Seine–Oise Confluence is a point of contact between the Oise and Seine axis at Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, its barges and the port of Achères on the other bank. The gateway to the sea tends to begin along the industrial valley of the Seine, west of Paris, and is based on the reinforcement of the port and multimodal platforms of Gennevilliers, Achères, Rouen and Le Havre. For its part, the Oise, at the heart of this network at the confluence with the Seine, is the subject of a project to increase the capacity of its canals north of Compiègne to create links with northern European ports.



View on the Oise from the Hautil in 1960 - CACP

THE «LANDSCAPE CITY»
OF CERGY-PONTOISE



A specific urban morphology

The curves of the Oise have always set the tone and shaped the urban and natural composition of the landscape, with new lines of communication accompanying the development of the old towns of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, Pontoise and the surrounding agricultural villages. But since 1969, the territory has been **marked by a singular development set in the middle of the agricultural plain: the creation of the New Town of Cergy-Pontoise**. This project was to be the scene of a variety of developments subtly combining large open green spaces and a unique architectural prowess; a contemporary heritage with an innovative spirit for a diversified design.

Various architectural competitions (Maisons de Ville in 1976, Immeubles de Ville in 1978) have been held for the city, and the question of housing has always been essential. Today, the city, with its 83,000 housing units (30% of which are social housing, 20% private housing and 50% owner-occupied), offers a diversity of housing types (hamlet, village, old town, suburban housing, large housing estates, collective residences, etc.) and is experiencing **a construction rate similar to that of the original new town, i.e. nearly 2,000 housing units per year**.

In Cergy-Pontoise — a large, dispersed territory ten times less dense than Paris — the question of mobility is key. The rail network (RER A, C and lines J, L and H) and motorway network (A15 and the Francilienne) mark, structure and connect the territory to the rest of the metropolis.

Internally, the spatial organization is represented by a dense bus network (26 lines) linking the main railway stations (Cergy-Préfecture, Cergy-St-Christophe, Cergy-le-Haut, Pontoise, St-Ouen-l'Aumône and Neuville) and economic and strategic sites in the area (business parks and commercial zones). The preference by the original designers of the new town to separate soft mobility from motorized mobility is reflected by the city's unique urban and infrastructural innovations and experiments: for example, the large pedestrian-only areas of the Prefecture or Les Touleuses, the "oversized" roads such as the Boulevard de l'Oise (originally planned for 500,000 inhabitants) and the quality public spaces (which are almost exclusively dedicated to pedestrian and bicycle traffic, yet are not connected to the previous two examples and sometimes "under-used"). These public spaces are organized in a network of small

squares, footbridges, alleyways and green spaces. They are open, numerous and largely designed in relation to the geography of the city's water. **How can urbanity on a human scale be imagined? How can the proximity of the River Oise be part of and contribute to the development of a comprehensive mobility plan featuring a pleasant and intuitive intra-urban design?**

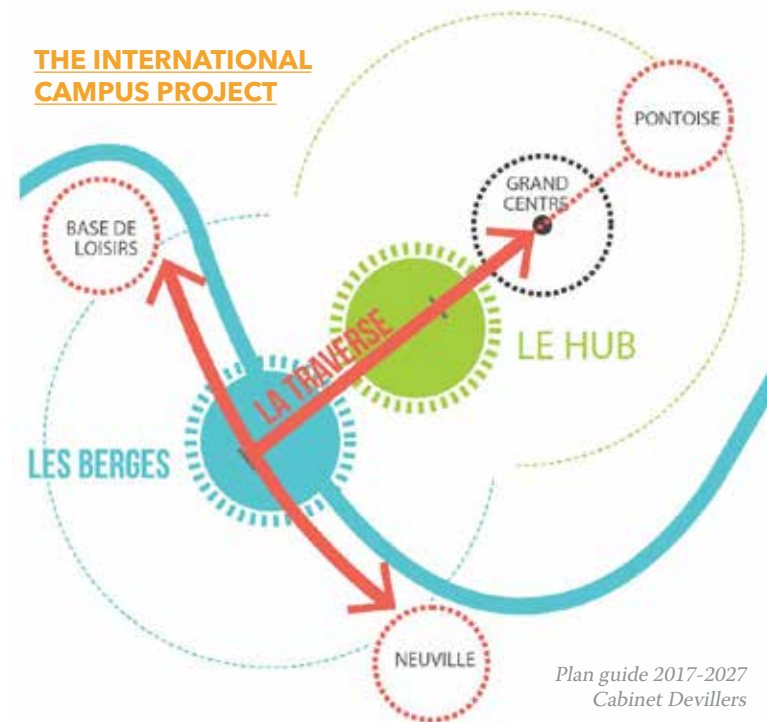
New town yesterday, campus town tomorrow

Fifty years on and isolated from the Grand Paris project (excluded from the Grand Paris Express metro network), this former new town, where more than a third of the land has remained natural or agricultural, seems to be regenerating its existing urbanized areas. It is becoming denser, is questioning its future and **is seeking to assert itself as a major metropolitan centre even beyond its borders**, notably through the project to redevelop its historic Prefecture "Grand Centre" District, which has been underway since 2013. With nearly 80% of the area's 30,000 students (40,000 by 2030) concentrated in this district, the ambition is reinforced and fuelled by the International Campus project: CY Cergy Paris University. **When "C" stands for the curves of the River Oise and "Y" for the crossroads between the Oise and the Seine, the importance of the river in urban marketing strategies need no longer be questioned!** Just look at the original emblem of the former new town or that of the City of Cergy! **How can the International Campus project be weaved into the urban fabric? Can the project exist in symbiosis with the Oise? How and in what ways?**

Endowed with an ecosystem of multiple socio-economic actors; important and influential sports, cultural and socio-cultural facilities (the Base de Loisirs, the Aren'Ice, the national theatre, etc.); a built heritage; emblematic tourist sites and places such as the Axe Majeur; the territory boasts enormous potential for creating a strong identity connected to the Oise. The Avenue Verte cycle route linking Paris to London via Cergy and the Vexin or Pontoise and the Oise Valley; the legacy of the great Impressionists Pissarro, Van Gogh, Thornley and Sisley; and the stories of great travellers such as Stevenson, who took a boat down the Oise from Antwerp to Pontoise only support this assertion! **To**

what extent should the Axe Majeur, a significant element of the built landscape and the physical entry point to the city and main access to the Base de Loisirs, be taken into consideration and integrated into the urban project?

Well orchestrated, all these elements can offer a unique human and urban experience and write a new history for **this area both near and far from Paris.**



What socio-economic structuring function(s) can the Oise play?

What role can it play in a productive economy, in attractiveness strategies, and in the image and development of the region?

COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION & CONVERGING VIEWS

This workshop focuses on putting uses and users back at the heart of discussions. **Whether they are everyday users, mobile users or users simply passing through**, all of them have an expertise in the practice of the territory, a unique perspective, interest, awareness and experience.

In Cergy-Pontoise, the presence of natural elements — largely embodied by the River Oise, its geography and sheer size — seems to be a privilege, a preserved but fragile asset that other highly urbanized areas do not or no longer possess. Therefore, if the notion of happiness resides in the possibility of having access to a green space less than 500 m from one's home, then in this “great landscape” shaped by water is there not the possibility of creating a happy fringe area in tangent with the new desire towards “counter-urbanization”?

Nature and the environment occupy a primordial place in our different cultures. The questioning of perceptions and practices around water in our relationship to space and in our individual and collective choices, consciousness and unconsciousness will fuel the debates and introspections of this 38th workshop session. Often in search of refuge or a pleasant living environment and being part of a mobile and increasingly nomadic society, we move or opt for certain types of residential trajectories or flee to the countryside

in times of crisis. Why? What if nature could be a saviour?

Water: Balancing risk and well-being

Today, flooding, the decline in plant and animal biodiversity, the increase in impervious surfaces and the shrinking of towpaths are all contributing to the weakening of the river's banks. And it is the local governments that have to undertake reinforcement work or, sometimes, pre-empt private land purchases to protect the population and the banks (e.g. Cergy, Jouy-le-Moutier). Alternatively, there are also so-called “eco-neighbourhood” urbanization projects that promote the “well-being” value of water to offer new urban experiences. These urban developments are not always welcome and may raise questions about the extent to which risks are really taken into account and the level of acceptance by the already established resident populations. **What economic and urban value can water have in the city? What way(s) can the Oise and its wide meanders be used to dynamize the city and the lives of its inhabitants?**

How can the development process for the urban project be questioned in order to further the objectives of participation and co-creation?



Esplanade de Paris and view of the Île-de-France Region – Association Axe Majeur



A servile nature

Like many other territories, natural areas are subject to the negative impacts of human activities and urban growth. In the area of study and its surroundings, such manifestations are increasingly visible: agricultural areas where waste from the metropolis is dumped and open-air rubbish heaps (nearly half or two-thirds of the total volume of the 300 sites listed in the Val d'Oise come from construction sites). Another phenomenon, river logistics and the lack of land in the heart of the metropolis, is pushing developers and economic actors to develop riverside logistics platforms. **What types of activities could reconcile human presence with a consideration for the area's specific landscape features? How can spontaneous informal uses be taken into account for a harmonious and balanced development of a "water city"?**

Living differently

In Cergy-Pontoise, water's presence in town is unique. Although the "amphitheatre" structure of the city converges towards the Oise, perceptions and practices of the urban space seem disconnected from the river and water in general. The city's greenery, itself, has developed in a mostly informal and free way. Taking some isolated urban wastelands, interstices and neglected areas

as examples, Cergy-Pontoise offers a myriad of possibilities for the expression and manifestation of uses, informal practices and alternative modes of living. It is already home to homeless squats, street art under motorway and railway bridges as well as informal campsites set up by travellers; neglected pontoons where people come to socialize, smoke shisha or drink beer; barbecues held on the banks of the river or at the Base de Loisirs; festive places like the Neuville Quarries, the lake or under the Axe Majeur bridge where undeclared parties are held; outdoor spaces to run, walk, pedal, stroll with the family, read a book, take a nap, fish, practice tai chi, Zumba, yoga, CrossFit... and even sites for creative and artistic expression along the Esplanade de Paris overlooking the River Oise.

How can the relationship between the city, its users and water be reinvented? How can users reappropriate the shared space around the water? How can mobility be supported and links be forged between this former new town set on the plateau with its various centralities and the banks of the River Oise?

THE WORKSHOP IN 5 SECTIONS

MOVING TO THE FLOW OF THE RIVER OISE

HOW RIVER OISE COULD DYNAMISE THE CITY(LIFE) OF CERGY-PONTOISE?

