



# A Metropole Growing Among the Vineyards

A Critical Analysis of Montpellier's Development Strategies

Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto







# A Metropole Growing Among the Vineyards A Critical Analysis of Montpellier's Development Strategies

Dr. Ute Lehrer  
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Students:

Linda Bui  
Anna Côté  
Zeina Ismail  
Saadia Jamil  
Graeme Jones  
Charleen Kong  
Chun Nam Law  
Evan McDonough  
Imelda Nurwisah  
Pawel Nurzynski  
Prabin Sharma

Edited by Evan McDonough & Anna Côté

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## **Introduction**

This report is an outcome of a course taught at York University. Under my directorship, eleven selected students from the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, were asked to investigate planning practices in Montpellier, France. What lessons can Toronto learn from Montpellier? This was the core question that the students explored. The three-month-long course took students to the Southern French city for a two-week field course and overlapped with an international conference. The workshop is intellectually linked to the Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI), “Global Suburbanisms: Governance, Land and Infrastructure in the 21st Century”, which is a seven-year research project, funded by the Canadian government and anchored at the City Institute at York University. It is assumed that some aspects of this workshop will make it into an exhibition in 2017 as part of the MCRI.

The intellectual content of the course addressed “land” in the broadest sense: how land is produced or converted to new usages. With its geographic location in the South of France and with a strong and coherent political agenda of growth over the past 30 years, Mont-

pellier brings together some of the key elements of urban planning: transportation, housing (private and public), new suburban forms, ecology, urban design, public space, and multiculturalism. The planning and urban development agenda in Montpellier is based on a regional perspective, which can be interpreted as an exemplary case of urban and regional planning.

While planning practice in Montpellier used to focus on the city centre -- and in that context has produced an impressive architectural legacy -- it also developed a regional perspective that addresses the pressures of a sprawling metropolis. We were particularly interested in how Montpellier is coping with its tremendous growth pressure, which is rapidly transforming its periphery, replacing the hinterland with newly built-up areas. In order to guide growth to certain areas, the political leadership of Montpellier has worked toward the implementation and expansion of a network of modern streetcar lines. At the same time, it also invests tremendously into culture and the arts, and takes great pride to produce high quality built environments by via the use of architectural and urban design competitions.

After their preparation in Toron-

to, the eleven students spent their two weeks in Montpellier exploring the city by foot, by streetcar, by bicycles and by bus. We met with planners, academics, politicians, community activists, reporters, and policy-makers with the purpose of learning about the specifics of planning practices in Montpellier. We reviewed many planning documents, reports and some newspaper articles with the intention of understanding the specificities of the French planning system and to be in a better position to make a comparison to the planning system in Ontario.

This report is the result of our experiences in Montpellier. The goal was to evaluate planning processes of urbanization and suburbanization in Montpellier and to highlight those parts from which we believe Toronto could benefit. This report ends with recommendations for planning practices in Toronto.

### ***Ute Lehrer***

Associate Professor  
Faculty of Environmental Studies, York  
University, Toronto, Canada



The 2012 *Critical Planning Workshop* group in Montpellier. Top row (l-r): Chun Nam Law, Evan McDonough, Graeme Jones and Pawel Nurzynski; Middle row: Ute Lehrer, Roza Tchoukaleyska, the Montpellier Agglomération's Jean-Paul Gambier, Saadia Jamil and Zeina Ismail; Bottom row: Charleen Kong, Linda Bui, Prabin Sharma, Imelda Nurwisah and Anna Côté.

### **Statement of Purpose**

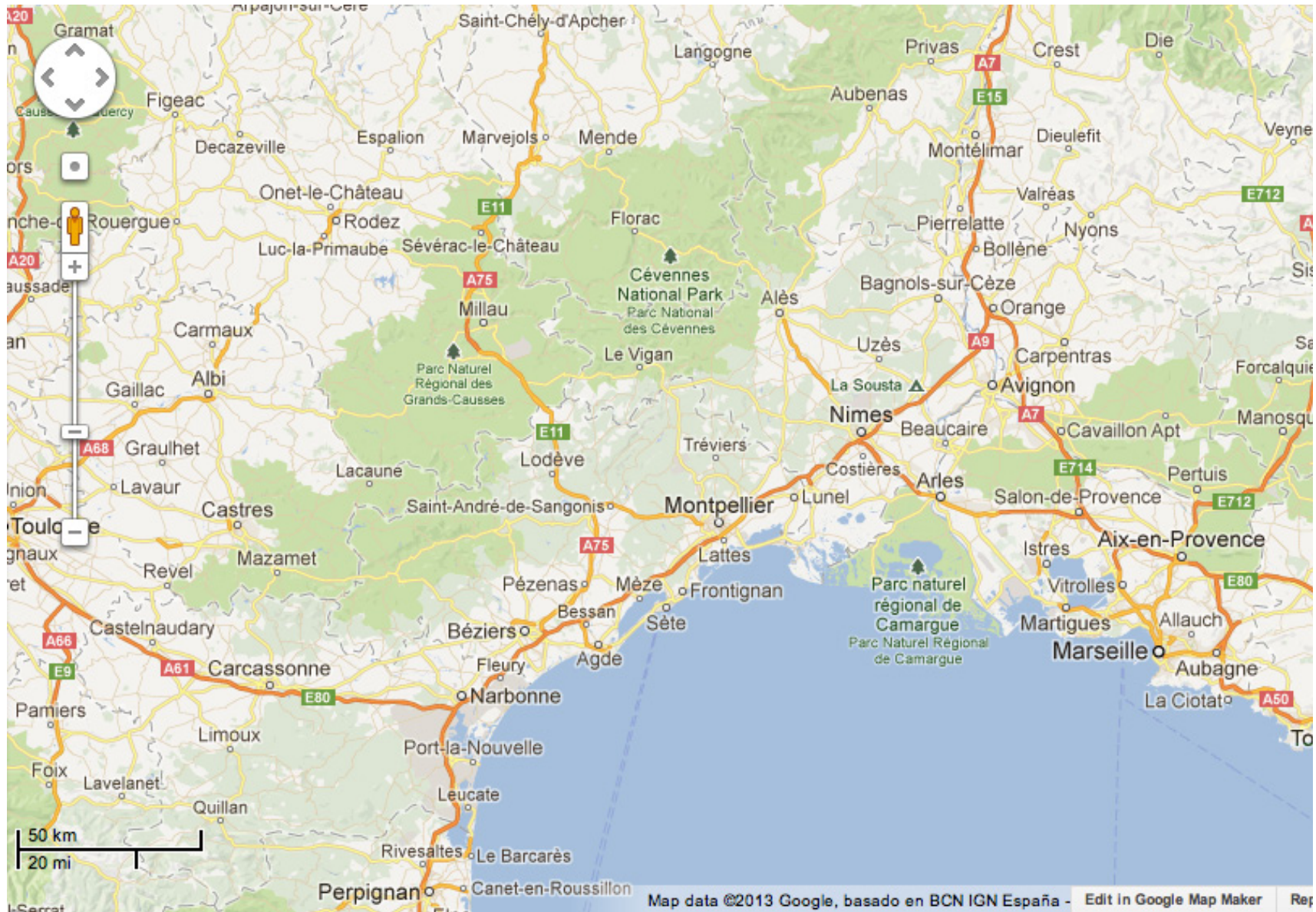
Montpellier is a rapidly growing and expanding city, and exemplifies many of the different ways that land is urbanized and suburbanized. The report will critically reflect on planning in Montpellier, and provide recommendations for Toronto based on our experience in exploring urban and suburban environments. Although the two cities differ greatly in location and in context, they also experience many of the same issues, such as social polarization, spatial fragmentation and they both struggle for ecological sustainability, provision of services, justice and equity. The lessons learned provide planning opportunities for Toronto to engage in unique planning approaches that are taken up by other cities.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## **Montpellier: Its History, People and Politics**



Map of the south of France and the Mediterranean. Montpellier is located along the coast, with the cities of Nîmes, Arles and Marseille to the east, and Sète and Béziers to the west (map retrieved from Google Maps, April, 2013).

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## Montpellier: Its History, People and Politics

Located in the Languedoc-Rousillon region in the south of France, and bordering the Mediterranean sea, Montpellier is emerging as a powerhouse city. Located in a region long engaged in viticulture, the city is surrounded by a landscape of vineyards, leading further out to the cities of Nîmes, Arles and Marseille to the east, and Sète and Béziers to the west.

The history and narrative of Montpellier provide an important case study about how planning and political will – namely the dynamic political leader Georges Frêche – can strategically and irrevocably alter the built environment and trajectory of a city. Montpellier's success exemplifies a productive relationship between a reformed gov-



ernance structure and coherent, ambitious planning and governance strategies by municipal leaders (Négrier, 2004, p. 36). The Frêche administration brought about a series of urban planning and branding initiatives that would forever change the nature of urbanism in Montpellier.

Montpellier has since become an attractive, pleasant coastal Mediterranean city, and one of France's centres of population growth, tourism and high technology. As such, IBM, Dell, Infosud France - all high profile technology companies - have located their offices here (Timbers, 2009, p. 3). Concurrent with large increases in population, Montpellier has always taken a proactive approach with urban and regional planning. Two major developments to the





The medieval centre of Montpellier: the Promenade du Peyrou (above) and L'Écusson (right).

east of the city that are reflective of the city's investment include the Antigone and Port Marianne master-planned neighbourhoods (ibid). Both of these urban planning megaprojects claim to provide a balance between habitat, environment and economic activity, while throughout the city, offices, universities, and housing are all interspersed between green areas (ibid). All of the initiatives described in this report have their roots in the new urban political economy of Frêche's re-imagined city. Although Frêche passed away in October 2010, the direction and momentum of his tenure prevails in Montpellier today.

Montpellier first gained prominence in the 10th Century as a trading center among a network of Mediterranean ports, although for centuries Montpellier remained a quiet city deep in the south of France, known primarily as a university town and as a centre

in the local wine industry (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 5). At different times in the city's history, Montpellier had welcomed immigrants from around the world, many of whom have continued to settle here, while other cultures have disappeared. Various factors have affected the population growth and decline of the city. France has a history of receiving immigrants from other parts of the world, although mostly from other parts of Europe, whereas in Montpellier, a significantly larger proportion of immigrants, popularly known as '*Maghrebins*', have come from French colonies in North Africa (Verma, 2005, p. 72). *Maghreb* refers to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania, the five countries constituting North Africa and means "the west" or "the place of sunset" (ibid).

The Jewish population in Montpellier first gained prominence in the 13th Century when the city gained its reputation for its education under Jew-

ish influence through secular studies of law and medicine (ibid). Jewish immigrants arrived from the former French colonies of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and settled in the south. Although they had lived here peacefully in the 13th Century, the annexation of the entire Languedoc Region to the French crown resulted in a harsh attitude toward the Jewish population, and the community was banished from the entire province in 1394 (ibid).

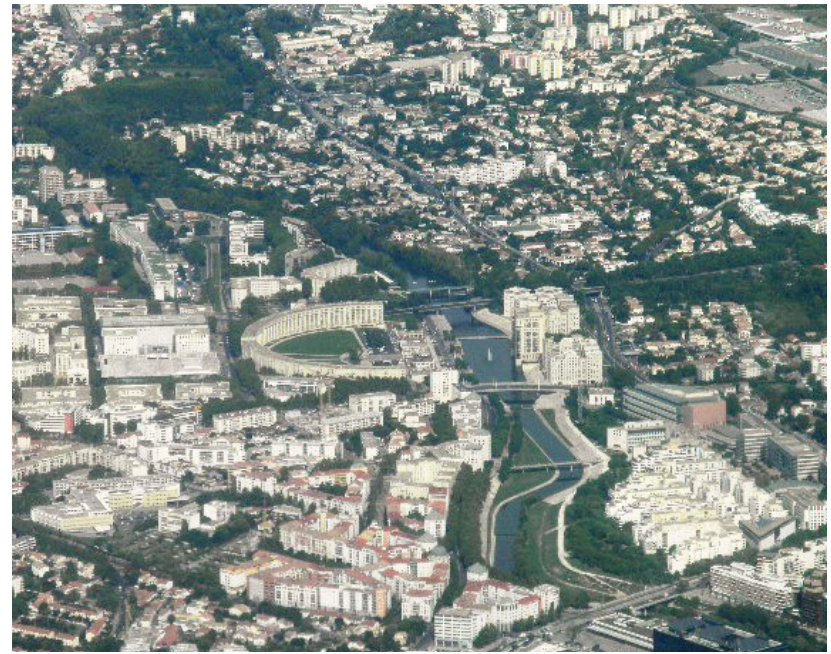
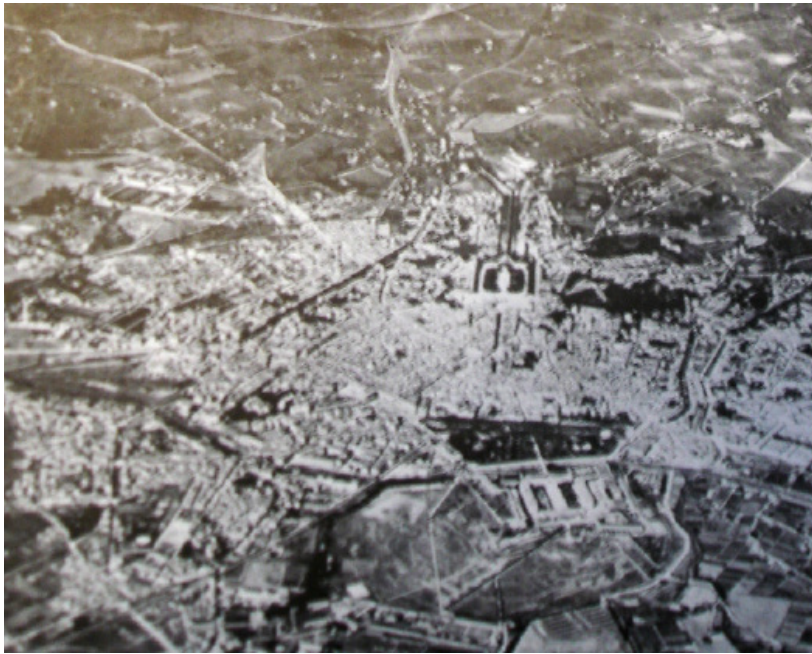
More recently, new centers of education were established, including the School of Agriculture (established in 1873), School of Trade (1897) and School of Chemistry (1908) (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 13). The First World War gave a temporary boost to the local viticulture economy although deindustrialization, remoteness from the decision-making centre of Paris, as well as economic crises in France that resulted from overproduction and low sales in



the local economy caused Montpellier's economy to fall behind (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 13).

Throughout the 1920s, Montpellier remained a low population growth city, while many - young people especially - migrated to Paris or other larger cities in France. After the Second World War, the population stagnated at 98,000 inhabitants, a period that reinforced Montpellier's profile as a city based on the service sector (ibid). Historically, Paris has dominated economic activity in France, and southern France was an economic backwater, as much of the region faced out-migration as people moved from the periphery to the core of the nation. Between 1962 and 1977, Montpellier faced a decline in population and a sharp decline in the wine industry, which created a push for transformation of the peri-urban area (Rauws and Roo, 2011, p. 276).

Montpellier gradually began to emerge from its status as a quiet, conservative community after it was promoted to capital of the Region of Languedoc-Roussillon in 1956 (ibid, p5).



Montpellier's L'Écusson in the 1920's (above, source: Buyck, et al.) and Antigone in 2012 (above right); Arc de triomphe (bottom left) and Palais de Justice (bottom right).





The Polygone shopping centre.



### **Municipal Politics and the 'Rupture' of 1977**

Republican Francois Delmas had been the mayor of Montpellier from 1959 to 1977. Delmas' goal for L'Écusson was to create new office space and a convention centre, as well as bring a modern shopping mall to Montpellier, under which new underground parking would be constructed, replacing the large surface parking lot that was overpowering the Place de la Comédie (Dubois, 1997, pp. 32-33). Delmas presided over the creation of the Société d'Équipement de la Région Montpellieraine (SERM) and construction of la Paillade, and was focused on making Montpellier the regional capital of Languedoc-Roussillon (Viala and Volle, 2010b, p. 37).

The arrival of repatriates from Algeria in the 1960s was one of the main reasons why Montpellier brought about many important urban planning tools such as the ZUP (*Zones à Urbaniser en priorité*), in order to prioritize areas that required immediate housing needs (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 15). The first ZUP was built in the west of the city center: the district of la Paillade, a modernist housing project built in 1960, when peripheral growth was still limited (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 15).

SERM was also instrumental in bringing about the construction of the Polygone shopping centre. Although the project was state-funded and the land owned by the city of Montpellier, the Polygone was the first project to use private developers for its construction (Dubois, 1997, p. 31-32). The governments at the national, department, and the city level all supported this project, beginning in the 1960s (ibid, p. 31).

Construction began in the spring of 1969. Spanning fourteen hectares, the Polygone project would eventually consist of 57,300 square metres of private residential space and 88,000 square metres of space for commerce and office use (Volle et al, 2010b, p. 32; Dubois, 2007, p. 33). Built on a property totalling fourteen hectares of land, the Polygone project included the construction of Le Triangle, a shopping mall, and the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall), and the construction of an underground parking lot indeed allowed for a more continuous public space between the L'Écusson, the Place de la Comédie, Esplanade and Promenade du Peyrou, and the Polygone project. The economically liberal Delmas saw the Polygone as an opportunity to spread financial risk for the project to these other stakeholders,

and the Polygone marked the beginning of a significant rupture that would roll-out development, and with the subsequent Antigone project, a shift in direction to the south of the city centre. The mall would be adjacent to this popular central square, extending the pedestrian space toward the entrance of the mall and providing space and venues that the ancient city centre could no longer provide.

However, today Polygone very much stands alone from the structures southeast of it - it is strictly a shopping mall and a place of consumption. The Polygone project had been promoted as the emblematic start of the 1970s and as the new commercial heart of the Region (Viala and Volle, 2010b, p. 32). Indeed, Polygone was an important first project in establishing Montpellier as the metropole and proclaiming its importance on larger scales. However, the Polygone failed to integrate lands to the southeast, and created a barrier from the city centre to the lands south and east. In the meantime, there were still no plans for the military lands to the east of the city centre, towards the area that would much later become Port Marianne. Today the Polygone is certainly busy and frequented by lo-

cal from the city and the surrounding region, and tourists alike. As a site for shopping, the mall appears to be quite successful, with the Galleries Lafayette remaining as the anchor store. However, being an enclosed space in the heart of the city, it pales in comparison to the vibrant public space of L'Écusson.

### **Montpellier's Pro-Growth Agenda**

A more pivotal 'rupture', or discontinuity with Montpellier's history occurred in 1977, when the local government made a decisive political shift from right to left, with the defeat of Republican Mayor François Delmas and the election of Socialist Georges Frêche (Buyck et al., 2010, p.18). He had plans to increase the social housing stock, expand cultural programming and build up networks of cultural infrastructure (Viala and Volle, 2010a). The determined and visionary role of Frêche and his "style of authority" is said to make Montpellier a "very particular" case study, which is perhaps why urbanists can learn so much from its recent history (Négrier, 2004, p.37).

During what must have been an exciting era to be a local politician or urban planner in Montpellier, the City was able to realize many large-scale



planning and economic development initiatives, beginning with the Antigone project, and culminating with the Euromédecine, Millénaire and Cap Alpha commercial projects and the city's *technopoles*, in addition to the consistent expansion of areas such as Port Marianne, the Odysseum shopping centre and a planned high-speed rail station. Montpellier's urban planners were able to create much of the essential infrastructure for the metropole project (Viala and Volle, 2010a, p. 15).

Frêche had much larger visions for Montpellier than Delmas, marketing the city at national and international levels. He was instrumental in developing programs that would put Montpellier 'on the map', whether it was through cultural programming, 'world-class' architectural projects, or by making the city an important hub for medical research and technology. Frêche was aware that the marketing of Montpellier could also be targeted to residents and those in the environs, thereby transforming the way that members of the Agglomération perceived themselves (Parker, 1993). Frêche prioritized the provision of social housing, social cohesion, and stronger governance within the Agglomération. Frêche's vision for

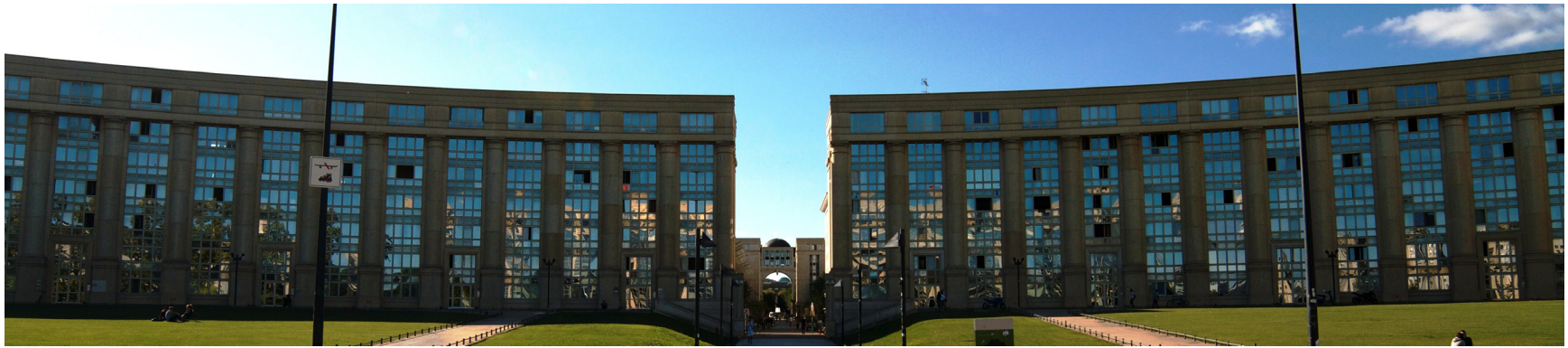
Montpellier was consistent with the aims of the Eurocities project, which imagined a network of dynamic cities that together would energize the continent with a shared emphasis on industry, commercial and financial services, as well as academic, cultural and social investment and developments (Parker, 1993, pp. 386-387). Urban planning would become Frêche's primary and strategic tool for solidifying Montpellier's metropole status in southern Europe.

#### **Bofill's Antigone**

An international competition was held in order to find the best architect to realize Frêche's ambitions. City officials sought someone who had both a strong personality and compelling vision for the project. It was also important to have a grand structure that could be marketed to the world. Ricardo Bofill, a renowned architect from the nearby Catalonia region in Spain won the competition, and his masterpiece urban redevelopment megaproject, the Antigone, became the first architectural project on which Montpellier would base a new image of itself to the world (Viala and Volle, 2010b, p. 45). The city could now be marketed as socially progressive, ar-

tistically bold, and politically powerful. The neo-classical architecture even suggests a history dating back to the Roman Empire, while the shape and scale of the project are unapologetically and exceptionally modern, in contrast to the narrow streets of the historic city centre (Viala and Volle, 2010b). Richard Bofill's megaproject contributed enormously to the reputation that the Montpellier continues to promote.

Through the use of monumental, world-class, postmodern architecture, the built form of the Antigone was able to express the city's ambitions through the built environment, and to, ultimately achieve a 'scaling-up' to the status of 'Mediterranean city' which could compete for investment with other, much larger cities such as Marseille, Toulouse, or perhaps even Barcelona (Viala and Volle, 2010b, p. 48). Indeed, Frêche projected the idea that Montpellier should confidently assert its attractiveness and natural position on the ancient axis of cities consisting of Rome-Barcelona-Madrid, which by the 1990s had become "the apex of a busy communication network in the new Europe" (Parker, 1993, p. 387). Antigone is used as an emblematic city image which is marketed in order to attract tourism



The Antigone.



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The Lez River and the Mediterranean Sea (above) and Montpellier's new Hôtel de Ville, designed by Jean Nouvel (opposite).

and to show to others - and the residents of the city - how progressive and imaginative Montpellier has become.

Within Montpellier, the extension of a visual axis with the Antigone development - from the Polygone in the city centre towards the urban expansion past the River Lez - had obvious benefits to the urban landscape. We can also use this interpretation of the landscape to understand how the dual processes of agglomeration and dispersal have helped to provide a coherent built form that could be promoted and marketed at larger scales. The Antigone acts to weave different parts of the city together. It is an exercise in spatial coherence at the municipal scale (Viala and Volle, 2010a, p. 28). The bold, confident design of the Antigone affirmed the importance of the city centre, as

well as its new relationship with the River Lez. This axis would become the new expression of political power, leadership and vision, and pointed towards where future development would occur.

#### **Population Shifts and Peri-Urban Development**

Coinciding with the development of the Antigone megaproject was a "drift towards the sun", in terms of internal migration within France throughout the 1970s (Timbers, 2009, pp. 3-4). Internal migration towards the southern regions of France from the north occurred because other regions were ill-equipped to deal with the recession in the 1970s or with the economic boom of the 1980s and 1990s (Ibid.). In addition, with the sudden immigration of

repatriates from Algeria, which had become independent in 1962 and brought Montpellier's population numbers up to 120,000 in the same year, the city's population rose to 200,000 inhabitants by 1982 (ibid, p. 3). The increase in population was an important factor in Montpellier's dynamic since there had previously been approximately fifty years of stagnation in the city's population.

Tourism on the coastline along with growth in the tertiary sector all led to migration in the south of France. There was much high-tech and industrial development in Montpellier around this time, as well as the national *Mission Racine* initiative, intended to link the leisure economy in France to that of Spain (Rauws and Roo, 2011, p. 276). This mass tourism initiative was also





Paul Chemetov's médiathèque Emile Zola (above) and Zaha Hadid's Pierresvives building (below).



initiated in peri-urban Montpellier and triggered investment in local leisure activities (Ibid.).

Between 1960 and 1980 Montpellier became an important agglomeration with urban extensions near main road axes, namely the coast with Palavas-les-Flots and Carnon. These seaside places were sites for a high level of tourism. In the northern parts of Montpellier, villages such as Clapiers, Grabels, Montferrier, Saint-Clement-de-Riviere and Saint-Gely-du-Fesc grew quickly, as peri-urban development coincided with increased employment at universities and in the medical sector there (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 16).

However, despite these high tech jobs, unemployment in Montpellier has steadily risen to almost twenty-five percent (Timbers, 2009, p. 3). Many of these unemployed residents are North Africans who cannot settle within newer developments, and experience a lack of adequate housing provision. Continued social polarization and a lack of cohesion remain major, unresolved problems in Montpellier to this day.

### **Architecture**

Architecture continues to be used as a branding, marketing and tourism tool

in Montpellier. Modern architecture is meant to signal a break from the medieval and neo-classical identity that is typical of the centre of Montpellier, represented by L'Écusson and Place de la Comédie, respectively. Here, historic buildings and the medieval layout of the city have been preserved, and appear to be very popular with tourists and locals alike, judging by the busy infrastructure of pedestrianized streets, shops and restaurants. However, beyond L'Écusson, the city looks quite different. With the commissioning of world-famous architects, these modern architecture projects and megaprojects constitute a architectural renaissance, as Giovannini (2012) calls them. The buildings have become renowned among elite circles of architects and art critics, and elevate the image and status of Montpellier.

Instead of utilizing less famous, in-house architects and engineers, world-renowned artists have been sought to design projects within the city. This is done through the mechanism of international competitions which attract attention for large projects that will be rolled out in Montpellier. In other instances, well-known artists and designers are approached

directly by the city, as was the case for the design of Lines 3 and 4 of the light rail network, and tram stops that were designed with the collaboration of fashion designer Christian Lacroix (Office du Tourisme, 2012).

The most recent projects include the previously-mentioned offices of the Département of Hérault, constructed by Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid, whose iconic flowing and futuristic style is on display with this building. The Pierresvives building combines various offices of the Département such as archives, a library and offices (Villenet, 2012). It has been built at the edge of la Paillade neighbourhood, a social housing complex comprised of modernist-era high-rise buildings, and in close proximity to several elementary and high schools. Pierresvives will be the centrepiece of a new ÉcoCité of 900 residential units. Jean-Calude Deperrois, Director of les Sociétés d'économie mixte (SEM) and la société publique locale d'aménagement (SPLA) and Dr. André Vezinhet, the president of the Département, suggest that these new elements will rejuvenate the neighbourhood by introducing a mix of socio-economic levels (Giovannini, 2012; Cros, 2010). They will also extend a link

from the city centre toward the north as well as attracting users from across the Agglomération, although it remains to be seen whether the residents of la Paillade will be included within the dreams of rejuvenation for this area or whether they will be marginalised by future activities (Villenet, 2012).

Another high-profile building is the new Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) designed by Jean Nouvel. Known for creating solid, imposing structures of glass and metal, Montpellier's new City Hall is also quintessential of this style. The glass and metal exterior of the building is painted in the emblematic blue colour that symbolizes the city of Montpellier. The building stands on the banks of the River Lez, built on columns over a basin. The foundations upon which the columns emerge are made up of massive boulders. Combined, the overall effect of the new City Hall is of a fortress atop a dike that is surrounded by a moat, looking out over the land and projects that are to be developed to the southeast. Mayor Hélène Mandroux justifies the massive €130 million project, stating that the former City Hall had not been updated since the time of Francois Delmas, Mayor of Montpellier from 1959 to 1977 (Pereira, 2011). That



The River Lez and Port Marianne (above) and SERM's development plans for Port Marianne (below).







The terminus of Line 3 at Pérois.

City Hall was no longer large enough to accommodate meetings and personnel, causing facilities to be annexed to nearby locations outside of city hall property itself (Cordelier, 2008). Inside the building, some windows are also tinted blue, giving one the idea that Montpellier is to be viewed through the lens of the political agenda: one that is futuristic, environmentally friendly, and technologically advanced (Pereira, 2011).

International architecture competitions and the awarding of projects to renowned architects began with Georges Frêche and the construction of the Antigone. The plethora of high-profile architects and projects that have come to dominate the landscape of Montpellier also include Claude Vasconi's le Corum exhibition and performance space, Paul Chemetov's Emile Zola-themed library, Marc Lehmann's

sea route from Montpellier to Palavaz, Christian de Portzamparc's Lironde neighbourhood within Port Marianne, and the new high school by Massimiliano Fuksas aptly named Lycée Georges Frêche that specializes in tourism and hotel management, among others (Cordelier, 2008; Giovannini, 2012).

### **Port Marianne**

As the population continued to grow in Montpellier, local planners looked to expand development further to the southeast, and the Frêche administration installed several important institutions near or within the Port Marianne neighbourhood: the new City Hall was constructed facing Parc Marianne's Bassin de Jacques Cœur; the new Regional offices were built just north of Port Marianne; new SERM offices were relocated in the Richter neighbourhood;

and several university and technological institutions including the University of Montpellier's library of law and political science were located on Avenue Raymond Dugrand, running north-south through Port Marianne (SERM, 2012).

The Port Marianne project is meant to conjure up images of the modern neighbourhood, one that is densely populated, green and sustainably developed, has a variety of retail shops and services, and is connected to public transportation. The name of the neighbourhood also makes reference to Montpellier's plans to become a Mediterranean port city. Back in the 15th Century, Montpellier experienced an economic boom and the area that is now Bassin de Jacques Cœur was a thriving inland port (Viala and Volle, 2010a, p. 18). In present day, ports are still an important global economic structure



Various modes of transportation in Montpellier's L'Écusson.

and can be a significant industry for a municipality when adequately serviced to extensive transportation networks (Llovera, 1997). It is hoped that in the future, Montpellier will be able to reclaim its role of port city. The project of Port Marianne and its future port function reinforce the forward thinking and ambitious strategy of Georges Frêche.

The lands on which Port Marianne was built had very little infrastructure and landscaping. The land was ideal to be zoned as an *Area of Concerned Planning*, otherwise known as a ZAC. However, there was a danger that the development would be monotonous in form and usage (Viala and Volle, 2010b, p. 60). There was a conscious decision to make Port Marianne interesting, landscaped, and connected. Parcels of land are developed incrementally, with negotiations between the city, architects and developers, and are influenced by the economy (such as land values, housing market, availability and growth of jobs in the region (Ibid., p. 33). At the same time, great pains have been taken to maintain some continuity in the style and size of the built form (ibid, p. 41). This gives Port Marianne a feeling of being a neighbourhood and one that is distinct from the city centre. Port

Marianne is made up of several sub-neighbourhoods: Lironde was designed by the architect Portzamparc who created enclosed residential “islands” with central plazas, a central mass of taller buildings, and referenced the traditional forms seen in the viticulture societies of which Montpellier is one (ibid, p. 58); Parc Marianne provides green space, Jacques-Cœur is where the basin is located, Richter is the site of many academic and technical institutions, and Millénaire is a business-oriented section of the neighbourhood (Ibid., p. 51). The quality of the public realm is also a focus of this development made obvious by the amount of green space, views to the water and city, pedestrian and cycling paths, welcoming plazas, and moderate size of buildings.

The architect of the well-known Antigone sector, Ricardo Bofill, was also instrumental in the masterplan of the Port Marianne project, although his style is not overtly present as was the case with the Antigone, which was quintessentially “*bofillienne*” (Viala and Volle, 2010b, p. 43). The architects that worked on the built form of Port Marianne include André Fainsilber, Claude Vasconi, and Jean Nouvel, who designed Montpellier’s newest City Hall

which opened across the River Lez in front of the Bassin de Jacques Cœur in 2012 (Office de Tourisme, 2012). Port Marianne is linked to the rest of the Agglomération with Lines 1 and 3. The latter continues south, terminating just one kilometer shy of the coast at Perols.

Port Marianne is also connected to Montpellier by a bicycle path. In fact, Montpellier is a very bicycle-friendly city and Port Marianne has bike paths along its green spaces as well as having a bike path along the River Lez that stretches down to Palavaz as part of the regional plan’s Sea Road mandate. Port Marianne is connected to the western part of the city by several foot bridges as well. The channelization of the River Lez provides public space for people to sit along the banks, enjoy green space, and look onto the river. Connectivity along the River Lez and the high quality public realm has turned the banks of the river into vibrant recreational spaces, areas that were previously unsuitable for development.

Looking further eastward from the centre of Montpellier, we find the suburban development of Odysseum. Together, the Port Marianne and Odysseum commercial district and shopping centre cover 4000 Hectares of land. In

2012, approximately half of the project has been built out which includes the construction of 800 homes, a quarter of which are social housing (SERM, 2012). It is a showcase neighbourhood, utilizing sustainable planning and construction techniques and continuing Montpellier's efforts to be an innovative and progressive city. This project showed that in the contemporary era of Montpellier, the city is made of buildings and neighbourhoods that are unique, distinct from the medieval Écusson, and use the most cutting-edge technologies as well as good planning and design practices.

### **Metropole Status**

The impressive collection of buildings and megaprojects in Montpellier are indications of the city's ambitions to gain metropole status. Capital city status and subsequent population growth in the 1960s would provide an opportunity for the Frêche government to instigate a series of ambitious, long-term spatial strategies aimed at achieving the coveted metropole status for Montpellier (Viala and Volle, 2010, p. 14). Today, the continued belief in the competitive advantages of this status and in the perpetuation of population growth (an

effect of successful inter-city competition within France, as well as the effect of immigration from beyond France's borders) go hand-in-hand. Continued growth and investment in the built form are evident across the city, which has by now decidedly become an actual *metropole* – a strategic centre of population growth and development.

Much of the urban and suburban landscape in Montpellier today can be interpreted as the product of the city's unapologetic pro-growth atmosphere, and the legacy of Georges Frêche. During this era, the Frêche administration was able to promote growth and development through a series of urban initiatives, including – but not limited to – the very impressive investment in public transit expansion across Montpellier, downtown revitalization, suburban expansion and growth, and in the promotion and attraction of information technology industries. His successors are said to be consistent with his policies.

In 2006, Montpellier's ambitions to expand south to the Mediterranean Sea were enshrined in the regional planning document, the *SCOT*. Specifically, this plan has a section dedicated to the *Route de la Mer*, or *Sea Road*,

which calls for infrastructure investments along a path to the Sea. The path will ensure that flood risk is managed and that a landscaped cycling pathway is constructed, reconnecting the inland city of Montpellier to the coast. Together, projects such as these produce an urban landscape that allowed the city to re-position itself on larger scales, as planners actualize plans that emphasized regional integration, dispersal, and social cohesion (Viala and Volle, 2010a, p. 10).

### **The Role of Local Government**

One of the keys to Montpellier's growth is the direction and political backing bestowed by local government. The local government continues to play a very active role in the urban governance and strategic direction and image of Montpellier, where planning is done within a political regime thought of as "municipal Keynesianism" (Viala and Volle, 2010a, p. 12). The term '*la ville inventée*', the conceptualized or created city, is said by local urbanists to characterize the final product of this dialectic city-building process, the urban landscape known as the Montpellier Agglomération (ibid).

*'La metropole incomplète'* has

also been used to conceptualize the process of urbanization here, with an emphasis on the unfinished, or perhaps, continuing and perpetual character of growth development here (ibid). This term is also said to hint at the different layers of government within the *mille-feuille* government structure in France, and with regards to planning and governing an emerging metropole such as Montpellier, within the divisions of responsibilities between the municipal and agglomeration community levels (ibid).

Likewise, the complimentary term *la territoire projeté* reminds us that the metropole project will inevitably require more land on which to grow – and peripheral, disparate communities with which to integrate (ibid, p. 13). Of course, some of these factors will be found in any case study of urban growth and expansion.

What is significant to the study of Montpellier, in particular, is that this growth can be attributed to the deliberate, strategic and ultimately successful initiatives of the Frêche administration, and his predecessors, whose policies appear to be generally consistent, with regards to the continued urban growth and prominence of Montpellier.

### **Frêche's Legacy**

Looking back over the decades-long tenure of the Frêche administration, it is clear that the strategies of his government involved a strategic emphasis towards the larger project of re-imagining Montpellier under an ambitious metropole-oriented model (ibid, p.11). During his tenure as mayor it was stated that there is “no doubt that Montpellier is Georges Frêche’s perception of what Montpellier [should be and] quite a large proportion of *Montpelliérains* will have been moulded by his perceptions, his values and by the environment he will have created for them” (Parker, 1993, p. 394). Indeed, during this time the city was able to rise from its function as a fragmented “*pseudo-metropole*”, and to in fact become a growth pole within a national network of French cities (ibid).

Following the election of fellow Socialist François Mitterrand at the national level in 1981, the urban planning and governance regime throughout France was significantly transformed by decentralization reforms in 1982 and 1983. This gave local government much more autonomy over urban planning (Buyck et al., 2010, p. 19). The administration was able to build on Mont-

pellier’s natural, objective features, such as its Mediterranean climate and proximity to the Sea, as well as its advantageous economic position and local history, and – with advancing infrastructure – its connection to Paris and other important parts of France (Parker, 1993, p. 286). Motivated by a fear that current urban problems had their roots in political and institutional fragmentation, local governments were given greater opportunities to decide their own future (Négrier, 2006, p. 2).

While growth in Montpellier may have had other limiting factors during this time, such as unemployment or poor integration with transportation corridors that run through the region, it is difficult to imagine a government structure more conducive to municipal urban planning and growth, or a local government administration more ambitious and effective at achieving its goals than the Frêche administration.

Then, in the 1980s, Montpellier became an important technological centre with the arrival of IBM and further strategic development of the biomedical and health centres by the local government, resulting in the most drastic population increase since the 1960s. Indeed, Montpellier grew from

the 25th to the 8th largest city in France during this time (Timbers, 2009, p. 3). As the capital of the Département and the Region, and later the Agglomération, Montpellier continued to attract other large operations such as the civil service and administration. By the 2000s, economic development would also be placed under the jurisdiction of the Montpellier Agglomération, providing the emerging metropole with even more tools to realize its full potential (ibid).

### **Regional Political Identity**

While the area population is concentrated in the Montpellier Agglomération and nearby city of Nîmes, residents in this urban corridor travel to other neighbouring cities for work and leisure. The other agglomerations and cities in between have important cultural and economical influences and relationships with each other. However, this urban corridor is politically fragmented, which in turn affects urban development, particularly large scale, cross-jurisdictional projects like transportation. This is a politically contested issue as even though the urban corridor consists of several communes that shares close social, economic and

cultural connections, inter-communal competition rather than collaboration is the historical norm. More coherent regional governance is needed for any one of the cities and the Agglomération to prosper together, and the notion of political fragmentation must be addressed.

The metropole ambitions are not limited to the political boundaries of the city and its agglomeration, and the metropole claim often stems from the notion of solidarity and coherence. According to Volle et al. (2010a), the metropolitan ambition actually stretches from Nîmes to Sète. It is clear that Montpellier is the growth centre of this urban corridor, as the metropole claim is justified by population growth, economic relationship and the cultural connections. Economically, from the perspective of Montpellier, in order to increase resilience and to grow to become a more successful technopole and education centre, it needs the support and collaboration of the adjacent communes and cities.

As suggested by Bonnet, the “resilience of a territory is the result of both relationships between firms due to geographical proximity and the efficiency of network on several scales”

(2008, p. 1361). Montpellier functions as a successful technopole as well, and it is often argued that the expansion and prosperity of individual agencies in the private sector rely on the collaboration of different jurisdictions to aid development, particularly for large corporations such as IBM and Sanofi Avantis.

However, different scholars have also suggested that this vision of creating a metropolitan city is overly idealistic and does not take into consideration the political will and economic functions of other agglomerations and communes. Since 2005, a total of three EPCI (*établissements public de coopération intercommunale*) were put forth, which considered joining Sète, Mèze and Montpellier together to create a larger urban community. However, none of these projects came to fruition as a result of the oppositions of the other communes and Agglomération. While the issue at hand remains a seemingly desirable goal for Montpellier, the political tensions around the topic are said to remain highly strained and the proposition itself contested.

The claim towards establishing a metropole is also hindered by the political identities of each commune, creating a fragmented municipal network.

There lacks incentive and motivation for the different communes and agglomerations to cooperate with Montpellier as there are no justifications for the other political jurisdictions to become a “subordinate” region of Montpellier. In particular, the ambition of creating a large urban corridor centered around Montpellier was not supported by the adjacent commune and agglomeration. Specifically, the project of joining three smaller communes to the Montpellier Agglomération in 2005 was opposed by the Sète Agglomération and a similar project was stopped by Mèze in 2009. Although Montpellier has had one of the highest demographic growth rates in France for the past decade, “the growth was only - hardly - managed at the commune level, with no planning scheme at the scale of the functional urban area” (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 6).





## **Urban and Regional Planning in Montpellier**

### **Institutional Actors and Inter-Communal Cooperation**

Different institutional actors are involved in changing the face of the Agglomération of Montpellier and in advancing the idea of the métropole. This section will identify these actors, present a brief background, and explain their roles and interrelations. Actors from the national to local level are engaged in the métropole vision. This section will mainly focus on the Agglomération of Montpellier, SERM, and the City of Montpellier. Understanding the French government structure, inter-communal cooperation, local urban actors, their structure and scope is essential to comprehending the Montpellier project.

The French government's administrative structure is multi-layered and is often compared with a *mille-feuille*, a famous pastry of French origin that, like the structure of the French government, has many layers. The top layer, the state, is divided into twenty-two regions. Each region is further divided into departments, departments into administrative districts (communities), administrative districts into communes (municipalities) and each commune is divided into electoral cantons, which is

the lowest level of political representation. The Agglomération of Montpellier is one of the administrative districts and is the fourth layer from the top. Above the Agglomération is the Department (Hérault) and above the department is the Region (Languedoc-Roussillon). Under the Agglomération are several communes – the City of Montpellier being one of them.

The local governance system in France is also characterized by a large number of local administrative units - 36,700 communes (Négrier, 1999, p. 29). To address this highly fragmented pattern of local bodies, 18,000 inter-communal cooperation units were established. Although an attempt was made in 1971 to combine these communes through amalgamation and reduce the number of communes, this was ultimately unsuccessful (ibid). This led the French government to keep the existing structure of the local bodies. As amalgamation did not succeed in this case, Négrier insists that unlike many North American and North European cities, amalgamation is “not particularly French” (ibid).

In France, many inter-communal cooperation models exist that range from single purpose or multi-purpose

inter-communal associations to inter-communal agreements, and these arrangements are seen as an attempt to atone for the failure to amalgamate. In this context, a very crucial role was played by the Chevènement Law, which was passed by the French parliament on the 12th of July, 1999 (ibid, p. 30). This law tried to simplify and reinforce the cooperative system by establishing three mechanisms: communities of communes (for a region of less than 50,000 inhabitants); communities of Agglomération (between 50,000 and 500,000 inhabitants); and urban communes (having more than 500,000 inhabitants) (Buyck et al., 2008).

The reforms provided the prefect (the head of the region) with the power to force communes into a cooperative system and also provided an initial grant to cover the cost of establishing the new cooperative system; these two provisions (the power and the grant) are considered to have played important role in the success of the new urban cooperation tool (Négrier, 2009, p. 30). If all of the communes were to adopt the Chevènement Law, France would evolve into 3500 communities of communes, 140 communities of agglomeration and fifteen urban

communes (ibid, p. 31).

Although the Chevènement Law is considered a success, it also has many detractors. The main criticism is related to the gap between functional space and institutional territories. The urban communes only serve twenty-nine percent of their metropolitan territory and incorporate less than fifty percent of the metropolitan population (Négrier, 2009, p. 30). Therefore, these units have been more successful as political units of cooperation, rather than functional units. Another problem invited by this tool is the drawing of the power boundary between agglomerations and municipalities, which complicates their relationship as municipalities might want to retain some autonomy while still being a member of the agglomeration.

However, the provisions of Chevènement Law favour an agglomeration with a greater authority and integration (ibid). In addition, the law also automatically transfers the right of the local municipality to collect corporate tax to the agglomeration, which makes the relationship more intense, especially when the municipalities have a strong corporate tax base. The new form of local administration is historically rooted

and is a response to the state's inability to amalgamate. The Chevènement Law did become very popular but faces criticisms especially in its inability to expand its function to reach the Montpellier Agglomération's boundaries.

### **Communes and the Agglomération of Montpellier**

The Agglomération Community of Montpellier is a type of inter-communal gathering, established in 2001. It falls under *communities of agglomeration*, as defined by the Chevènement Law, with a population of 250,000, and was created from the District of Montpellier, the fourth administrative layer within the French government structure, the establishment of which dates back to 1965 (Montpellier Agglomération, 2012). Originally, the Agglomération had thirty-eight communes, which was reduced to thirty-one in 2004, after some of the communes stepped out from the original inter-communal gathering. In fact, the communities that left the Agglomération formed a separate Agglomération. The split is attributed to political conflicts and support for the departing from Jacques Blanc, the right-leaning President of Languedoc-Roussillon, who preceded Georges Frêche

(Laurent and Volle, 2010a). However, this might also be a reflection of the fear of potential dominance of the Agglomération in the Region.

Metropole ambitions can be observed in many plans, including the desire of the Agglomération to expand its influence outside its boundary. For example, the Agglomération is currently not allowed to invest outside its boundary, which is affecting the desire of the Agglomération to connect itself to the sea and prevents expansion of the tram network to the Aéroport Montpellier Méditerranée, which links Montpellier with other cities in Europe, as well as North Africa. The Agglomération is expecting that the State will make an exclusionary provision that would allow the Agglomération to shape its peripheral land and achieve its goal to extend to both the Mediterranean coast and its airport despite the fact that the investment would be made in the communes who left the Agglomération in 2005 (ibid).

The Chevènement Law has granted wide power to the agglomeration, which primarily falls under two categories. The first category of power is compulsory power and includes economic development, urban planning,

social housing, urban regeneration, fight against social exclusion, and prevention of petty criminality (Négrier, 2005, p. 31). The second category of power is optional and may include sewage infrastructure and facilities, road infrastructure and parking facilities, environment, waste treatment, water provision, and culture and sports facilities. Besides these, the Agglomération has the option to choose other powers not listed above as long as the power boundary between municipalities and the Agglomération is clearly defined (ibid).

The Agglomération council consists of ninety members, represented proportionately from each commune based on its population and is led by the President of the Agglomération elected by the council. The current president is Jean-Pierre Moure. The rule of representation states that no municipality can have more than half of the council seats and each municipality should have at least one representative to the council, irrespective of its size. Matters that come before council are decided by voting by its members (Montpellier Agglomération, 2012).

Most of the works of the Agglomération Council are supported by



The Agglomération of Montpellier's offices in the Antigone.

the development council. Initially created in 2003, the Agglomération council expanded its size and revised its role in 2012. The development council, besides providing expertise and comment, contributes actively to *Project Agglomération 2020* by acting as the voice of the citizens of the City of Montpellier. The new Development Council is led by Olivier Torres, Professor, University of Montpellier III and the members of the council are chosen based on their commitment and expertise. One of the initial responsibilities of the council is to develop and adopt a charter that would regulate the behaviour of persons participating in any committee formed by it, so as to ensure quality debates and discussions. The Development Council is divided into four committees that together look after all matters related to the Agglomération (ibid).

The Agglomération Council is based on the population of a commune. This model of representation could result in the council being controlled by communes with large population. This is understood as a difficulty in power sharing in agglomerations such as Montpellier, where communes such as the City of Montpellier retain a decisive majority of voting power because of

their population (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 6). The authors also cite this provision as the cause for local communal conflict and the split of several communes from the Agglomération of Montpellier in 2004. This representational dominance poses a challenge to small communes which might not have sufficient support because of the size of their faction. The dominance might dissolve the difference between the city project and the Agglomération project, and deprive the peripheral communities of Agglomération from regional benefits.

The strategy of the Agglomération of picking representatives of civic society reflects a desire to control the public participation process. As clearly expressed on the website of the Agglomération, it is choosing representatives based on their commitment. Therefore, only people who commit to the Agglomération project will be selected, effectively leaving those with a critical voice behind. Any error in the first stage of selection of citizens' representatives will be solved by soon-to-come regulation that will circumscribe the behaviour of participants in different committees formed by the Agglomération.

The Agglomération is working closely with local academia to produce

long-term plans such as the *SCOT*. The participation of local scholars and researchers in urban planning matters indicates that the Agglomération believes in the capacity of academia to advance the Agglomération project. The willingness of academia to lead a government team also reflects this sector's level of comfort towards the government, and conveys the value of coherence: a desire to work together for a common project.

Communes are the lowest level of government in France, and are alternatively referred to as municipalities. Their scope changed as the historically centralized government adopted the decentralization policies of 1981-82, and provided municipalities with greater autonomy with respect to their own budget and fiscal resources (ibid, p. 22). However, the most important provision of the decentralization law was the granting of authority to the Commune Councils to authorize legal agreement to development applications (ibid, p. 5). Thus, land development and urban planning came under the purview of the local authorities, the communes.

As is true for other communes, the City of Montpellier undertakes all functions related to local governance

including urban planning and provision of local infrastructure. However, depending on the magnitude of local projects, different levels of governments may become involved. For example, the Department (Hérault) plays a major role in the planning and funding of local transportation (Buyck et al., 2008, p. 6). The *PLU (Local Urbanism Plan)* and *ZAC (Area of Concerned Planning)* are the main tools used by the city to shape its land use planning. These two planning tools, however, have to conform to the Regional plans: *SCOT (Scheme of Territorial Coherence)*, *PDU (Plan of Urban Mobility)* and *PLH (Local Housing Plan, sub-regional level plan)*. The City has the flexibility to prioritize its land development and establish phasing. However, when it comes to implementing the urban plan, it works in cooperation with SERM.

### **SERM (Société d'Équipement de la Région Montpelliéraine)**

Since its creation in 1961, the Société d'Équipement de la Région Montpelliéraine (SERM) - or in English, the Equipment Company of Montpellier Area - supports and executes the implementation of urban projects in the Montpellier area by bringing together au-

thorities of the Agglomération and local development actors. Outside of the Agglomération of Montpellier, SERM also works for the commune of Palavas-les-Flots (SERM, 2012). As a public-private entity, SERM acts as a developer for the communes by helping cities realize their urban plan. It is involved with land acquisition, selection of consultants (architect, engineers etc.), preparation of design, and selection of investors and construction companies.

After acquiring the land required for a project, SERM retains possession for a certain period of time, creates a detailed, development-ready design, invites bids from interested developers, and implements the project through a competitive bidding process. The selected developer, who is a private party, takes control of the project, develops it and sells it to consumers. In certain cases, when private developers hesitate to implement a project, SERM makes the investment by itself and sells to the customer. For this purpose SERM has created another authority, SAAM, which is a development authority owned by SERM and is equivalent to a private developer. The SAAM also takes part in bidding process, which makes the process highly competitive. All of the city

projects in the Agglomération are led by SERM. Some projects of note include Antigone, Port Marianne, Odysseum, Malbosc, le Corum, Olympic Pool, Parks Millennium and various environmental projects such as the biogas plant (ibid).

SERM has been able to limit the speculation of land in Montpellier Region. Any difference in the value of land between acquisition and project implementation phase is harvested by SERM rather than by a private entity. Involvement of SAAM in the developer selection process not only adds to the competitive bidding process but also avoids collusion among private bidders. SERM has also used SAAM as a way to leverage private investments, where SAAM would complete the initial phase of a project to create a condition attractive to private investors. One such example is that of the SERM office building itself. The SAAM completed the first block of the office and was able to attract private investors to complete the rest of the project.

Multiple actors are involved in pushing forward the Montpellier project. The main actors are the Region of Hérault, the Agglomération of Montpellier and the City of Montpellier. However, the works of these actors are sup-

ported by SERM, SAAM and key players from University of Montpellier and Research Institute. These actors together constitute the “growth machine” of Montpellier, a machine that is trying to produce a competitive metropole.

The Agglomération of Montpellier, the inter-communal authority, is *the* key player of the metropole project. Although the tradition of inter-communal cooperation has an extensive history in France, the Chevènement Law had an instrumental role in the formation of inter-communal institutions. Historically, the local actors have been able to control private intervention in urban development and land speculation. The role of SERM is crucial in this matter, which works as a consultant for the agglomeration and the commune. The creation of SAAM has added strength to the work of SERM and reduced private monopoly, as the SAAM acts as a competitor to the private investors.

The roles of the actors are circumscribed by various plans, from the local to the regional, which also control urban development in the agglomeration. The requirement of these plans is that they be responsible to the objectives of parallel plans, be consistent with the higher level plans and reflect a high,

degree of coherence among planning documents and in the planning practice in the Agglomération. However, the concentration of voting power within one commune in particular – the City of Montpellier – invites political tension within the Agglomération, which has the potential to spread throughout the Languedoc-Roussillon Region.

### **Schemas de Coherence Territorial (SCOT)**

Planning policy in Montpellier, and in France in general, is directed by a number of hierarchical documents which address policy implementation at different levels. Legislative codes, regional plans, communal plans, and regulations have been implemented using a centralized, top-down approach. The list below provides for a brief overview of policy mechanisms which influence land development nationally, regionally and locally:

1. *National Urbanism Code*
2. The *Regional Scheme for Sustainable Territorial Development (SRADDT)* is a global document indicating general objectives for Regional planning at the Regional level
3. *SCOT (Scheme of Territorial Coher-*

*ence)* with other documents as *PDU (Plan of Urban Mobility)* and *PLH (Local Housing Plan)* at the sub-regional level which is the most important level in the French planning system as it deals with the scale of functional urban Regions

4. *PLU (Local Urbanism Plan)* and *ZAC (Zone D'aménagement Concerté - Area of Concerted Planning)* at the commune level

5. Several revitalizing mechanisms; *ZUP (Zone à Urbaniser en Priorité – Priority Urban Zone)*, *ZUS (Zone Urbaines Sensibles – Sensitive Urban Zones)*, *ZFU (Zones Franches Urbaines – Tax Free Urban Zones)* and *ZRU (Zones de Redynamisation Urbaine – Urban Renewal Areas)*.

Planning in France is administered at the regional and local level with the same standard application forms used across the nation. Planning is done at the national, regional and local level in France, forming a complex, yet cohesive planning structure. The national policies create the context for regional plans which create the foundation for Regional and local policies (Angloinfo, 2012). These are then integrated into an area plan referenced as *Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale – Territorial Coherence Scheme (SCOT)*, which provides

the framework for individual cities, towns and villages to create their own local policies.

Montpellier's *SCOT* was established by Solidarity Law and Urban Renewal (SRU) on December 13, 2000. This came as a result of the national urban solidarity and renewal law setting up new planning policies with the local urbanism plan (*PLU*). This law imposes spatial planning at the inter-communal level with the *SCOT*. Thereby, planning policies at both the communal and inter-communal levels must now be developed in a project report with zoning maps that indicate the different status of land induced by the project (Buyck et al., 2008). The *SCOT* organizes development with respect to the balance between city and nature, and coordinating planning and transport. It ensures the consistency of the *Mobility Plan (PDU)*, the *Local Housing Program (PLH)* as well as local plans (*PLU*) that fall under the jurisdiction of municipalities.

The *SCOT* is a strategic planning document that defines development for the next ten years at the regional and local level through a sustainable development perspective. This planning tool organizes the development, planning and active participation in the preser-

vation of natural and agricultural areas, although it may be subject to revision or amendment. The development of the *SCOT* was accomplished through extensive consultation with the State, the Department, the Region and the public. The initial plan can be subject to a public enquiry but, once approved, is valid for a period of ten years. The *SCOT* can also be viewed as an area plan that identifies areas for residential, commercial, tourist and conservation.

The plan consists of a presentation report which includes the diagnosis, the initial state of the environment, environmental assessment, the expected impact and the articulation of *SCOT* with other documents. Meanwhile, Montpellier's *Projet d'aménagement et de développement durable (PADD)* - or *Planning and Sustainable Development Project in English* - sets the objectives of public policy planning, housing, economic development, tourism and culture, leisure, transport and movement of people and goods. The *Document d'orientations générales (DOG)* - or in English, the *General Guidelines Document* - accompanied by graphic documents, includes requirements through which the *PADD* will apply. This document is enforceable against the *SCOT*.

The *SCOT* aims to be the reference document of public policies that sets goals for planning housing, economic development, recreation, movement of people and goods, vehicle parking and car traffic control. The *SCOT* determines the conditions to ensure:

- A balance between urban renewal, controlled urban development, development of rural areas
- Diversity of urban functions and social diversity in urban housing and rural housing
- The use efficient and balanced natural, urban, suburban and rural

The objectives of territorial coherence scheme are as follows:

- To define development orientations avoiding too precise locations: it is to ensure consistency choices for housing and activities
- To restructure the built fabric, limiting the consumption of new spaces. In the absence of the *SCOT*, urbanization is subject to the rule of moderate development. There is a possibility, however, to expect a moderate extension of urbanization on the prefect agreement, after notice, during the implementation of the *PLU* or communal map.

The main planning tools of the different levels in French planning ad-



ministration are comparable to some of the planning strategies which currently exist in Ontario, such as the *Places to Grow* and the *Greenbelt* plans. The main difference which can be identified is the very high level of government influence at the National level over policy in France.

### **Plans de Déplacements Urbains (PDU) - Mobility Plan (PDU)**

The French government has been active for a number of years in the development a cohesive and sustainable framework for urban mobility. The French government first developed *Plans de Déplacements Urbains (PDU) – Urban Transport Plan* as an alternative version to *Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning (SUMP)* following the law on domestic transport in December, 1982. The general goal of a PDU is to ensure a sustainable balance between the needs of mobility and accessibility with the protection of the environment and health (Vanegmond, 2012).

In 1996, with respect to the Kyoto Agreement in reversing the effects of climate changes by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the Clean Air and Rational Use of Energy Law was adopted. The *Mobility Plan (PDUs)* are

obligatory for transport authorities in areas with a population of over 100,000 inhabitants, while areas with less than 100,000 inhabitants can choose to develop a *PDU* on a voluntary basis (ibid). These plans are primarily centred on the urban area. The Clean Air and Rational Use of Energy Law defines eight goals for the PDU:

- 1) To improve road safety for all users, in particular for vulnerable groups such as pedestrians and cyclists
- 2) The reduction of automobile traffic
- 3) Development of public transportation and more alternative modes of transport/travel such as bicycle and walking to reduce pollution
- 4) Improve road use efficiency by redistributing the use of roads and by promoting real time information about traffic
- 5) Organisation of car parking and pricing system applied at the urban level
- 6) Rationalisation of transport and delivery of merchandise and development of multi-modal transport
- 7) Encouragement of companies and local authorities to draw up a mobility plan and promote the plan within the companies, in particular by encour-

aging the use of public transport or car-pooling

- 8) Implementation of fare and ticket systems that incentivise inter-modal transport

With the adoption of the *SCOT* in 2000, the Solidarity and Urban Renovation Law reinforced the *PDU* as a transport planning instrument that not only considered mobility but also urban development, social cohesion and environmental protection. This legislation essentially changed PDUs from simple forward-looking documents into integrative programming documents. Most metropolitan authorities have set up a committee designed to ensure that the process of the *PDU* is on track and is constantly monitored (Vanegmond, 2012).

### **The Programme Local de l’Habitat (PLH)**

The *Programme Local de l’Habitat (PLH)* - Local Housing Program, in France, is the main instrument for housing policy at the local level. Established in 1983 and amended by the 2004, the *PLH* governs “local liberties and responsibilities”, the *PLH* targets actions to be undertaken on existing housing stock through the construction of new housing, and, on

the other hand, interventions concerning occupancy. The PLH defines, for a period of six years, the objectives and principles of a policy aimed at:

- Meeting the housing and accommodation needs through the construction of new accommodation or through the renovation of existing buildings
- Managing a balanced and diversified distribution of housing supply, among communes within the same urban area and among areas within the same commune.

The *PLH* consists of three main parts: Diagnosis; Statement of Principles and Objectives; and Program Actions. The *PLH* promotes urban renewal and social diversity while aiming to improve the accessibility of the built environment for people with disabilities by providing a balanced and diversified housing supply.

### **Plan Local d'Urbanisme - Local Plans (PLU)**

It is the responsibility of the commune under the direction of the mayor for the preparation of a local plan. Until 2000, local plans were commonly called *Plan d'Occupation des Sols (POS)*. It has since been replaced by the Plan Local d'Urbanisme (PLU) – local plans. The



Several different types of housing stock available in Montpellier in 2012.



PLU is both a regulatory and a planning document that sets the guidelines for planning and land use in an agglomeration or town from ten-to-fifteen years. The preparation of the *PLU* takes place in consultation with all relevant statutory bodies and local public participation before it can be adopted. Once a *PLU* is adopted it has legal and binding force.

The *PLU* zones are organized into sections, each of which has a detailed plan defining the type of development permitted within the area. The plan identifies development zones by examining the social, economic and political requirements of the urban area. The goal is to find a balance between urban development and the preservation of natural areas in a sustainable development perspective. This local development plan is accompanied by rules on which decisions are based on public and private planning. Both *SCOT* and the *PLU* are considered flexible in terms of the choice of which areas to urbanize and how to extend infrastructure (Volle et al., 2010). The *PLU* consists of:

- A report presenting the project with investigative planning and justification of choices
- Project planning and *Sustainable Development (PADD)* that describes the

long-term planning and arrangements for ten-to-twenty years

- Any related planning regulations and maps illustrating the various areas of the agglomeration
- Any applicable environmental assessment

The *SCOT* brings forth three key concepts linked to the *PLU*:

- The importance of quality of life, which links to the need of having nearby services, good transport, less dependence on automobiles and a multi-nodal development
- The economy, which links to real estate, the wealth of the landscape and productivity
- Environmental protection, which regards to land not only as a building reserves but as a resource in and of itself.

### **Development Policy**

In Montpellier, development pressures are generally caused by the population growth throughout the Languedoc-Roussillon Region which has led to drastic changes in the local landscape. It is a city that is viewed as quite attractive due to the pleasant climate, advantageous geographical location, and educational facilities. One of the priorities of the Agglomération is to develop the

area with the intent of accommodating and anticipating growth.

In 2006, Montpellier's *SCOT* was approved at a meeting of the Municipal Council, despite several obstacles. In 2002, the agglomeration added a further twenty-three communities to the existing fifteen, and the population grew to 413,000 residents (Volle et al., 2010). Montpellier's *SCOT* is the first, crucial vision for the Agglomération and provides some solution for creating cohesion. Montpellier's *SCOT* is a planning tool from the urban to the rural scale including the urban fringe (Buyck et al., 2010). In spite of urban pressures to grow, the logic of territorial coherence has led to a new balance between the urban and rural spaces.

The boundaries identified by *SCOT* follow the existing boundaries for Montpellier. These political boundaries also include rural areas as a way to quickly respond to the need of the community as a whole. As a result, this approach allows the region that is not used to sharing development targets will now collectively support a common approach to development (ibid). In accordance with the *SRU*, Montpellier's *SCOT* must, after a period of ten years after its approval, provide an analysis



of its results with regards to controlling the use of space, the environment and travel. The main focus of the *SCOT* is on three topics: environment, social and economic issues. The *SCOT* seeks to create a spatial coherence that supports a high quality of life while providing the tools for ensuring a balanced economic and cultural milieu. Its specific characteristics, as assessed in *Montpellier: La Ville Inventée* (2010) are:

- Rapid population growth suggests a need to guide and manage this growth, with particular attention paid to how it eats up space and its effects on the environment
- Montpellier's economy continues to have difficulties ensuring long-term employment opportunities, and as a result has one of the highest rates of unemployment in France. In a region with a very limited industrial base, and highly dependent on tertiary employment, the goal is to create more jobs but in a way that they do not become dispersed
- Maintaining the environment is considered vital to ensuring that the area remains attractive, and the surrounding landscape is part of Montpellier's own identity. The *SCOT* allows for the relationship between the city and the villages to become one of equality, and

ensure that rural areas don't become urbanized in the process of development

The *SCOT* is now the most important plan for Montpellier, and is an active tool for development and supports the desire for collaboration across the communities, thereby, reducing the competition between each of these sites. The *SCOT* therefore breaks away from the principle of a free economy and strategically intervenes to support future development in the Agglomération. This portion of the document will provide greater detail on specific land use policy and mechanisms within the urban and peri-urban context. The following section will discuss land use policy pertaining to rural Regions. For general knowledge pertaining to this section it is important to restate the three key points which inform *SCOT*: the Natural city; the Shared city; and the Thrifty city.

The Agglomération has identified a number of important goals and objectives which inform the *SCOT* as well as a number of different planning documents (Buyck et al., 2008). These points are discussed in great detail in the previous section but it is important to restate the main objectives: which

include higher density housing; improving urban transport network; managing spatial limits; preserving agricultural land; support of peri-urban farming; investment in waste management initiatives; and flood prevention.

Volle and Barnie-Boissard (2008) explain that land development policies included in the *SCOT* must tackle the negative external influences such as population growth, rising land prices, environmental degradation and excessive consumptions of space while at the same time different stakeholders provide for different oftentimes narrow-minded, objectives.

#### **ZAC – Zone d'Aménagement Concerté**

In 1967, a new development policy, the *Zone d'Aménagement Concerté (ZAC)*, was enforced through the implementation of the Loi d'orientation foncière. The *ZAC* policy led to the development of projects such as Port Marianne and the Odysseum, and is widely implemented throughout the entire agglomeration. *ZACs* are the concentrated planning development areas within which the public authority decides to intervene in order to develop social infrastructure; water, sewer, roads, schools, public transit and homes for all.

The municipality uses *ZACs*, a public-private partnership model leading them to abandon the previously used purely private strategy, in order to develop land integrated with open public spaces. The land is usually acquired much earlier through pre-emptive land banking policy commonly referred to as *ZAD - Zones d'Aménagement Différé*, and developed by private firms and then sold to public and private users.

*ZACs* are used to build a "city of proximities" which promotes urban form defined as mixed-use residential and commercial space, where housing, travel and work are closely related. Urban land development based on this planning instrument is rather interesting (Volle and Barnie-Boissard, 2008). On the one hand, there is a reduction in stimulating market based demand while on the other there is a reduction of risk through the implementation of regulation policy. In order for this policy to work several conditions must be satisfied: the availability of land reserves, the pressure of strong demand which allows investors to recoup their funds, even rules for all participants and strong partnerships between actors based on good merits which foster long term investment strategies. There are

many examples which illustrate the ZAC development process. Thus, the case-studies of Jacques Cœur, Odysseum and Malbosc are identified in greater detail for the purpose of this report.

### **Jacques Cœur**

Located on the east bank of river Lez, the Jacques Cœur development began in 2006, and spans over an area of 9.6 hectares. Jacques Cœur is located within the district of Port Marianne, a 400 hectare ambitious plan encompassing ten neighbourhoods, only possible due to hydraulic management of the Lez. Port Marianne has been started over 20 years ago with the aim to decentralize urban development in Montpellier (SERM, 2012). According to statistics provided by SERM, once finished, Jacques Cœur will consist of 1,500 housing units (20 – 30% affordable housing) with commercial spaces located on the main floors of the buildings. It is serviced by two tram lines, (Lines 1 and 2) and is located in the vicinity of A9 highway, on the axis of Avenue Marie de Montpellier and the Avenue de la Mer.

The development could be understood to encapsulate a vision of modernity mixed with the interpretation of a Mediterranean spirit. The Archimedes



The neighbourhood of Jacques Cœur



group of architects built this project around a water basin (currently used as a water park) which in the future may be utilized as an urban tourist port. Surrounding the basin are mid-rise buildings encased in wood, metal and white pallet associated with a Mediterranean city. These buildings provide space for numerous shops, services and restaurants for local population to take advantage of, creating a mixed-use urban environment (ibid).

### **The Odysseum**

Designed by a Canadian architecture firm, Design International, work on this project began in 2006 and represents the culmination of ideas on the city's past and future: Montpellier's Greek-influenced design reflective of democracy as well as modern technology and the conquest of space through themes like the Milky Way and constellations (ibid).

Located between the sea and the city centre, the Odysseum is also known as "the Gate to the Mediterranean" a space dedicated to leisure and pleasure shopping, an activity often associated with suburban areas. The shopping centre is easily accessible by public transportation (tram Line 1), cycling and private automobile with the provision



The Odysseum shopping centre.



of a large amount of parking spaces. The shopping district is located in the vicinity of the future TGV station and will see the addition of residential development once the new station is constructed. It aims to provide a connection and lead the development away from the city centre, stretching it towards the sea.

In juxtaposition to its themes of Greek mythology, which reflect the concept of democracy, the Odysseum is an epicentre of suburban consumerism modeled on Californian capitalist shopping culture. Volle and Barnie-Boissard (2008) discuss the conflict that characterized the Odysseum development. The private business consortium FADUC et SOCRI, with interests in the Polygone, were highly critical and protested against this urban decentralization. They were unsuccessful.

### **Malbosc**

In 2003, Francois Kern's proposed design was realized. The thirty-eight hectare neighborhood park consists of 2,100 residential units including 1,100 collective, 600 individual and 400 townhome-style units. Height of buildings is generally two-story houses and five-story apartment buildings. Kern's inspiration for the design of Malbosc community



The Malbosc neighbourhood.





originated from the local rural landscape of gently sloped vineyards (ibid).

The Malbosc development is nestled between Euromedicine and historical Chateaux d'O and overlooks the neighbourhood of Mosson. This mixed-use community is serviced by tram Line 1, and plays host to approximately twenty local businesses and public institutions including a pharmacy, bakery, hair salon, community centre as well as a range of educational institutions. The development exuberates modernity which although - eye appealing - does not reflect the nearby older neighbourhoods and medieval character of Montpellier.

### Urban Form and Density

ZACs must conform to the three key concepts informing *SCOT*; i) natural city ii) thrifty city iii) shared city. Meanwhile, the *PLU (local official plan)* and the *PLH (local housing plan)* of the Municipality of Montpellier identify four types of density forms, including: more than fifty houses per hectare; between thirty and fifty houses per hectare; less than thirty houses per hectare; and approximately fifty houses per hectare (in clusters). The Agglomération uses the Urban Design Charter, which is specifically aimed



High- and low-density development in Saint-Martin (above) and outside of Mosson (below) and la Paillade (next page).





50 - A Metropole Growing Among the Vineyards

at developing urban fringes, while preserving important natural and agricultural areas. The *Urban Design Charter* allows for effective land management and development specifically in relation to suburban context.

The *Charter* provides for the use of *PLH* and *PDU* (housing and mobility) policies in order to intensify housing along the most important transit corridors in order to create linkages between the city and its periphery. It also uses similar schemes in order to regenerate areas surrounding transportation hubs. Through the use of this *Charter*, a municipality is able to make best use of land resources by providing concentration of development in urbanized or growth designated areas, while at the same time protecting agricultural plots located at the fringes.

### **Pre-emption: ZAD and the DPU**

It is important to recognize that there is a fair amount of pressure exerted by developers on local agriculture. Investors pressure land owners such as farmers close to the built up areas to obtain formal “selling intention”. Land developers also put pressure on local elected officials to increase areas for future urbanization in the local planning

document (*PLU*). The speculative pressure imposed in advance of foresight developments, causes severe price distortions on farmland lots in urban fringes. In combating these market-based real estate practices, local planning authorities use a number of land banking mechanisms in order to prevent land speculation activity from taking place.

Originally implemented in 1963 in *Le Code de l'urbanisme et de l'habitation*, later revised in 1985 and most recently in 2009, the laws of pre-emption are one of the most noteworthy and successful planning mechanisms used in France. In order to acquire property belonging to a private person or part of the private domain of a public authority, the public authority has to adhere to specific requirements provided by law. According to publication by the Departement Moselle conseil général (2012), several different subsections describe the specifics regarding pre-emptive law. However, the last two can be considered as the most widely used. It is one of the most effective planning tools used to combat land speculations and controls artificially constructed market demand.

1. The right of pre-emption in sensitive natural areas may be exercised by de-

partments.

2. The right of pre-emption on agricultural lands used by la Société d'Aménagement foncier de l'Espace Rural SAFER - the Rural Area Land Development Corporation.

3. The right of First Refusal Urban (*DPU*) – unlimited time length

4. The right of pre-emption exercised within the framework of a *Deferred Development Zone (ZAD)* fourteen-year time limit.

Article R 211-1 of the *Code de l'urbanisme et de l'habitation*, allows for the possibility for municipalities to exercise the right of first refusal on a specific area defined by the commune map (ibid). The right of pre-emption may be delegated to the State, a public local chamber of commerce, or SEM -Mediterranean maintenance services. The pre-emptive right shall be exercised in order to achieve general goals of operations or actions to meet the following objectives as outlined by law L 210-1 and L 300-1 of the Town Planning Code to:

- Allow the implementation of an urban project or a local housing policy
- Promote a variety of economic activities.
- Stimulate the development of recre-

ation and tourism.

- Develop community facilities.
- Prevent health hazards.
- Allow for urban renewal to take place; enhance the built heritage, undeveloped and natural areas.

The disposition of lands through pre-emption can be voluntary or set through a judicial process. Buildings or land intended to be assigned to the construction of social housing as well as residential and commercial buildings constructed within the last ten years are excluded from the right of pre-emption (ibid).

### **Urban Renewal - ZUS**

On December 31st , 1958, through the decree No. 58-1464 of the *Relatif Aux Zones a Urbaniser Par Priorité*, the *Zone à Urbaniser en Priorité (Urban Priority Development Zone)*, a predecessor to the modern urban renewal mechanisms came into existence. During the 1960s the rapid Algerian repatriate migration to Montpellier, along with the growing demands of the baby boomers created a demographic explosion, placed a high demand on affordable housing stock. Planners throughout France used the ZUP policy in order to promote rapid development of high density urban

form which helped to supply considerable amounts of affordable housing. However, the ZUP high-density areas were often located far away from the city centre with poor public transportation and lack of social services. One of the most prolific examples of ZUP policy, which ceased to exist by the 1970s, is the la Paillade district in Montpellier, built in the 1960s (Buyck et al., 2010, p. 15). The high density development was designed to be set on 240 hectares of derelict land provided housing option for approximately 27,000 residents (Rosso, 1999; Observatoire National des Zones Urbaines Sensibles, 2012).

In 1996, the *Relative à la Mise en œuvre du Pacte de Relance Pour la Ville*, No. 96-987, implemented the statute regarding the *Zones Urbaines Sensibles (Sensitive Urban Zones)*. The principal aim of this policy was to achieve habitat diversity and social mix, it was also intended as a mechanism to fight against stigmatization, ghettoization and segregation and promote job creation and economic reinvestment in neighborhoods of degraded habitat. According to *D'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine* (2003), the unemployment rate rose more sharply in sensitive ur-

ban areas compared to other urban areas throughout France, to 25.4%, with many ZUS identified areas experiencing unemployment rates as high as 40%.

What is also identified as important is the high level of unemployment amongst youth. In 1999 the rate of youth unemployment across ZUS-identified neighbourhoods was 40%, 15% above the national average (*D'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine*, 2003). The high level of youth unemployment in these specific areas can be attributed to the low level of education, in 1999 it was identified that over 30% of youth over the age of fifteen had no degree, 1.8 times higher than the national average (ibid.).

Prior to the development of the SCOT, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jospin, the French State amended the 1996 ZUS policy, implementing new legislation, *Loi No. 2003-710, d'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine*, an act which provides new legislative guidance on urban renewal and city planning. The law is popularly referred to as the Borloo Law and builds on the severities established within the ZUS by-law. The Borloo Law has several priorities; The first is the urban renewal priority

'breaking up the ghettos', second is the creation of jobs through tax concessions and lastly the establishment of National Agency for Urban Renovation (ANRU) whose mandate is to simplify development and renewal procedures (*D'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine*, 2003). The mandate of the National urban renewal program is to restructure, with the objective of social diversity and sustainable development, urban neighborhoods that are classified as sensitive (*ibid.*).

Articles Six and Seven of *D'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine* (2003) state that the program investment is set at €12 billion spans over nine years, during the period from 2004 to 2013. Its aim is to deliver 250,000 new social housing units and rehabilitate another 400,000 units. The program also has a provision for demolition of 250,000 units which are deemed inadequate and obsolete (*ibid.*) Article Ten of *D'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine* (2003) addresses ANRUs particular investment in old and degraded neighborhoods providing financial assistance to local governments as well as

public institutions in order to encourage cooperation between competent and public or private organizations which may contribute to the achievement of the program (Legifrance, 2012).

According to Dikec (2007), the Borloo Law recentralizes urban policy and exhibits traits of 'static geography' and return to Pacte de reliance: a form of geography in which objectives and actions are rigidly defined by law, and little room is given to social democratic participation and negotiation. The focus is predominantly on physical transformation as opposed to socially conscious process which would foster the engagement of local collectives in a democratic and participatory manner.

#### **ZFU – Zones Franches Urbaines**

In addition to the Borloo Law, the State administration has also created a policy with the goal of stimulating economic development and revitalization through tax incentives. The *ZFUs* are directed at neighbourhoods within cities that meet the following criteria (Green et al. 2001);

- A population of around half a million;
- an unemployment level double the national average;
- A population of under 25-year-olds of

46 per cent;

- Almost one person in two (44 per cent) over the age of fifteen with no formal qualifications.

According to Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Territoriale de Montpellier, the southern district of La Paillade In Montpellier was recognized as a ZFU (Urban Zone) by decree *No. 96-1154, Relative à la Mise en Oeuvre du Pacte de Relance Pour la Ville* (1996) which outlines specific tax base exemptions:

- Companies created between 1 January 2006 and 31 December 2014 in *ZFU*
- Companies already established on the 1st of January, 2006 in one of the *ZFU* created in August 2006

The Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Territoriale de Montpellier also outlines the specifics regarding the benefits for businesses located in *ZFU* identified zones (SERM, 2012):

Exemption from income tax in the area for five years, within the limit of €61,000 per company per year is permitted. This is to be followed by a decreasing exemption for three years and potentially up to an additional nine years, depending on the size of the business.

- Five-year exemption from making Ter-

ritorial Economic Contributions for five years for institutions located in *ZFU* and exemption decreasing rate for three or nine more years depending on the size of the company.

- An exemption outlined in Article 1466 of the Quarter CGI is applicable for companies with fewer than fifty employees to a maximum of €343,234 net basis in 2007. This exemption is only applicable under specific conditions of business activity.
- An exemption from tax on local real estate for five years if the property is located with the *ZFU* designation and it is used for professional purpose. Secondly the business must be operated by a company with fewer than fifty employees who work in the local trade and services industry or their activity if more than 85% of their sales are in France (art. 1383 B du CGI). After five years of full exemption, companies can benefit from a degressive exemption for three to nine years depending on the size of the company.
- Specific exemptions related to businesses localized within the *ZFU* are not cumulative with other previously established exemptions. Businesses that could qualify for another type of exemptions must formally opt out of the

previous exemptions.

These planning solutions have little concern for local needs and input from neighbourhood residents. Dikec (2007) contends that the increasingly authoritarian restructuring of the French state has been observed by many researchers, who pointed to a shift from social to penal forms of state intervention confirming that the recent urban policy measures have little to do with localized planning and instead are rooted in authoritative technocratic top down approach.

### **Suburbanization**

Although low-density suburbanization is widely recognized by planners and environmentalists alike as an unsustainable urban form, it remains a popular mode of urban development in Montpellier. In order to accommodate the growing urban population, like many cities in Europe and North America, Montpellier too experiences a similar urban expansion pattern in the suburbs of the city. However, suburbanization in Montpellier is distinct from most North American cities in that physical infrastructure such as public transportation are often built prior to housing developments, which act as preconditions for



urban growth.

Montpellier's urban landscape is a contrasting dichotomy of two different urban forms: while public transportation is the primary mode of transit in the urban core, in the urban fringe - particularly two of outermost communes, Juvignac and Jacou - planning is extremely auto-dependant. This raises an important question as to how suburbanization has changed the peri-urban area, and how the local government's pro-growth agenda contributes to this dominant urban landscape.

Development allowed for more urban-rural integration, and detached family houses in the peri-urban area even attracted wealthy people from the north of France and other northern European nations because of its Mediterranean climate (Rauws and Roo, 2011, p. 276). New cottages were built as a result of individual initiatives of municipalities handing out lots without coordination, which results in a scattered pattern of new-detached houses in peri-urban Montpellier (Rauws and Roo, 2011, p. 276). Over time however, the scattered cottage merged into a coherent structure of urban expansion.

Three specific factors have given rise to the dominance of suburbaniza-

tion in the Hérault urban landscape. One is the general attractiveness of Montpellier and its surrounding area due to the climate and natural environment, which caused an influx of population. Another is the change in housing preference, from the traditional French mid-rise housing units to larger suburban houses, which led to the housing development in the urban fringe. A third is the process of land discrimination which has led to a change in land pricing, causing fluctuations for urban settlement in the urban fringe (Buyck et al., 2008). While these three factors have all contributed to the urban development in the peri-urban area outside of Montpellier, suburbanization within the Montpellier Agglomération occurs primarily as a result of a government-led pro-growth agenda, which can be most easily observed from the perspective of infrastructure development, particularly in the development of public transportation.

### **Juvignac**

Located at the northwest quadrant of the Agglomération, Juvignac is one of the thirty-one communes in the Montpellier Agglomération. It serviced by Line 3 of the tram network. Like the

other suburban communes in Montpellier, Juvignac is subjected to intense development pressure. Within close proximity to the Juvignac tram station, there are numerous development sites (pictured, right), of which - except for one senior homes development - all are private residential units, densely located near the tramway, demonstrating a ribbon development pattern. These units are also all mid-rise and offer a spacious, cosmopolitan and luxurious architectural style, emphasizing the notion that their targeted residents are of the higher-income group. In addition, more development sites can also be seen beyond the tram station in Juvignac. The series of housing development here showcases the intensity of the development demand in the area, which is not visible in the urban core. This difference in development pressure is partly due to the Grand Cœur's focus on urban renewal, its urbanized landscape and the increasing demand for larger housing units, which is more readily available in greenfield sites in the outskirts of the Agglomération.

One of the most striking observations of Juvignac concerns the existence of infrastructure that seems to confidently assume the continued

demand for this growth. While it is generally acknowledged that one of the key issues of suburbia is that low-density neighbourhoods often lack access to different amenities like public transit, this is not the case in Juvignac. While the housing construction is still underway, tram access to Juvignac has already been built. It is also a curious observation that unlike the conventional terminus of transit lines where one might expect to find commercial or retail space. In Juvignac an abrupt end of the tram tracks marks the terminus of the tramline. This suggests an agenda for continual growth and further tramway expansion. In fact, Mosson is a major transit hub and had been the previous terminus for Line 3 of the tramway and had a similar terminus, in terms of development around the station.

However, even though the commune of Juvignac is serviced by public transit, it is not yet well-supported. There is only one tramway stop for the entire commune and the tramway stops leading up to the terminus are distant from each other. As such, the primary mode of transportation remains the private automobile, as the majority of the area lacks access to public transit. Therefore, despite a short distance

away from the city centre, access to public transit therefore remains an important issue for Juvignac. In addition, one can also see that there is a significant amount of empty lots awaiting devel-

opment along the tramway towards Juvignac. In a way, suburbanization in Juvignac displays some interesting similarities to the North American suburbia.



The tramway system in Montpellier at Juvignac (above) and Jacou (opposite page).





### **Jacou**

Jacou is one of the thirty-one communes in the Montpellier Agglomération. It is located in the northeast quadrant of the Agglomération and is served by Line 2 of the tramway. Of all the suburban communes in the Agglomération, Jacou resembles conventional suburbia the most, from the perspectives of automobile dependency, size of lots, existence of cul-de-sacs and big-box stores.

Like Juvignac, Jacou relies heavily on the use of private automobiles, perhaps even more so than Juvignac. In the urban landscape of Jacou, automobiles are the primary transit option. As can be seen on the road towards Jacou, the tramway is not recognized as the primary mode of transportation - this is evident by the use of single tram tracks instead of two-way tram tracks for the tramway, where the roadway for cars occupies the majority of public way space. This also signifies less frequent trams in this area. It is also interesting to note that the distance between tram stops on Line 2 here increases as we move westward towards Jacou, particularly from Clairval towards Jacou. The time spent riding the tram between stations is significantly longer than those in the city centre, which can be interpreted as this decentralization of population in

the suburban neighbourhoods has a lower demand for public transit.

The average wait time for each tram is also significantly longer. Finally, ample parking is also available adjacent to the tram station. This can be recognized as the lack of public transit access throughout the commune, or the strong dependency on automobile. Moreover, large parking lots along the tramway are often observed in Jacou, which further affirms the suggestion of automobile dependency. Like many other suburban communities, big-box stores are also commonly seen in Jacou. Along the tramway towards Jacou, there are large retail spaces and car dealerships, which are often staples for suburban communities. Jacou also appear to have larger lots in general.

From the urban landscape of Jacou and Juvignac, the government's pro-growth agenda has materialized itself in the development of public transit in the form of tramways towards the two different communes. However, despite the pre-built infrastructure, the suburban communities in Montpellier still exhibit many of the negative consequences of urban sprawl, particularly automobile dependency, unequal access to public transit and a decentralized urban development pattern.

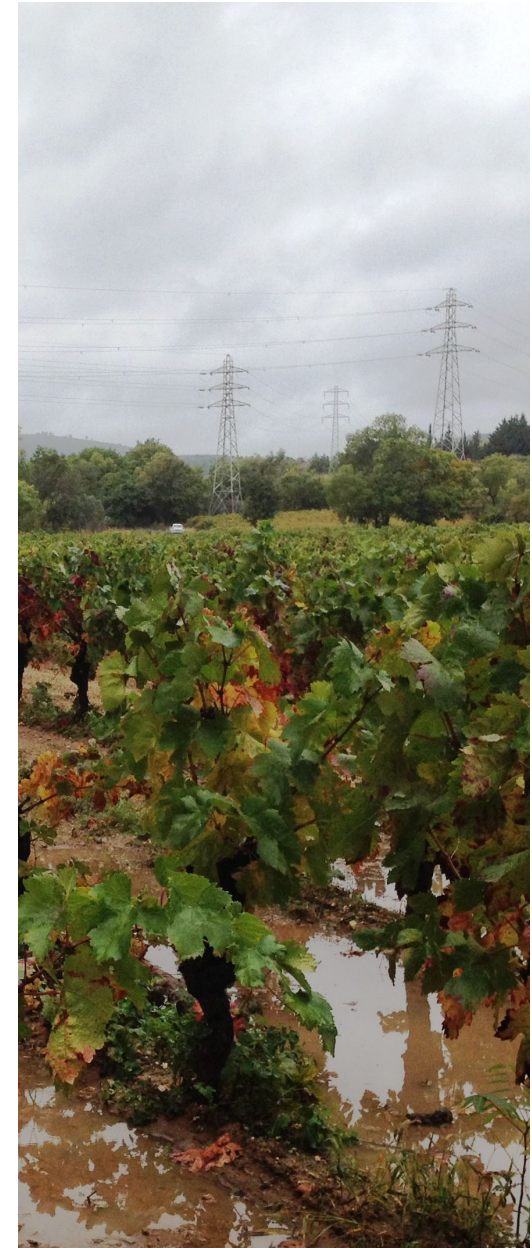


Solar panels above commuter parking near Jucou (above), and big-box stores on the suburban periphery (below).





Water and the landscape of Hérault outside of Montpellier at Octon (a lake above and in a vineyard after a storm at right) and Palavas-les-Flot on the Mediterranean (below).



## Environmental Planning

Montpellier presents itself as a leader in environmental considerations affecting urban areas. Sustainability, green technology, ecology and biodiversity are prominent themes in planning documents, city websites and in conversation with local officials. How this translates into the Montpellier's environmental planning approach can be elucidated by looking at three issues being targeted in Montpellier today. The first is the determination of boundaries of urban development through a process called sight inversion, as highlighted in the *SCOT*. The second is the City's response to issues related to flooding and water management. Finally, the *ÉcoCité* project and examples of its key neighbourhoods will be discussed in order to illustrate the local emphasis on sustainability.

### Sight Inversion

Among other planning guidelines, Montpellier's *SCOT* lays out the limits for urban expansion of the Agglomération. Determining urban development limits does not immediately seem to fall under environmental planning, but the unique perspective which the respective task force brought to this exercise



Suburban development on environmentally-sensitive land near Pérols (above) and Octon (opposite).

deserves consideration for its environmental focus.

In the twenty years leading up to the creation of the *SCOT*, over 3000 ha of agricultural land were urbanized, along with additional development and degradation of ecological areas (Communauté, 2006, p. 71). This was a result of urban sprawl spanning from the 1960s to the beginning of the millennium: in 1960, the density of Montpellier was 145 people per hectare, dropping to 40 people per hectare by 2000

(Blasco, 2012b, slide 14). Recognizing that this was not in line with their goals of sustainable development, the Agglomeration sought to change its perspective on the remaining undeveloped greenspace, creating greater harmony between nature and the built environment (Communauté, 2006).

The method they derived was termed *inversion du regard* (Volle et al., 2010, p. 132), or sight inversion. The wooded areas, agricultural lands, and biodiversity-rich greenspace sur-



rounding the city was studied for their site qualities, of which landscape features were a principal focus (Buyck et al, 2008). Then over 30,000 ha – or over ninety percent of all natural and agricultural land within the SCOT area – were deemed protected and unavailable for further development (Communauté, 2006, p. 83). This in effect created the new limits for urban development. This is thought to be a “very unusual” way of delimiting growth boundaries because “usually it is the city design that makes

the rural design”, when peripheral green space is considered empty space open for development. This approach contributes to sprawl and a lack of attention to landscape features (Buyck et al., 2008, p.47).

Sight inversion reverses this perspective by starting first with the value of the greenspace, seeking both to protect it and integrate it into city development. Undeveloped zones are no longer seen as empty but as assets to Montpellier’s urban future. Sight inver-

sion was therefore a conscious attempt to valorize and prioritize ecologically-significant areas. This more ecocentric approach to delimiting urban growth, with a view to working with nature and allowing the landscape to dictate settlement patterns, therefore falls into the realm of landscape ecology and environmental planning while also contributing to the Montpellier’s larger planning goals.

### **Water and Flood Management**

Bordered by wetlands and the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the rivers Lez, La Lironde, and Le Nègues-Cats in the east, and the smaller river of Mosson in the west, Montpellier is built in an area prone to sudden and violent flooding. This is especially true when the Mediterranean climate is taken into account, where high levels of precipitation in a short amount of time are common (Communauté, 2006). However, in the recent decades of rapid urban growth, development in floodplains and in areas - disrupting the hydraulic cycle – has become common (Alexandre, personal communication, October 2012). This is likely due in part to the nature of the city layout and its growth ambitions: with much of the city surrounded by

wetlands and floodplains, urban expansion seems to leave little choice but to develop at least some of those areas. To compound matters, little thought appears to have been given in past decades to managing the impact of such fragile developments.

New development is in fact worsening the situation. The high rate of urbanization in the region, coupled with inadequate hydrologic planning, has led to an increase in impermeable surface area, artificial channelization of waterways and a lack of water retention basins, thereby raising the chances of obstructing water flow and triggering flooding (Communauté, 2006). The decision to build in floodplains in decades past had not been adequately considered, and Montpellier lacks an agency to oversee regulations specific to development in areas of flooding (Alexandre, personal communication, October 2012).

In Toronto, it took an event of the magnitude of Hurricane Hazel in 1954 for authorities to begin taking the regulation of development in floodplains more seriously. This led to the formation of the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, which still regulates development in floodplains today. An increase

in injury and even death occurring due to flooding in the Languedoc-Roussillon Region is now having a similar effect on Montpellier, with official measures being developed to mitigate issues related to floodplain development and water management (Alexandre, personal communication, October 2012). The fear of worsening hydrologic conditions due to climate change has further compelled action (Blasco, 2012a, slide 12).

The new planning direction in Montpellier, embodied in the *SCOT*, places greater emphasis on thoughtful flood and water management. In areas that were developed with little regard to their hydrologic environments – such as *la Route de la Mer* – a re-adjustment strategy is being implemented to bring the developments in line with hydrologic considerations and risks (Blasco, 2012a, slide 12). Research is being undertaken to model flood risks to inform these strategies.

As a result, emphasis is being placed on preserving and even increasing permeable surfaces, limiting the creation of impermeable surfaces, creating upstream dams and retention basins, and recycling rain water at the source (Communauté, 2006). The Agglomération is spending €40 million

on flood protection related to the Lez and Lironde alone. The whole hydrologic system is being reconfigured, with three new high-tech automated retention basins to be created, in addition to the one already in place within the airport park (Montpellier Agglomération, 2011).

Equally important to Montpellier's new water and flood management strategy is their flood warning system. Surveillance systems will be installed in the retention basins to monitor for flooding, pollution, etc. Flooding will first try to be minimized through weather surveillance and proper management of retention basins, but simulations of flooding will also be undertaken so that authorities are properly prepared. In the event of a flood, warnings about the imminent risks will be sent to citizens via SMS, a technology thought to reflect the modern ambitions of the city in dealing with hydrologic concerns (Blasco, 2012a, slide 13).

Montpellier is making an effort to repair the damage caused by previous failure to acknowledge the hydrologic characteristics of the region during an era of aggressive growth. Developments from past decades are being re-sensitized to the environmental re-



Greenfield construction in Port Marianne.

quirements of the hydrologic systems, while new developments are being more carefully considered. However, it is evident that the majority of the emphasis is on technological fixes: artificial manipulation of waterways, creation of dams and retention basins, and a modern monitoring and alert system. Little is being discussed about the regulation of building in floodplains. While it may be an improvement that the city is being (re)designed with greater consideration of these environmental risks, a largely technological fix may lack important insights critical to ensuring better

long-term harmony with the natural environment.

### ÉcoCité

Sight inversion and water and flood management are particular strategies which highlight Montpellier's increasing focus on environmental concerns. Yet these are only two facets of the larger sustainability discussion that permeates the Agglomération's approach to development. Throughout planning documents, City branding material and presentations by City officials, Montpellier's vocalization of this approach is

clear.

Since the application of *Agenda 21* – an action plan signed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 – Montpellier has had a focus on sustainable development, and in 2011 adopted their own local *Agenda 21* (*Agenda 21*, 2012). They have gone on to win many awards and accolades related to their sustainability and ecological achievements, including the titles of the “French Capital of Biodiversity 2011” and the “European Capital of Biodiversity”. The goal is to maximize their natural heritage and become a national and international leader in urban ecology (Biodiversity, 2012).

How do these ambitions translate on the ground? An emblematic representation of this sustainability philosophy is presented in the project called *ÉcoCité*. Situated to the south-east of the city-centre and encompassing important areas such as the Saint-Roch railway station, Odysseum and the main thoroughfare stretching Montpellier to the sea, the project occupies an area of 2500 ha under development, with completion expected in 2020-2030. A response to a national call for “Sustainable City” projects from the Ministry

of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport and Housing, ÉcoCité aims to reinvent the city-centre. Based on mixed-use principles, this project area is designed to represent the sustainable city of the future (Ville de Montpellier, 2011; ÉcoCité, 2012).

Although development has taken place in this area for the last forty years, it was for the most part undertaken with little consideration of the environment. The area is now being re-worked to become a model of sustainable urban development. In fact, this is an area where much of the development connected to the landscape's natural hydrologic workings are being re-formulated to reduce flooding. Additionally, the area is surrounded by and interspersed with vineyards and other agricultural land which the Agglomération is committed to protecting, consistent with the sight inversion strategy.

Active transportation is being encouraged and Line 3 of the tram network cuts through the heart of the area, leading development south to the Mediterranean Sea. Energy-reducing urban forms are sought, as well as an emphasis on energy exchange and locally-sourced renewable energy. Business and commerce are being re-thought as

well, with more compact and accessible shopping areas that are at once energy efficient and responsive to their natural environments. This new megaproject is ambitiously aiming to meet sustainability goals in several sectors, and multiple neighbourhoods are contributing to these goals (Montpellier Agglomération, 2011; Blasco, 2012a, slide 5).

The ZAC of Port Marianne is the first neighbourhood of the ÉcoCité, initiated in the mid-1990s. It extends along the River Lez and is notable for being wholly conceived with sustainable development principles in mind. It utilizes the natural elements of the area to this end: temperatures – both inside buildings and in the neighbourhood – are regulated by architectural designs which maximize the humidity from the Lez, dominant winds and the sun. This in turn lowers the requirements for energy resources. When heating and hot water are needed, these are provided through a wood-burning system. There are additionally several hectares of greenspace, including a wooded area and large pond (Développement Durable, 2012).

Within the ZAC Port Marianne is Parc Marianne, a thirty hectare neighbourhood which won an eco-district

award in 2011 for its global ecological approach. Despite containing 2000 mixed housing units offering space for 4600 residents, along with 50,000 square metres of office space providing 800 jobs, it is set within a “natural environment”, including a seven hectares of wooded park that helps offset flooding risks (Biodiversté; Ville de Montpellier, 2011).

Taking the idea of combining city and nature one step further is the district of Jardins de la Lironde, also within the ZAC of Port Marianne. The area's architect Christian de Portzamparc describes it as a contemporary form of garden-city covering forty hectares. Making the most of the small river basin of La Lironde and the wooded area, buildings have been placed within the natural landscape. To increase this feeling of being within nature, the 1900 housing units are dispersed among eleven “islands” with only approximately 150 units per section (ZAC – Lironde).

Throughout these neighbourhoods, the ÉcoCité project is guided by multiple tenets of sustainable development, such as the preservation of biodiversity, hydrological management, an emphasis on active and public transportation, “evolved models of commercial



consumption”, and the integration of nature within neighbourhoods (ÉcoCité, 2012). However, the Agglomération seems to have mixed reasons for its sustainability commitments. They heavily advertise their many awards and environmental visions as a marketing and branding technique, and politicians have been said to use environmental summits and conferences primarily as promotional opportunities.

Catchphrases such as “leader in biodiversity”, which hold unclear literal meaning, seem to be used freely. Individuals familiar with city politics but working outside local government offices claim that Montpellier’s discourse on sustainability is little more than strategic greenwashing, as other areas outside of eco-districts such as ÉcoCité fall victim to less sustainable decisions, such as the expansion of the A9 highway. Additionally, while green innovations have their value, Montpellier’s approach relies heavily on technological solutions to their environmental problems.

There is risk in creating a dependency on technology to solve environmental issues, leading to a lack of emphasis on other solutions, such as changing citizen habits. Again in Port

Marianne, there is a reflection of these contentions: a neighbourhood built based on sustainable development goals is nonetheless built on top of a wetland – a highly important ecological landscape, particularly in terms of hydrological management – and in support of an aggressive urban growth vision.

Montpellier continues to be an innovative city when it comes to environmental planning techniques, combining ecological considerations into the Agglomération’s ambitious growth plans. While they are making real advances in terms of creating ecologically and environmentally sensitive development, it is based largely in technological solutions and with a view to the resulting branding benefits. This is not necessarily a fault - any change in this direction that is mutually beneficial may be a win-win situation. It is nevertheless important to note the foundations of their environmental planning approach and its targeted impacts to better understand what is produced on the ground in this growing metropole.



## **Development Strategies in Montpellier**



### **Pro-active and Re-active Infrastructure Development**

The infrastructure of Montpellier reveals a great deal about the ambitions, goals and priorities of the City and the Montpellier Agglomération toward their objectives of growth, ÉcoCité and other priorities outlined in the *SCOT*, all of which are related to the ambition of becoming a Metropole. Infrastructure will be examined by looking at the contrast between ‘proactive’ versus ‘reactive’ infrastructure development in Montpellier, and examining how infrastructure development is used as a tool of the government for achieving its various objectives. To understand the approach to infrastructure development here, a brief understanding of their governance system and planning culture is required.

Infrastructure development in Montpellier is planned both proactively and reactively, as a tool for pursuing their pro-growth agenda and towards resolving social, cultural and economic issues. Infrastructure can be divided into ‘hard’, physical infrastructure - such as bridges and tram lines - and ‘soft’ service infrastructure - including a range of social services and cultural venues. The study of both types of infrastructure de-

velopment, the proactive and a reactive ways for the municipality to achieve its objectives, provides us with a better understanding of the governance priorities in Montpellier.

The idea of pro-active infrastructure development is used to explain how new infrastructure is planned and put in place in advance of proposed developments or expected infrastructural demands. Reactive infrastructure development describes the creation of new services or facilities as a method of fixing an existing problem or improving existing conditions in the city.

As part of the process in which new communities like Port Marianne are planned and developed in the city of Montpellier, the planning tool known as a *ZAD - Zones d'Aménagement Différé* and *Zone d'Aménagement Concerté (ZAC)* is used. Again, a ZAD is a planning policy that enables the city to pre-emptively buy land, setting these properties aside in a land bank for future plans and development.

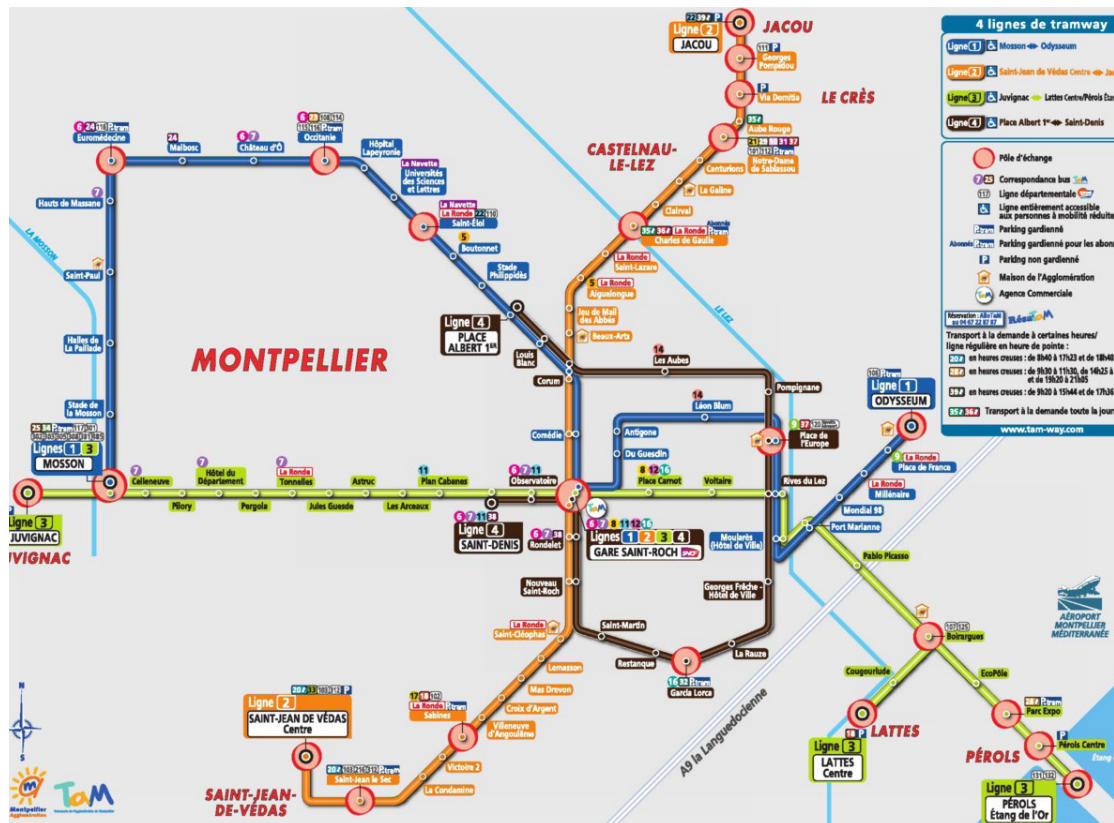
This enables the city to limit land speculation and keep housing affordable, while also allowing the municipality to conduct comprehensive planning by proactively guiding development to neighbourhoods where in-

frastructure is already in place. This is accomplished by attaching a ZAC status to a neighbourhood, which means that it becomes a concentrated development area. First, 'hard' infrastructure such as roads, tramway and utilities are constructed, then, the 'soft' infrastructure of social services and schools are built.

This proactive planning of infrastructure and neighbourhood is conducted in partnership with SERM, the development agency of the Agglomération. The Municipality plays the role of the visionary and master planner, deciding on where development should occur and how, while SERM functions as the developer and project coordinator, designing and planning the new community and implementing the plan through a competitive bidding process.

Re-active building or implementation of infrastructure takes place when the government has identified concerns or problems that need to be fixed or addressed. Thus this type of infrastructure development functions as a tool of the various levels of government, primarily used to address social and economic problems in the under-served areas of the Agglomération. Prime examples of reactive infrastructure development in-





Montpellier's tramway network (above, source: montpellier-agglo.com/tam) and its role in the process of peri-urban development (below).



clude the construction of the tramway to connect the isolated social-housing-dominated neighbourhood of Mosson and la Paillade and the selective placement of government-funded infrastructure such as the football stadium and the rugby stadium in established neighbourhoods.

One of the objectives of the first tramway line in Montpellier was to connect Mosson to the core of Montpellier, replacing a busy and slow bus line as the main east-to-west transit line in the city (Mills, 2001, p. 342). The placement of Mosson as the terminus of the transit line is a reactive use of infrastructure, connecting this spatially- and socially-isolated low income community with rapid access to services and opportunities available in the urban core.

Other re-active infrastructure development in Montpellier includes the usage of infrastructure to foster integration and provide economic stimulus to a neighbourhood. A good example of this is the construction of the previously mentioned Pierresvives building in Mosson. This building, and the social infrastructure associated with it, serves as a part of the ZUS plan for managing and improving the social and economic conditions in immigrant-dominated Mosson.

This infrastructure is used as an attempt to remedy the problems faced by residents of Mosson. Housing a new community library, as well as the archives and the office of the sports department of Hérault, the development is interpreted as an attempt to integrate the neighbourhood of Mosson by bringing jobs into the neighbourhood and providing a variety of cultural and social services.

### **The Use of Infrastructure as a Tool to Guide Urban Development**

Different levels of government actively use infrastructure to meet their goals and objectives. This section will illustrate some of the ways in which infrastructure is being used as a tool to guide development, foster integration and build the Montpellier brand.

The construction of the light rail network is a good example of infrastructure being used as a tool for guiding urban development. This is evident along the tramways' dedicated right-of-ways, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Juvignac and Port Marianne where the tramway arrived prior to the construction of the neighbourhood's residential and commercial buildings. In Montpellier, the local government

uses infrastructure as a tool to guide and concentrate development, building the essential infrastructure prior to the construction of new neighbourhoods.

As discussed above, physical infrastructure such as tramways, roads, recreational trails and parks are built proactively, to foster and promote development in new areas of the city such as Port Marianne and Juvignac. The development of tramway Line 1 from Mosson to Odysseum is a good example of how infrastructure aids development. Line 1 was used as part of the long-term vision to reshape the urban form of Montpellier, from the traditional concentric form to a linear east-west axis (Mills, 2001, p. 341). This led to the (ongoing) revitalization of certain neighbourhoods such as Mosson while stimulating new developments such as the science and technology park at Euromédecine and the new neighbourhood of Malbosc.

### **The Tramway Network and Montpellier's Identity**

As a prominent presence in the landscape of the city, the modern and brightly coloured Citadis Alstom trams are a distinct symbol that have not only become part of the Montpellier brand

but have also been recognized internationally (Dy, 2012, p. 1). The explicit marketing efforts of the city as a brand are part of the solidarity efforts to create a common regional identity. This branding of Montpellier is part of the planning culture as discussed in the later chapter on culture and part of an ongoing effort to support the metropole aspirations.

The President of the Agglomération recently described the proposed Line 5 as "*un geste fort de solidarité*" (Moure, 2011, p. 1), that is, Line 5 continues the policies of solidarity, and these policies of solidarity provide an image of the long-term vision of the metropole and the projects that support this vision (Parker, 1993, p. 390). In this vein, the trams represent the political regime that created them as much as the new urban cohesion they produced.

While the topic of branding will be covered in more details in a later section of this report, this segment will focus specifically on how infrastructure is being used as a tool for branding in Montpellier by the various level of government.

The City of Montpellier, the Agglomération, the Department of Hérault

as well as the region of Languedoc-Roussillon all use infrastructure as part of their branding exercise. Branding happens not only on building signage, but also throughout the transit systems, and even on the name of the local sport teams. Some of the best examples of infrastructure used to promoting Montpellier and foster to Montpellier brand, again include the regular usage of star architects such as Ricardo Bofill and the tramway vehicles and stations designed by famous designers such as Christian Lacroix to create a competitive image for Montpellier. While infrastructural developments have effectively advanced Montpellier's pro-growth agenda, there have been some limitations to the approach of using infrastructure as a proactive tool.

The limitations are often political in nature. This is illustrated by the lack of tramway access to both the airport and to the Mediterranean, due to both of places being communes that have seceded from the Montpellier Agglomération, which funds and plans the tramway network.

Montpellier's aspirations of becoming a metropole require accommodating large numbers of anticipated new residents and directing develop-



The interior of Montpellier's Citadis Alstom's trams.

ment to facilitate such growth (Mills, 2001, p. 338). This chapter considers how the tramway system has been used to accommodate population growth throughout the city and implement policies of cohesion around Montpellier. The first section considers the policies facilitating regional development, specifically public transport. The subsequent sections focus on spatial co-

hesiveness and the use of the tramway as a tool for both spatial orientation and urban form by considering how Montpellier's urban planning regime supports a cohesive city through the tramway system. (Volle et al., 2010, p. 14) The final section on transportation planning considers the tramway as part of the identity or as a symbol of unity across the city



### Public Transport Policy

Montpellier's planning program supports its aspirations of becoming a metropole, a process that has and will continue to take years to achieve. The Administration has been able to pursue this ambition for four decades due to a stable political setting. The current public transport program was initiated by the Georges Frêche regime in the late 1970s. In 1978, the Société Montpellicaine de Transports Urbains (SMTU), a city organization, was founded and took over the management and operation of the existing bus public transport service from private companies (Mills, 2001, p. 339). This shift towards public intervention in public transport broadened to the regional area.

In 1982, the District of Montpellier took on the mantle of public transport authority (Subra, 2012, p. 1) and over subsequent years has expanded bus service and increased the ridership levels until levels remained stable from 1988 onward (Mills, 2001, p. 340). The development of the tramway system was influenced by three things: 1) increased ridership beyond bus capacity; 2) decrease in average bus speeds; and 3) the lower operating costs of trams to buses (Mills, 2001, p. 341). The

mayor of the city and president of the Agglomération, Georges Frêche, understood and seized on this opportunity to compliment and reinforce the east-west development, i.e. the linear city (Mills, 2001, pp. 341, 351), through the development of Line 1. In 1999, SMTU, renamed Transports de l'Agglomération de Montpellier (TaM), initiated the development of Line 1 along this axis. Subsequent tramway development by TaM occurred aligned to the evolving axis of development such as to the river and now more recently to the sea. This includes the promoting and developing of different means of transport around the tramway as part of the broader transportation network (Moure, 2011, p. 1).

Despite Frêche passing away recently, the political continuity remains with the long-term vision of becoming a unified metropole articulated through key planning documents (Volle, Négrier, and Bernié-Boissard, 2010, p. 13). The *Plan de Déplacements Urbains (PDU)* is the urban mobility plan that guides the public transport development, and is mandatory for all Agglomérations with over 100,000 inhabitants. It must be in place for five-to-ten years, and must conform to La Solidarité et au Renouveau Urbains (*SRU*), the State law of

Solidarity and Urban Renewal. In addition, the local development plans (*PLU*) must be compatible with the *PDU* as the *PDU* must also be compatible with *Le Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale (SCOT)*.

As previously discussed, the plan coordinates development among the members of local governments by aligning various policies to provide general guidelines for land use according to the principles of strategic planning and sustainable development (Direction Départementale des Territoires de la Loire, 2012, p. 1). With regards to guiding the *PDU*, the *SCOT* identified areas for preferential urban development and public transport to reduce auto-dependence, to facilitate access to centre, and to promote short trips on foot or bicycle (Montpellier Agglomération, 2011, p. 10).

With the success of Line 1 and the increase of public transport ridership by fifty percent between 1997 and 2001 (Crampton, 2003, p. 10), the *PDU* of 2002 outlined three new tram lines to address the disconnect between urban expansion and access to transit (Volle et al, 2010, p. 69). This urban development also supported the broader regional growth aspirations of becoming

ing a metropole that was also reaffirmed by the 2006 *SCOT* for Montpellier. The 2009 *PDU* builds on these goals and considers transportation needs until 2020. It reiterates the tramway priorities of access to the city centre, optimizing the lines that connect to the periphery, and maintaining a coherent system (ibid, p. 70). The *PDU* policy also includes social considerations such that everyone pays according to their means and includes accessibility provisions for people with reduced mobility (Moure, 2011, p. 1). Consistent through *SCOT* and the *PDU* are planning provisions that link new urban development projects and existing neighbourhoods, and provide alternative to cars by using the tram network both to direct urban growth and influence the built form of the city (Volle et al., 2010, p. 67).

### **Montpellier's Tramway Network and Spatial Integration**

The public transport policies lay out the tramway system as a tool for integration (ibid, p. 69). Also, it is common in France for an initial line to be planned such that they quickly attract high patronage and only in the second phase do they build lines or extend existing ones which allow more potential for

economic growth and urban renewal as in the case of Montpellier (Crampton, 2003, p. 12). Currently in Montpellier there are four tram lines in operation with two more lines planned for the future. The evolution of developing each line reflects the changes in the urban development priorities. Line 1 reinforced the east-west development axis connecting the high-density la Paillade neighbourhood at Mosson to Euromedicine, the health and science centre to La Comédie, the centre of the city and on to Odysseum, the suburban mall and entertainment complex (Mills, 2001, p. 342). After opening in 2000, Line 1 is primarily a City of Montpellier project connecting the major centres in the city.

Using the tramway as a tool for integrating the city evolved to connecting the periphery to the center and creating secondary centres within the Agglomération as outlined in *SCOT* and the 2006 *PDU* (Volle et al, 2010, p. 76). This policy allowed the tramway to help break from the traditional approach of planning new neighbourhoods by encouraging dependency on the tramline from the beginning, often arriving before the development (ibid, p. 78). This can be seen with Line 2, which opened in 2006. In the north, the line terminates

at Jacou, a planned neighbourhood. At the other end of the line is St Jean de Vedas, an area that is also underserved by amenities and services and poorly aligned to nearby large supermarkets and shopping zones (ibid, p. 76).

Lines 3 and 4 opened in 2012. While the former continues the same pattern of Line 2 of anchoring emerging neighbourhoods while connecting to the existing city core, the latter connects the new neighbourhood of Juvignac to Comédie in the centre and south to Perols near the Sea. The connection to the Mediterranean is abbreviated by the two communes not part of the Agglomération. Nonetheless, the route anchors the new development pattern from Port Marianne to the EcoCité towards the Mediterranean.

In contrast to Line 3 and the expansion of urban development towards the sea, Line 4 supports the revitalization of the city centre. Line 4 is a circulator route connecting the existing three lines. All four lines come together at the city centre at the train station Gare St Roch near Place de la Comédie. The integration and overlap of the lines reinforces the centrality of Montpellier limiting car use in the centre while providing access to the peripheries (ibid, p.



The centre and the periphery connected by the tram network: Place de la Comédie (left) and la Paillade (right).

75). The future expansion will maintain the pattern of cohesive city-region with plans to connect the future TGV station and another connection to the communes to the north with the tram network is underway.

One of Montpellier's most iconic spaces, Place de la Comédie is a very large central public space and was the centre of the old tramway network that closed its last route in 1949 (Subra,

2012, p. 1 p), resulting in heavy traffic in the city centre (Mills, 2001, p. 338). With the reintroduction of the tramway, Comédie has been transformed into a pedestrian zone with cafés, Opéra de la Comédie, the tramway stop, and an esplanade leading to the Corum, a conference and performance hall (Mills, 2001, p. 338). Comédie is now effectively the city centre and has become a gathering place connecting L'Écusson and the

Polygone shopping complex with the main train station, all of which are within walking distance from the Place de la Comédie tramway stop.

The pedestrian zone beginning at la Comédie radiates throughout L'Écusson, with limited access to cars. These pedestrian zones are complemented by the tramway, with the concrete track bed improved with surfaces of stone, gravel, or grass as ap-



appropriate for each section (Mills, 2001, p. 342) not to mention the high aesthetic design of the stations, street furniture, and visual elements (Mills, 2001, p. 351). By leveraging the tram investment to include a higher standard of urban design, a co-benefit of the tram development is a high quality visual environment and has led to large-scale improvement of public space.

Public space improvements have led to unintended consequences. As a result of pedestrianization and tram access, changes across France in the property market are driving out some of the more traditional shops making way for chain stores, (Crampton, 2003, pp. 8-9). That is, the character of these older places is threatened by the improvements that come with the tramway. However, these inner areas have less noise and air pollution, mainly because there are now fewer motorized vehicles (Mills, 2001, p. 350).

The removal and reduction of motorized vehicles has freed up space and enabled designers to integrate alternative modes of transportation and urban landscaping contributing to the improved urban form. The 2009 *PDU* supports and promotes these alternatives to individual transport by



A pedestrianized street in L'Écusson (opposite); Bicycle infrastructure throughout the city (above).

increasing the number of intermodal exchanges for those who use the tram especially those with a low ecological impact (Montpellier Agglomération, 2011, p. 10). Specifically, near the tram stations in the centre are bicycle shares and towards the periphery are parking lots and bus interchanges. TaM has also installed solar panel that provide shade for the parking lots.

### **'Soft' Infrastructure and Culture as Tools to Foster Integration**

The construction of the tramway network also serves as a tool toward integration, linking the formerly disconnected community of Mosson, which suffers from both social and physical disconnection, and has begun to create connections between the communities in the north and south, providing easy

access to the core for these outer communes of the Montpellier Agglomération.

Montpellier is able to achieve a unique sense of place within its urban space through incorporation of a cultural strategy in its approach to planning. Montpellier's unique cultural planning strategy facilitates its political and economic aspirations to emerge as a leading metropolitan city at a national and even international scale. Organizing the city under a brand not only has local implications of creating sense of identity and pride but also plays a role in showcasing Montpellier's distinct yet coherent character at a larger urban scale within the contemporary context of a global economy.

The cultural discourse within Montpellier is dominated by the lifestyle

of elite social groups as high-quality art, music and theatre dominate. Such an approach to culture may play a role in demarcating social groups from one another as underprivileged classes are unable to access various forms of art. It must be noted that the central role of the State (in dominating the cultural planning approach within Montpellier) raises the question of how diversity is accommodated within Montpellier's neighbourhoods to respond to the needs of people of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds.

Contrary to the democratic political framework of Toronto, diversity is imagined through integration within a coherent cultural model within the European republican governance structure. This European model is rooted in the ideology of equality among individ-

uals with no differentiation criteria for cultural allegiances. In Montpellier, ethnicity is viewed as a space-based difference, as people are identified according to their residential associations rather than their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

The cultural agenda is of course another way in which newcomers are integrated, by providing shared cultural experiences. At a metropolitan level of cultural planning, inter-communal partnerships provide an opportunity for communes to develop cultural associations with one another through shared cultural activities such as those initiated by Radio France and the Fine Arts School (Négrier, 2010, p. 54). The dynamic created by such inter-communal partnerships is not only a trigger for a sense of solidarity at a cultural level, but for the creation of a coherent urban space. Amenities like médiathèques and libraries that were traditionally dispersed at a smaller scale are established at a metropolitan level with larger-scale locations at the Agglomération level.

The communes of rural and peri-urban areas surrounding Montpellier are rich in local traditions and historical heritage. To highlight these territorial dimensions of culture, Montpellier utilizes a unique governance framework. The

governance framework aims to tackle a constant paradox of establishing coherence within the Agglomération while acknowledging the differences of each of the communes. The government is able to embody cooperation and establish partnerships at several levels such as State, Region, Department, city centre and with other towns to achieve 'interculturality'. Partnerships at an inter-urban and intra-urban level with public and private sectors further facilitate the goal of building cross-community activities and events (Bigas, 2012).

Urban and Regional planning is highly contextual and needs to be analyzed based on the unique socio-economic and cultural milieu of an urban space (Friedmann, 2005). In Montpellier, culture represents a central feature of planning as it is embedded within its political, social and urban policies and frameworks. Montpellier aims to achieve its goal of becoming a metropolis by recognizing culture as a significant engine for local development, economic stability and international recognition (Bigas, 2012). Through a strategic approach to cultural planning, political affirmations of developing Montpellier as a metropolitan city are pursued.

Within the contemporary model

of globalization, where diversity, multiculturalism and cultural heterogeneity may represent the defining essence of some metropolitan cities, in others they may represent an opportunity for assimilation or integration into a central cultural model. Within a European context, a centralized and hierarchical approach to governance is not only highlighted in urban and regional development policies but also prominent in its perspective to culture. "In fact, so important is the word and concept of 'culture' in French society, that if one were to attempt to locate and interpret its every manifestation, one would be trying to encompass virtually the whole range of activities in every area of French life" (Rigby, 1991, p. 4).

### **Cultural Planning Strategies**

The Montpellier government has revitalized the Culture Commission as the coordinating authority for cultural activities. Along with a constant interaction with cultural sites within the Agglomération, the Commission also brings culture-focused topics and issues to be voted on at the Agglomération Council. Furthermore, monitoring meetings known as *Rencontres de la Culture* are organized that comprise of thirty-one

cultural assistants and managers, as well as working groups composed of elected representatives who hold responsibility for implementing established cultural goals (Bigas, 2012). Citizen-engagement is achieved through the establishment of groups called 'Cultural Circle', that are composed solely of responsible cultural representatives that work together in proposing ideas for cultural events and activities.

Montpellier's cultural planning strategy is based on the objective of offering accessible opportunities for people to experience culture. This objective is implemented through a decentralization of cultural events, including live art performances and events organized throughout the Agglomération (Bigas, 2012). The Department of Cultural Affairs plays a central role in organizing cultural activities, coordinating with government-owned cultural facilities and monitoring private cultural operators around the city. This is accomplished by using the idea of *maison pour tous*, situating socio-cultural centres in all the neighbourhoods (Volle et al, 2010, p. 162). This decentralization of cultural infrastructure across the Agglomération to the various communes led to the construction of physical infra-

structures such as venues like the médiathèque. The construction of the médiathèque fostered closer integration of the rural communes by creating a unified sense of culture, and environment of cooperation and pushing together Montpellier's objectives of solidarity and coherence.

### **Culture and Politics in Montpellier**

The cultural-political paradigm shifted from a city scale to the larger communal network of the Agglomération since the 1990s as cultural activities began to focus on establishing solidarity and attracting a broader range of audiences (Négrier, 2010). The goal of achieving cultural coherence in Montpellier can be examined through an understanding of the role of State in directing the political and cultural milieu.

Lefebvre explains the classical role of state in the imposition of culture: "[s]everal 'subcultures', even if subsumed under one blanket definition of classical culture, do not in reality make up one single culture. In any case, is culture not after all a myth? No. It is more than that: it is a State ideology. The unity of culture is, in fact, situated at the highest level – that of cultural institutions" (1968, p. 37). Montpelli-

er has developed a long-term cultural planning strategy to build on the revolutionary vision of cultural politics by Georges Frêche. Political parties are able to gain public support through a culturally-aligned agenda that reinforces the strong focus on cultural activities by future political representatives. Montpellier's cultural politics are facilitated by a multi-scaled collaboration amongst national, regional and local institutions.

Cultural activities are primarily funded by the Montpellier Agglomération, with twelve percent of the overall budget allocated to cultural planning. This budgetary cultural planning allocation is the third largest, coming only after the funding devoted to urban transportation and domestic waste collection (Bigas, 2012). From 2002 to 2007, the cultural budget increased from 4.8% to 18% of the overall budget for the Agglomération. This increased funding for cultural activities paved the way for planning and hosting events at a larger and more professional scale, while shifting the marketing efforts to focus on large events to draw an increasingly regional and international audience (Volle et al. 2010, p. 169). Thus, the main objective of this cultural agenda is two-fold:



'Soft' infrastructure: Le Corum (left) and the Agora (right).

First, using culture as a tool for integration and coherence of the Agglomération. Secondly, in Montpellier we can see how investments in culture, public transportation or architecture, can be used as an attraction tool for promoting and branding Montpellier as a regional capital and a metropole.

In 2011 and 2012, the cultural planning budget was €60 million and €55 million, respectively. The financing of cultural activities is comprised of 40% funding from Montpellier, 21% from the national agency DRAC, 15.5% fund-

ing from Regional departments within Languedoc-Roussillon, with other funding including contributions towards cultural infrastructure by the conseil général de l'Hérault (Négrier, 2010, p. 166). The proportion of funding plays a significant role in defining the level of influence exerted over cultural planning by each of the institutions.

#### Events and Festivals

Culture within Montpellier is associated with high-quality music, dance, theatre and other forms of classical art. At the

same time, the 'soft' infrastructure of cultural planning was slowly reformed by the transfer of cultural planning, politics and governance from the commune level to the agglomeration level. This process started with the transfer of Festival Montpellier Danse in 1987, Festival Radio-France in 1991 and finally the médiathèque Fellini was transferred from the control of the city to the control of the Agglomération in 1995 (Volle et al. 2010, p. 165).

From 1990 onward, the Agglomération provided upwards of 61% of



funding for many cultural events, demonstrating the new political scale of cultural planning and the desire to become a metropole. Some of the significant elements of the cultural planning strategy within Montpellier is the acknowledgment of talented local artists and bridging the gap between the people and arts. To further the goal of promoting French culture, performances from international artists are organized within Montpellier at grand venues within the city. Inter-communal partnerships formed by the Agglomération also allow opportunities to showcase French culture to the communities as festivals and events are organized within each neighborhood. Popular cultural forms such as hip hop are perceived to be deviant from the classical forms of art and need to be assimilated and acculturated within the French model of culture.

### **Cultural Facilities**

To understand the scale of cultural urban space within Montpellier, there are thirty buildings designated as cultural facilities around Montpellier, providing more than 100,000 square metres of cumulative floor space (Bigas, 2012). The high quality of performing arts, cinema, music and theatre is further high-

lighted through the prestigious venues in which the events are organized.

Classical French music, dance and theatre is experienced through the large seating capacities of venues such as le Corum - Palais des Congrès (a concert hall with 2000 seats), the ZENITH (6000 seats), and the ARENA (14,000 seats) (Bigas, 2012). Dance performances are organized in specific locations including the Centre chorégraphique National and the Agora de la Danse, while theatrical activities are held at the Centre dramatique National and the Théâtre du Hangar (Bigas, 2012).

One of the fundamental elements that reinforce French culture within Montpellier and allows opportunities for heightened focus on arts and culture is specialized education in the field. Education institutions in Montpellier include Le Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional (CRR) for music, dance and theatre, L'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts (ESBA) and L'École Nationale Supérieure d'Art Dramatique (ENSAD), which offer expertise in French arts. Furthermore, the urban environment in Montpellier is able to complement the distinct social character of the community and culture through architectural buildings specifically devoted

to demonstrating heritage. Besides the physical design of the buildings that create a unique sense of place in Montpellier, the functions offered by the urban form reinforce the cultural heritage. Museums such as Musée FABRE et Hôtel Sabatier d'Espeyran, Musée Archéologique de Lattes, and Domaine Bonnier de la Mosson offer the public an opportunity to connect with French heritage (Bigas, 2012).

### **The Branding and Marketing of Montpellier**

The slogan, "*Montpellier, la surdouée*" (the *super-gifted*) can be understood as a product of urban and territorial marketing and a reflection of successful inter-city competition (Buyck et al., 2010, p. 24). The strategies, plans, developments and projects mentioned above had the combined effect of re-positioning Montpellier on a much larger scale, the result of which may be continued and consistent growth of the population throughout the Agglomération. Conversely, the *surdouée* campaign also likened Montpellier to "the small cluster of French towns best known in the world", affirming the city's image as both an important urban centre and a picturesque community consistent with

the attractive, marketable image of the south of France and southern Europe (Parker, 1993, p. 390).

Between 1977 and 2001, Montpellier was transformed and became attractive for many reasons including the technoparcs and the construction of the Odysseum – a peripheral commercial and leisure center - as well as tramline that connects the city of Montpellier with surrounding villages (Rauws and Roo, 2011, p. 276). The aspirations of becoming a metropolitan city can be associated with the contemporary context of accelerated globalization and capitalism. Montpellier is able to develop a brand under the current banner of *Montpellier Unlimited*. Such branding of the city is representative of Montpellier's ambitions to not only be prominent at a regional scale but develop an identity at a national and international scale. This branding is disseminated at all levels of government as well as amongst the public in order to associate the city with a symbol of identity and pride as well as represent Montpellier as a leading entity at an economic level (Montpellier Unlimited, 2012).

Perhaps similar to the ways that regionalization of urban governance and planning have altered the dynamics

of global cities such as Paris and Madrid (in terms of balancing local concerns with the need to offer a functional, coherent Region – essentially a consumable product - to the global market [Borja and Castells, 1997, p. 183]), we can understand the complimentary processes of dispersal and metropole branding in Montpellier as successful strategies by actors within urban governance to market the Agglomération on a larger scale. With the extension of the tram system throughout much of the metropolitan area, for example, transit planners have – in addition to providing affordable transportation and 'transit justice' to peripheral areas – found a way to unite the real estate in these areas as a coherent product for investors from beyond Languedoc-Roussillon, or even France. It could be argued that the SCOT plan provides a very similar function, as would plans for greater connections with Sète and Nîmes.

## **Reflections on Planning in Montpellier**

As a case study of urban boosterism, competitive branding and marketing, urban sustainability and an attempt at achieving metropole status for a mid-size city, there is much to learn from Montpellier. The Montpellier Agglomération provides a compelling example of how state-centred - yet market- and competition-oriented - governance and planning can strive to become a metropole through political will and long-term investment while simultaneously extending services such as public transit and social housing.

First-hand observation reveals a landscape that has changed dramatically since the 1950s. Today, Montpellier's built form reveals the legacy of the Frêche administration both in the busy commercial, residential and leisure areas to the south and east of the city centre, as well as in the suburban sprawl that continues to consume the agricultural land beyond. Although urban problems such as social and spatial polarization, unemployment, sprawl and questionable sustainability aims may persist in Montpellier, the pro-growth, metropole-oriented agenda that the administration instigated in 1977 do not appear to be slowing down, even despite the ongoing effects of the 2008

economic crisis. While active, large-scale construction sites and cranes have largely disappeared from the landscape of other southern European cities, the growth and expansion of Montpellier's built environment continues to be as persistent and determined as the personality of their advocate, Georges Frêche.

Montpellier's aspiration of becoming a metropole of international importance requires a long-term vision and a plan for achieving a cohesive city-region. The city is actively striving for this goal by using the tramway as a tool for spatial organization, neighbourhood integration, revitalization of the urban form, and the solidification of an identity that has changed the way the city is conceptualized. It is furthermore indicative of a political will to base the future of the city on public transit (Volle et al., 2010, p. 78). Emblematic of this is the neighborhood of Juvignac where a new tramway station for Line 4 was recently completed. This station is the western terminus of the line and it is currently surrounded by active construction sites; this station and the tramway infrastructure have arrived years before people will begin making use of this neighborhood. It is a clear example of Montpel-

lier's proactive approach to develop infrastructure, and thereby the city's future.

Montpellier's planning approach is highly interventionist compared to North American standards, yet allows for greater coordination of public investment and development to achieve maximum benefits for the public. While not all practices that work well in Montpellier can be transferred or even recommended for cities elsewhere - where differences such as culture, geographical conditions and city goals may differ - amid this hotbed of planning ideas and actions, there are mistakes as well as many innovative success to learn from. Montpellier is not a city that is afraid to reconsider old methods for the sake of trying a new, experimental approach or embracing a vision that may verge on overly ambitious. Along with the city's more specific lessons, it is this mentality of striving to be at the forefront of great city planning from which planners everywhere - and their corresponding cities and citizens - can benefit.

## **Recommendations for Toronto**

Though our examination of Montpellier highlighted the experience of a very different city, this difference has allowed innovative, yet practical ideas and solutions to common urban problems to emerge. Drawing on our knowledge of Toronto's urban dynamics, we have translated Montpellier's most successful strategies into applicable recommendations for the City of Toronto.

**#1: Toronto should take greater measures to ensure the creation of social and affordable housing.**

The average cost of housing in both Toronto and Montpellier is much higher than their respective national average, creating a large demand for affordable housing infrastructure. The need for affordable housing in Toronto could be better addressed through a more cohesive planning framework which includes requirements for the construction of much needed affordable housing stock. In this report, it is recognized that all social housing is affordable, whereas not all affordable housing is social housing. The term affordable housing finds its definition in the Provincial Policy Statement (2005).

The Agglomeration of Montpellier actively uses inclusionary zoning

policy in order to facilitate development of affordable housing units. Inclusionary zoning requires provision of 20% affordable housing in newly constructed development. The social housing units are located in the same building as the remaining market housing and cannot be identified as being different from the outside. All municipalities within the agglomeration are required to continuously hold a minimum level of affordable rental housing or will be penalized by removing their right of pre-emption.

It is suggested that in order to stimulate the construction of affordable housing in Toronto the City undertakes the following:

**a) Inclusionary Zoning** - It is recommended that the City of Toronto advocates the province to consider creating inclusionary zoning as a possible replacement to Section 37 of the Planning Act. Currently, Section 37 is negotiated on a case-by-case basis and recognized as a bargaining tool between the City and developers for delivering community benefits. Inclusionary zoning would require developers to allocate a percentage of all new development to affordable housing for people with low to moderate incomes.

**b) Scattered Site Policy** - It is suggested that the City studies the possibility of having a policy mandating that the majority of all newly-built affordable housing units to be scattered housing, mixed within market housing. Provision of scattered housing forms would alleviate safety concerns for victims of domestic violence, prevent stigmatization of individual social housing buildings and finally it would allow individuals more choice for affordable housing throughout the city. This provision would exclude group homes, shelters and supportive housing for individuals experiencing acute cases of mental health and developmental disabilities.

**c) Provide Excess Affordable Housing** - It is recommended that the City investigates the possibility of a by-law requiring developers to continue to provide excess affordable housing until predetermined housing stock conditions are met. Once a specific level of affordable rental housing is achieved, then a requirement that the municipality should maintain a minimum level of affordable rental units could be suggested. This would prevent social housing whose mortgages are maturing to be turned over into market rental without replace-

ment affordable housing being secured.

**#2: Toronto should champion a regional approach towards inter-municipal cooperation.**

It is recommended that Toronto examines the possibility of adopting the Agglomeration of Montpellier approach to inter-municipal cooperation for achieving a coherent regional planning system. Regional planning is not new to the Toronto region; different sizes and natures of regional governments have existed and are presently functioning in the region. Some regional authorities with broader mandates including Greater Toronto Service Board and Metro Toronto could not continue themselves, but regionalism in some form is continued through organizations like Metrolinx and Toronto Region Conservation Authority. However, many times inter-municipal competition is more prevalent than cooperation, and little emphasis has been given to municipalities with similar desires and needs to come together to form a regional entity. This might be the result of a lack of legislative permission and encouragement from the province. Nevertheless, the City of Toronto could start exploring the possibilities of such cooperation, and

initiate a discussion with like-minded municipalities and the province to promote natural agglomeration of the municipalities in the region. Grouping with municipalities with comparable aspirations would help advance the growth agenda and also ease municipal cooperation. As the largest municipality in the region, Toronto is best positioned to champion a regional approach towards inter-municipal cooperation.

**#3: Toronto should take a more proactive role in real-estate development.**

The city of Toronto has an authority mandated to develop the city's surplus land – Build Toronto – that resembles the development authority of Montpellier – SERM. Although Build Toronto does not have a long history, it has taken initiatives to capture the benefits of the city's underutilized land and has secured dividends for the city. However, two features of SERM are worth considering. First, SERM plans and designs a project as per the direction of the Agglomeration. In doing so, it hires consultants to plan and design a project, which is sold to developers through a bidding process. By taking this approach, the Agglomeration is pursuing its vision for the city, not simply advancing the market's

vision. Second, SERM invests in land that has future developmental potential. The authority then holds the land for several years, develops projects, and sells the projects to developers to capture the enhanced market value. SERM has achieved the capacity to make such investments by including banks as one of its stakeholders. Although Build Toronto is working in joint venture with developers to advance its projects, the city would benefit from considering these two working modalities of SERM, as these approaches will not only divert more revenue into the city's coffers but also advance the city's vision of its built form.

**#4: Toronto should implement green boundaries at different scales.**

Drawing on Montpellier's eco-centric approach to urban boundaries through the process of sight inversion, the City of Toronto could better integrate environmental and landscape considerations into its own development approach. The process of sight inversion, where boundaries of growth are determined first and foremost by what greenspace ought to be preserved, could help protect important greenspace throughout the city. While the Greenbelt is already

in place and the current growth boundaries are determined in the Places to Grow Act of 2005, Toronto could employ the sight inversion technique on smaller scales. For example, it could be used in staking out the parameters of a new development, whether on the scale of a neighbourhood, a city street or of one specific lot. In these cases, by using sight inversion, specific areas of the city (via secondary plans) can ensure their greenspace and important natural features are preserved, rather than being perceived as open space for development. This stands to benefit the City of Toronto in the long-term by preserving crucial features of its green infrastructure, rather than turning to technological solutions or landscape rehabilitation after they have been lost.

**#5: Toronto should pursue proven sustainability initiatives while avoiding greenwashing.**

Montpellier's sustainability discourse provides an opportunity to examine the value of sustainable development initiatives. The City of Toronto does not have the extensive image of a sustainable city that is becoming characteristic of Montpellier, a resource that heavily supports Montpellier's branding initia-

tives. Would it be worthwhile for the City of Toronto to cultivate a similar commitment to sustainability? It may depend on the intended outcome. While Montpellier's sustainability commitments contribute to its success in its growth and branding agenda, it is still up for debate what kind of environmental impacts it is having. A useful approach for Toronto would be to ensure that its sustainability initiatives provide long-term environmental investments that will continue to support urban ecological health, and then maximize on the image that can be cultivated from this approach. Otherwise, the city risks the greenwashing criticisms that are at times directed at Montpellier.

**#6: The City of Toronto should seize the opportunity to align new development with a vision of the city which prioritizes public spaces and recreational activities.**

A further lesson that Toronto could learn from Montpellier pertains to its investment in the public realm. Toronto and Montpellier are both cities that enjoy a multitude of high-profile, outdoor public events and festivals of international renown. Public spaces are also utilized every day in more mundane

ways as people walk to work, rest on park benches, or participate in recreational activities. Considering these uses, Montpellier has paid special attention to making the public realm walkable, aesthetically pleasing, and a place where citizens can linger and connect.

Considering the steady pace of development in Toronto, the City should consider the potential benefits of similar treatments to the public realm, as well as a change in thinking with regards to how our public spaces are planned. The genius of Antigone was not that it was designed by a high-profile architect, but that Bofill used the project, and the redevelopment and urbanization of land there, in a way that connected public and private uses and made public space the centrepiece of that urban renewal project. The spirit of Bofill's vision was carried on with his master-planning of areas outside of Montpellier's centre. Port Marianne, for example, has been built with a consistent respect for the pedestrian and cyclist, and includes new public squares, parks, and recreational activity among the new, private, suburban development of private housing and retail space.

Building on this model, Toronto



should take bolder steps to value and create public spaces that anticipate a mixture of recreational, public activities. This can be done in both high- and low-density areas by dedicating a greater area of developable land in Toronto to pedestrian and recreational activities, by investing in permanent structures for public and leisure use, and by ensuring that public and private spaces are coherently connected to each other.

**#7: Toronto should adopt a capacity-building approach to urban relations issues.**

Urban politics has a significant influence on city planning and urban development. While it is not suggested that Toronto shares similar urban political issues, Montpellier's experience has nonetheless highlighted the importance of developing political and commercial partners with other actors in the region for both strategic and economic reasons. In Montpellier, the political landscape is heavily influenced by its jurisdictional disputes between communes, which has led to the reduction of collaborative partnerships between the city and its neighbouring political actors. At times, this fragmented urban political landscape has garnered criti-

cisms and negatively affected Montpellier from realizing its goals. One of the more prominent examples is Montpellier's lack of direct accesses to its international airport, which is often said to be attributed to its strained political and jurisdictional relationships with its adjacent communes. In the case of Toronto, one of the key discussions could be the importance of collaborative large-scale infrastructure planning with the adjacent municipalities for regional governance reasons. Recognizing that the York Region and City of Vaughan are one of the fastest growing municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area and that many residents travel within this region for work and leisure, there is a strong case for collaborating to develop regional transportation infrastructure for the provision of rapid and cost-efficient public transportation. This in turn further aids the development of a regional or even national commercial hub.

**#8: The City of Toronto should build Light Rail Transit (LRT) to address its transportation problems while improving public space and urban form.**

In terms of land use and transportation planning, the case of Montpellier

demonstrates that new streetcar lines can be a useful and cost-efficient way to provide transit to under-served areas of a city, and for transforming the existing urban environment into a more pedestrian-friendly urban realm. Montpellier's tramway has been constructed relatively recently, replacing busy and overcrowded bus lines to better connect the urban fringe with the rest of the city. The system in Montpellier is very well integrated into the neighbourhoods that it connects due to the conscious effort by various government departments to add high-quality public realm improvements along the route. Taking advantage of the transit investment to transform the existing neighbourhoods and urban spaces has rejuvenated these spaces returning the street as shared space for predominantly pedestrian activity while still accommodating car traffic.

Toronto should better integrate the proposed LRT lines on Sheppard Avenue West, Eglinton Avenue and Finch Avenue West with the surrounding neighbourhoods. Like much of Montpellier's built environment, these medium-density, suburban areas lack the potential passenger density to warrant subway lines. Our research of Mont-

pellier shows that this technology has the ability to improve public space and urban form. In Toronto, LRT would better connect disparate, post-war communities – especially those on the urban periphery, such as the Jane and Finch neighbourhood – to the rest of Toronto (a similar argument could be made for the extension of Toronto’s bicycle infrastructure). Furthermore, the Montpellier example demonstrates that development and investment concentrate around designated growth areas that have received pro-active infrastructure investments such as streetcar lines. Likewise, Toronto could revive the Transit City plans to also provide similar upgrades on the Jane, Weston, Waterfront West and Scarborough-Malvern routes as this investment would support midrise avenues in contrast to the tower development typically attracted by subways.

It is understandable that local planners or politicians may be cynical about the potential of LRT based on their experience with Toronto’s streetcar networks. However, first-hand experience of Montpellier’s tram network demonstrates the positive impacts that these lines bring to a city, especially given that tramways there compliment

and encourage adjacent development and population growth as well as provide a more equitable model for suburban expansion.

## **Student Profiles**



Linda Bui holds an Honours BA in Human Geography and City Studies from the University of Toronto. She is currently in the Urban and Regional Planning stream of the Master's program at York, with research interests in redevelopment, sustainability and urban planning. Her previous internships with Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change and the Town of Ajax's Planning & Development Services have provided an excellent foundation for understanding municipal planning and local community engagement.



Anna Côté holds a BA in philosophy from Queen's University and has experience working in sustainable development in the international tourism sector. She is currently in the Environmental Planning stream of the Master's program at York, with research interests in urban ecology, brownfield redevelopment, and municipal law. She has deepened her involvement in these areas through internships with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the national charity Evergreen.



Zeina Ismail holds an Honours BA in Geography and Environmental Studies from the University of Toronto. During her undergraduate degree, Zeina completed projects in Germany and Vietnam. Zeina is particularly interested in land use and transportation planning in Canada and internationally. Her major research topic for her Master's at York is exploring public transportation and commuting patterns in the Greater Toronto Area.



Saadia Jamil received a B.Sc. (Hons.) degree from the University of Toronto and is currently a MES candidate in Urban and Regional Planning at York University. Saadia's research explores themes of placemaking and mixed-use infrastructure, particularly within the context of Canada's suburbs. Her graduate assistantships with the Educational Alliance for Sustainable Ontario and the CITY Institute at York University, as well as international travels to cities in United Kingdom and France have offered her invaluable learning experience in urban planning. Saadia currently works with the City of Pickering as a Planning Student, where she coordinates with senior planners and city staff to complete a ten-year review of an urban revitalization project: Liverpool Road South Waterfront Node..



Originally from the City of Vancouver, Graeme Jones is a second year graduate student in York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies planning program. He holds a BA in Geography with an extended minor in Economics and Ontario Graduate certificate in Geographic Information Systems. Graeme's area of expertise is public transportation planning and he is currently researching public transportation in the Metro Vancouver region.



Charleen Kong holds an Honours BA in Economics and Environmental Policies & Practices from the University of Toronto. Currently a graduate student in the Urban and Regional Planning stream of the Master's program at York University, her research interests focus on regional governance, sustainable planning policies and urban metabolism. Most recently, she is working on a research paper about the development of sustainable planning policies in Hong Kong.



Chun Nam Law came to York's Master's of Environmental Studies planning program after studying co-op Environmental Studies at the University of Waterloo. He has worked extensively on policies and initiatives at different levels of government, from the municipality of Vaughan to the Ministry of the Environment's Drive Clean Office to Health Canada. He joined York's planning program with the intention of expanding his knowledge in the fields of environmental, land use and transportation planning. His major research is focused on the topic of transportation, and its sustainability in the suburban landscape, using the City of Markham as the case study for analysis.



Evan McDonough holds an Honours BA in Urban Studies from York University. His research explores the intersections of planning, history, architecture, infrastructure, social justice and globalization within the contemporary city. In addition to Montpellier, his research and education in the MES Planning Program thus far has taken him to Barcelona, Montréal, Ottawa, Vancouver and - most recently - back to Europe for his Major Research Paper: *Madrid-Barajas Airport and the Urban Geography of Globalization*.



Imelda Nurwisah is interested in public engagement and civil society initiatives in making sustainable communities within an urban planning context. She is specializing in community planning in the Master's of Environmental Studies planning program at York University. She has an interdisciplinary background in Zoology and Computer Science and has worked in the fields of market research, arts and culture, and local government.



Pawel holds an honours BA in Urban Studies and is pursuing a Master's degree at York University in the faculty of Environmental Studies. Prior to joining the program at York University, Pawel held a number of diversified positions. His portfolio consists of work experience as a team member of the flagship RE/MAX brokerage in Canada and various management roles in the hospitality industry. Pawel's interests include sustainable community development, affordable housing and homelessness.



Prabin Sharma specializes in urban and regional planning and uses a governance lens to analyze this field. He sees institutions and governance as two major factors determining the fate of many plans and programs. He has been conducting researches and studying institutional and governance issues as a part of his Master's of Environmental Studies degree within York University's planning program. With a strong comprehension of environmental issues acquired through MSc in Environmental Science, he recognizes the significance of regional planning and the value of nature for human existence.





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All (colour) photos were provided by the master's students who participated in the course.