



China's Urban Century: Governance, Environment, and Socio- Economic Imperatives

**UrbaChina final conference
Paris, January 15-16, 2015**



**Conclusive international conference on the Urbachina project
Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine, January 15-17, 2015
Introduction by Guy Amsellem, president of the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine**

Welcome to the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine for the final conference on the Urbachina project.

First, I would like to briefly present the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine.

The Cité is a national public institution, created in 2004, and opened to the public in 2007.

It is comprised of an architecture center, a museum, a school of architecture, a specialized library and an archives center.

The Cité de l'architecture, in line with the missions entrusted to it, has developed a very broad range of activities:

- the conservation and promotion of very diverse collections (wall painting, monumental sculpture, models, stained glass, drawings, historic books, photos, etc.) that enable contemporary architecture to be situated in history;
- the organization of temporary exhibitions that help promote and disseminate architectural creation and urban issues to the general public;
- the programming of other events, apart from the exhibitions: film projections, photo evenings, literary encounters, colloquiums, debates, roundtables, etc.;
- publications: 10 to 15 titles a year on average, mostly coproduced with publishers, as well as two reviews, *Archiscopie* (quarterly magazine on current events) and *Colonnes* (yearly publication of the archives center);
- a higher education program through the École de Chaillot, which offers post-master's training for holders of a state-certified architect's degree or the equivalent, who wish to specialize in the heritage field. Some of these graduates, go on to become, head architects of historic monuments (ACMH), or architects of Bâtiments de France (ABF). Furthermore, the École de Chaillot offers, in partnership with the École des Ponts-et-Chaussées, post-competition training for state-certified architects and urban planners;
- the Cité regularly proposes events for professionals in all the building sectors : Equerre d'argent, European competition, Albums of Young Architects and Landscape Designers, AFEX prize (for promotion of French architects abroad), among others;
- last, the Cité makes available a host of resources to students and researchers: a specialized library, an archive center, many publications as well as digital resources (a digital doctoral library and a collaborative digital architecture encyclopedia).

The reflection of the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine on the city, extends in many directions, which correspond to society's major challenges.

I would like to give you a glimpse of them, through three projects in which we are involved: Grand Paris, the France 2025 World's Fair project and the sustainable city.

We are taking part in the thinking on the construction of Grand Paris.

In 2009, we organized an exhibition of the projects of the 10 teams, selected during the international competition, on the future of Grand Paris.

Moreover, we are members of the council of partners of the mission prefiguring the Metropolis of Grand Paris, a law on which, has scheduled implementation as of January 1, 2016.

Thinking about Grand Paris means re-evaluating ideas on density, centrality and mobility.

It also means reflecting on what creates a metropolis.

It is not certain that creating a series of clusters, linked by an automatic metro, is enough to transform Grand Paris into a metropolis.

Because the metropolis is not *agglomeration plus globalization*, it is “a new relationship between the inside and the outside of the city, between places and links, between the immaterial, the virtual and physical space¹.”

The frenchwriter Julien Gracq, remembering the city of Nantes of his boarding school years, wrote: “I was living in the heart of a city that was almost more imagined than known².”

Perhaps, what Grand Paris still basically lacks, is to become, for those who live there, a common narrative, a shared fiction, an “imagined” territory³ as Benedict Anderson writes.

I would also like to bring up the France 2025 World’s Fair project in which the Cité de l’architecture & du patrimoine is a partner.

We are supporting this project for several reasons.

First, because World’s Fairs are part of our DNA: the building we are in, the Palais de Chaillot (built in 1878 and transformed in 1937), just like our museum’s collections, are very closely linked to the history of World’s Fairs.

But if we have gotten involved, in this project, it is also because it fits in, with our own reflections on metropolization, territories, heritage and its uses, mobilities and identities.

It seems to us that creating a metropolis, also means re-thinking the question of international mobility, by making these nomad identifies, that stem from immigration, a comparative advantage, rather than an issue of safe technology.

Perhaps it is time, as professor Marc Augé suggests, to finally develop an anthropology of mobility⁴, to rethink utopia and otherness, commensurate with the widespread circulation of people and cultures.

The mobility question joins that of identities and the relationship to heritage.

The planetary standardization process, that globalization has produced, harms the identity aspect of heritage.

By removing its symbolic function, it weakens the mechanism that, according to philosopher Françoise Choay⁵, “gave their material foundation to identity and the respective differences of human societies.”

But inversely, the practices of mobile populations, enrich national heritage, by nourishing them with their own history, by investing them with their own memories.

We therefore find the idea of the “France 2025” world’s fair project very interesting, asking the guest countries to reinvest our monuments and to give them, for a few months, another meaning.

We would thus send a wonderful message to the world: that of an open identity, welcoming otherness, one that respects differences.

The third element of the France 2025 project, that interests us, is its reflection on the use of the built heritage.

Turning this heritage into museums, is not necessarily the best solution: the architect Viollet-le-Duc, our museum’s designer, to whom we are dedicating, at this moment, an exhibition, asserted that “the best way of preserving an edifice is to find a purpose for it...”⁶

The question of re-using existing buildings (as opposed to restoring or rehabilitating them, because it raises the question of transforming uses), has become a major challenge, in the context of urban mutations and the reversibility of the contemporary city.

It is in fact the very subject, of one of our exhibitions, that we are currently presenting, titled “A Building, How Many Lives?”

¹ Daniel Behar, “Comment faire métropole à l’heure de la mondialisation ?,” *Réflexions immobilières*, 50, 2009.

² Julien Gracq, *La forme d’une ville*, Paris, José Corti (1985), 2010.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin And Spread of Nationalism*.

⁴ Marc Augé, *Pour une anthropologie de la mobilité*, Paris, Payot&Rivages, 2009.

⁵ Françoise Choay, *Le patrimoine en questions*, Paris, Seuil, 2009.

⁶ Viollet-le-Duc, “Restauration,” in *Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*.

Apart from Grand Paris and the France 2025 project, the last challenge in which we are involved, is that of the sustainable city, connected to the emergence, of a shared awareness, of the world's fragility and the disappearance of many of its species.

Climate change, is only one, of the many expressions of the anthropocene era, into which we have shifted, which marks the preeminence of the influence of human activities on the planet's biophysical system.

Should we keep pursuing, the mad dream of absolute control through technology, at the cost of a phenomenal waste of resources, of a mutilating separation between the cities and the natural milieu?

Should we continue to make the technological response to risks ever more sophisticated, to strengthen earthquake resistance standards, to build ever higher dikes, to protect ourselves from tsunamis?

Hasn't the time finally come to officially recognize the failure of our way of thinking, of a blind faith in man's capacity to control nature, of a culture that, using the pretext of efficacy, has constantly separated, disjointed, isolated?

We believe in the importance of public regulation, for urban development.

The invisible hand of the market, too often leads to unchecked growth, and the increase in high-speed mobilities, which disperse our cities, and fracture our territories.

The sustainable city is a city that practices solidarity, with serene social relations, welcoming for foreigners, kind to pedestrians, resistance to trials, resilient in the face of disasters.

It is the capacity, to connect these different competencies, more than the development of a green construction industry, that will make our territories sustainable.

It is from this perspective, that the Cité de l'architecture is a partner, alongside the LOCUS Foundation, of the Global Awards for Sustainable Architecture.

For the Global Awards prizewinners, architecture is an ethical question as much as an aesthetic one, a position of resistance faced with every type of determinism, a transformation process for behaviors, more than the act of producing an object, the assertion of a high standard, more than the simple execution of a program dictated by a client.

In 1992, the Chinese minister of construction, stated that construction, would be the driving force of Chinese growth, for the decades to come.

Twenty years later, it is the development of domestic tourism, that has become a challenge, in the development of China's territories, and sustainable development one of the country's major questions: situations similar to those we have encountered in France, in the West, in many other countries and continents.

In under three decades, urban, architectural and territorial questions have been subjects that we can all share, for which we need to create common platforms, where questions and knowledge can be exchanged, and disseminated, between our different professional milieus – whether they concern technical, regulatory, social, cultural or economic competencies –, but also that of decision-makers and inhabitants.

Given the size of its population and territory, China exacerbates a good number of questions, that are ours, as well on territorial balance,

on urban frameworks and rural life and development, on those excluded from our societies, on the potential of architecture and ways to build the city.

Regional cooperation agreements, between administrative authorities, between disciplines, between countries, are to be developed to meet this powerful demand for sustainability, and one of whose major steps, lies in education, training, and the link with the inhabitants.

This is one of the Cité's roles, and why I am happy to welcome you here, to develop and strengthen, together, the cultural aspects, the social sciences in innovation and urban research.