Disneyfying Ile De France?

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-6024-4
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6024-6

To my mother, who ensured all her children had an equal chance at education, as far as each wanted to go.

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All illustrations were created by the author unless otherwise documented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research this book is based on has enabled many encounters for which I am very grateful, in particular with the librarians at the (now defunct) documentation centre of EPAMarne and EPAFrance, Line Aldebert and more recently Patricia Gressien. They were always ready to respond to my requests for information whenever I appeared in their domain. Bertrand Ousset, one of the pillars of EPAFrance and later one of its directors, was a wonderful guide over the twenty years I badgered him for knowledge, as well as Dominique Coquet on the Walt Disney Company side. I thank also the mayors of the five *communes* of Val d'Europe as well as the directors, architects and other specialists then working for EPAMarne and EPAFrance who gave of their time to be interviewed. Jean-Eudes Roullier and Jean Poulit were extremely kind to provide much insight into the project having held major decision-making positions within the French government at different stages of the construction of Marne-La-Vallée and Val d'Europe. My gratitude also goes to Christophe Mourani who guided me over the past few years as then the EPA director of the *Villages Nature* project and now councillor to the directors of the agency. Permission to use illustrations produced by EPAMarne/EPAFrance is gratefully acknowledged as well as the cartographic work of Max Oulton and the source indicated for each image used. The University of Waikato granted me a half sabbatical to conduct interviews in 2005-2006. All errors or misinterpretations, however, are my sole responsibility.

PREFACE

The project, which I have followed since the mid 1990s, has been fascinating because most critics believed the French state had bowed to every demand of the Company. Much ink flowed in the mid 1980s and then in the 1990s to disapprove of such a partnership as it would erode French culture and subject France to capitalist modes of economic exploitation. My interest was awakened in 1994 when all were happy to believe the project was doomed. I surmise that many readers are interested in discovering what has actually happened, whether the partnership still exists and where it is heading. The Company's negotiators had at first thought they could (or had) outmanoeuvre(d) the French state representatives. Unfortunately, they did not realize that the French have their own rules of the game that the Company would have to bend to.

The book's intent is to capture the history but mostly the meaning and the value of the on-going partnership between the French state and the Walt Disney Company, remembering that it involved from the start more than a tourism project. The book examines how the combined aspirations of the French state and the American Company transformed Val d'Europe as the sole potential location in Europe for the Company's theme parks while the state could hang onto its egalitarian ideals. PART I investigates the encounter between the partners and the reasons why a welfarist state encouraged penetration by a capitalist enterprise but also follows the Company's reasoning. PART II reveals the continued cooperation between the two entities in the management of the urbanization of Val d'Europe from the opening of the first Park and the start of a new major tourism development, in spite of criticisms and fluctuating attendance in the parks. PART III highlights more recent actions of the partners to create a formidable tourism pole that will attract ever more visitors, while still critically examining their effectiveness and mostly their sustainability.

Italics are used to underline or emphasize different elements when writing. I have thus maintained the *italics* used by authors when I have quoted them. I have used them myself just a few times for emphasis too. Italics are also used when a title is the "author" of a book or review. Otherwise, I have put in *italics* almost all the French names that appear in the text, when they are related with the project: names of cities, villages, companies, political entities and agencies. Whenever justified I have provided

a translation for these names. I have not italicised personal names or names that appear often such as the location of the project, Val d'Europe, within the new town of Marne-La-Vallée, or the names of the often mentioned public agencies that represent the state, the EPAs, or the name of the regional metro (RER) and the fast speed trains (TGV), which are known even to tourists. These last serve many parts of the Paris surroundings and different European countries.

INTRODUCTION

> We have to rethink the city. Look far and wide. Paris is a city that spreads way beyond the *Périphérique*, a large world metropolis. Paris is a world city. It is not just the capital of France. Its vocation is to be at the forefront of the world economy and civilisation. [The] Greater Paris [project] is a process of change to exploit all possibilities, all potentials, so Paris [remains] a world city whose name is significant to all the world's people.
> —Nicolas Sarkozy (2009)

Although the subject of this narrative is Val d'Europe, a minuscule part of Greater Paris, Val d'Europe owes its existence to governmental worries in the 1960s (and even earlier) about the growth of Paris and its role on the world stage. The *Périphérique* is the four to six lane motorway that encircles the city of Paris and effectively cuts it from surrounding suburbs and further peripheral developments, certainly in the minds of most Parisians. Although the term seems all encompassing, global cities can show marked differences depending partially on variations in the types of capitalism with which they are associated, or the type of resources available to them. A few, like Paris, have the advantage of functioning as capital cities. It has performed as the French nation's most important transport, commercial, administrative and financial hub and seeks to keep its pre-eminent (global) status. Because Paris has maintained most of its architectural heritage, this is sometimes interpreted as its incapacity to change with the times. In Paris, Haeringer (2006, 27) declared, "one renews where elsewhere they rebuild".

Paris decided to continue betting on tourism development, as part of its diversified economic growth strategy, in 1984, when the Walt Disney Company called. Economic diversity is the hallmark of vibrant cities. Diversity defines economic development, according to Jacobs (2000, 37). The French state renewed and confirmed the role of tourism with the 2010 decision to authorize the development of *Villages Nature* (a major real estate and tourism project) and to extend the *Convention* signed in 1987 until 2030, years beyond 2017, its original end date. In 2014, Laurent Fabius, a well-known political personality in France, presented an ambitious national tourism plan to entice international visitors who until then just crossed the country on their way elsewhere, to remain and spend money in France for a few days. The French state also has had to look beyond Paris and its surroundings as it realized in 1984 (when first approached by the

Company) that a major investor was an important opportunity for tourism and other forms of development in Ile de France.

Tourism has become a major facet of economic development even in wealthy countries. In France it provides 7% of the country's GDP (Institut Montaigne 2014). Tourism, or being a tourist, involves a stay away from one's usual place of residence of at least one night which separates tourists from day-trippers, and demarcates tourism from this far larger phenomenon. The difference is significant because staying overnight influences the psychological state of the participants. Tourism is the complex result of a great diversity of practices at different scales and sites. Tourists also inhabit places differently to residents because of the heterogeneity of actors and the variety and multiplicity of places that become destinations. That is why tourists are not always welcome by local residents. Yet, participation in travel continues to increase: by 7% in 2017 (UNWTO 2018b). Few local residents realize that tourists are net consumers and jobs are created to service them (hence its attractiveness to public developers) within the regions visited, which include urban spaces.

Considering that the production of urban space is not only a material but also a symbolic process (Lefebvre 1991), it is surprising there has not been more research in urban tourism. Law (2002) discussed its role in metropolitan growth but Selby (2004) was one of the first to publish on the phenomenon more generally. Urban centres, after all, are the origin of most tourists; they are also destinations for many: city trips represent 22% of all holiday travel (IPK 2016, 8). Cities are also gateways to their surrounds. Attention has focused mostly on global cities while sustainability has been largely neglected (Maxim 2016). One specialization has been more thoroughly examined: (mega) events or attractions because they are believed to play a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of tourist flows. Paris hosted the Euro Soccer competition in 2016 and is to host summer Olympic Games in 2024. It had also applied to host the 2025 Universal Exposition but later withdrew. Urban tourism, however, is part of this process of replacement of some economic activities by others and by extension of the displacement of lower income groups by wealthier ones in the name of creating spectacular spaces.

Following the success of the Frank Gehry Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, the belief emerged that flagship architectural projects, mega events or large mesmerizing attractions could assist in boosting cities' positions. When commissioning buildings by star architects, cities are in fact seeking to enhance their image on the regional and international stage, as was done in western sectors of Marne-La-Vallée. Some authors have declared that architecture is a "big thing", an assemblage of elements that can impose a

life pattern on urbanites (Cairns and Jacobs 2015; Jacobs 2006). A current of research warns that to be successful "big things" require proper governance to procure full benefits (Charnock, Purcell and Ribera-Fumaz 2014; Raco 2014). Gras (2002) commented that unfortunately social issues are often forgotten in flagship projects. Capturing Disney's parks can be considered a major coup for the French state and its mode of governance. It has certainly enhanced the presence of Paris on the world stage.

This work seeks to uncover, i.e. to explain more than just describe, some of the key elements through which a particular landscape came to exist in the Paris Basin. It means questioning a variety of actions and understanding the complex processes of conception, land use planning and construction. Decision making involves the management and coordination of multiple actors, and of strategies deployed by all stake holders to create the final product, which will not necessarily resemble what was originally intended. Coordination of multiple stakeholders is becoming a major challenge as many more groups are coming to the table: cultural institutions, schools and hospitals, technology companies and citizen groups who all have their own visions for development. Over time, rapports between the state, the market and residents evolve, changing the conditions under which decisions are made. Decision making is a fascinating topic especially when faced with the opportunity to examine the French state's adventurous welcome of what was in 1984 a somewhat important American company, a portend of capitalist globalization, according to its critics.

The project initiated by a contracted partnership is fascinating for different reasons, in particular because of the unified and major opposition to it by intellectuals on both sides of the Channel and the Atlantic. Globalisation is a discursive strategy which can justify exploitation, one of the concerns of the critics of the total support the French state seemed to have provided the Walt Disney Company (hereafter, the Company). They evoked a victoriously complete domination of the Company over a powerless state. Most believed that the French state caved in to its every demand. Not one of them ever mentioned investments, i.e. profits that the state, the region and local authorities would soon collect from taxing such a large private investment and which could then be invested in other projects such as rehabilitating the most rundown areas (so dear to some of those critics). None contemplated that a marriage between an elderly, rather rigid and bureaucratic actant and a lively young courtier might work out to the benefit of both parties.

It is fascinating also because, even though the Company was not yet a major multi-national, most of the reproach was against permitting the invasion of capitalism in a country that prides itself on its socialistic bent.

As capitalism establishes corporate control over all aspects of our lives (Habermas 1968; Ritzer 2008; Shiva 2002) but in a "naturalised" or normalised form, most economic activities have difficulty developing counter to such practices. Capitalist rhetoric insists on the impossibility of changing its ways because capitalist hegemony is the outcome of supernatural forces. However, the negative comments about the Company's invasion did not last long. A lack of real engagement on their part prevented critics from offering creative alternatives or stories for a better future. Other topics caught their attention as the Company did not make large profits from its European incursion, contrary to the scenario in Japan … but it (the scenario or the park in Japan) is not owned by the Company. The Paris region was, after all, benefitting from a major investment.

Life is a roller coaster ride … well, certainly for the Company's theme park adventure in France. After a euphorically optimistic opening and first six months, during which it welcomed almost 7 million spect-actors, grimmer times lay ahead. Not that the Park was then shunned; it welcomed more visitors per year than some European countries (e.g. Greece) or any other attraction in Europe. Those numbers, however, were insufficient to push its accounts into the black. In fact, the Company's Park bled red for many years. Bukics commented on "Disney's European adventure, a lonely financial nightmare" early in 1994. Again, more recently, *Le Parisien* headlined: "Disney to the rescue of Mickey in France" (Kremp 2014) to enable the parks (Disneyland Paris and Disney Studios) to ride out another lull in visitor numbers (down from 16 million in 2011 to 14.2 in 2014). The United States headquarters advanced a loan of €1.3 Billion to Euro Disney SCA, which manages the parks. They had already bailed it out with €907 M in 1994 and €250 M in 2005. In 22 years (up to 2014) since the opening of Euro Disneyland, the parks enjoyed only seven years in the black (Kremp 2014; *Les Echos* 2014).

The French state, on the other hand, has had a joy ride from the beginning, mostly, vindicating those who had ignored the vituperative comments by French, English and American critical journalists and intellectuals. It is fashionable in France to critique any manifestation of American or capitalist (the two are often conflated as interchangeable synonyms) global hegemony and to turn against the French government if hegemony seems to have gained the upper hand. France is, after all, supposed to uphold the ideal of an egalitarian society. Ramonet (2006) explained in Le Monde: "France is one of the only countries in Europe where, with a tremendous vitality, a majority of the workforce refuses unbridled globalization and where social integration is a fundamental characteristic of identity" (see also Pfaff 2006). It has been proven that

segregation puts a heavy cultural, psychological and political burden on those it isolates and disconnects from productive society (Baudin and Genestier 2002; Bourdieu 1993; Merlin 2010). It is also economically costly to French society (Fitoussi, Laurent and Maurice 2004).

In France, despite discourses on equity, social organization has always been characterized by hierarchical divisions. However, a sense of belonging was encouraged by a number of institutions such as schools, certain kinds of major projects (e.g. the new towns), military service while it was compulsory or sports and other recreational activities. The *banlieues* in France have become a hierarchically inferior space, even though the original meaning comes from the word ban, an expanse about a mile wide surrounding a city. They have always been opposed to city centres where urbanity is concentrated according to French citizens. *Banlieues* have been defined as "sub" or not really urban because some of them, north and north east of Paris, have contained for the past fifty years groups socially discriminated against, hence isolated especially in their large residential towers (Merlin 2010). The towers were built in the 1950s and 1960s to remedy a lack of housing for labour attracted by quickly increasing numbers of urban jobs for reconstruction after World War II: cheap rent was the main attraction. Continued economic growth salvaged their first occupants from permanent segregation.

Although the French state discourses seem to signal a desire for the integration of lower social strata and immigrant communities, as indicated by a series of laws since the 1980s to improve urban neighbourhoods, one author recently concluded that "the policies of the 'politics of the city' had been fully successful because of their double entendre" (Saragoussi 2012, 70). They actually maintained the isolation of these neighbourhoods whose inhabitants were undesirable in the eyes of the French middle and upper classes because many small and middle-size communities "did not wish to be invaded by these barbarian hordes" (p. 71, my translation; see also Donzelot, Mevel and Wyvekens 2003). Since the 1970s, the slowed economy and their occupancy by large numbers of immigrants from French ex-colonies have maintained their residents isolated in these "zones". Rachedi (2011, 18) confirms: "far from memory, away from the eyes, these suburbs have disappeared from public political debate, except upon some dramatic event … Meanwhile, their occupants feel more and more abandoned" (my translation). These pariah landscapes become invisible by virtue of their separateness. Such spatial segregation contradicts the putative values of French society: diversity and equality (Fitoussi et al 2004).

Global economic transformations have shaped how politicians have responded to bolster urban economies and to capture a larger part of

new markets and global flows. Urbanization exists within an undergirding social and political structure. That explains the call by French intellectuals for

> land use planning to produce a common good (or public benefit) and serve social progress (a form of social redistribution of the community's wealth) … It must facilitate social integration and connection to avoid the 'ghettoization' of social groups (Landrieu, Beaufils and Janvier 1999, 10-12; my translation).

For them social justice can exist only if there is social integration, though few recognize the assimilationist nature of such discourses. Social housing estates and new towns played a crucial role in the state's attempts to create a modern French citizenry through the production of space (Epstein 2011; Lefebvre 1991). Immigrant neighbourhoods had become a space of threatening cultural alterity in the mainstream French spatial imaginary.

All agglomerations, including global metropolises, compete even for one of the leisure forms of consumption, tourism. Cities have succumbed to the imperative to formulate strategies to differentiate and market themselves (Healey et al. 2002; Lukas 2007; Schmid 2009). Critiques of neoliberalism often cite case studies that exhibit instances where further injustice and inequality have resulted from reduction of the role of government, facilitating or even encouraging the spread of privatization, foreign direct investment, and market-oriented governance. Establishing a common good based on collective values of solidarity was the basis of programs run by the French state but there has been little public debate to determine what is the preferred common good (CERTU 2007b; F. Piron 2005). Lower class and especially immigrant neighbourhoods are not promoted on the world stage and are avoided by circuits of capital. Their residents have then become place-bound but Paris continues its competitive bid on the global stage.

Is Paris just a national capital or a world metropolis? Anglophone researchers tend to ignore Paris as a major urban pole, present on the economic, cultural, etc. global network. According to the Euro Monitor International, for example, Paris received half as many visitors as London in 2006, on the basis of national statistics publications, i.e. apparently non-contestable. The French capital remains isolated in the Paris basin, at least according to Florida, Gulden and Mellander (2008) who believe its competitors include metropolitan regions such as greater Tokyo with 55.1 million inhabitants; Osaka-Nagoya 36; or Rome-Mil-Turin with 48.3, which one can agree with. However, attaching Rome to Milan and Turin seems quite arbitrary and most of all attaching Lyon to Barcelona rather

than Paris, seems to diminish potential competition from Paris. Might such groupings indicate some prejudice against (or fear of) the competitivity of the French capital or is it because of its continuing "village feel", asks Haeringer (2006)?

Doel and Hubbard (2010: 365) note that "world cityness is not determined by a city's location in a pre-existing structure, but needs to be performed and worked at in a multiplicity of sites", which creates the "global space of flows, a complex and contingent achievement that inevitably requires constant attention". They continue to affirm that "we no longer live in a space of places, but in a global space of flows". Space, hence, has lost some of its agency as support for world status. Emerging cities function as key nodes in an intensifying network of global relationships. Each city is no longer a bounded spatial entity but a network of social relations, itself the result of actions and multiple varied resources. Cities, though, are not just mere connecting points (of social, economic or other kinds of networks). They also constantly activate and nourish those flows.

Figure 0-1: One of the multiple sites of the Manhattan skyline, reimagineered by the Company in the eastern Paris Basin.

Paris had already become a metropolis, whether metropolisation is defined as an extension through space, economic growth, restructuration of the city so that workers have to commute from further and further away, a redistribution of urban functions across its territory, or maybe some or all of these, and more recently participating as a node in the global network of

flows. Beaverstock, Smith and Taylor (1999) drew up a roster of world cities on the basis of multiple networks (e.g. accountancy, advertising, banking, insurance, law and management consultancy firms) in which Paris appears in the Alpha (top) tier of global connectivity with London, New York and Tokyo. More recently a study on liveability placed it 4th in the world (Newton 2012). In fact, French authorities have been planning for a Greater Paris (see AMC 2009; Sarkozy 2009). Ile de France can compete as a global city because it contains numerous activities and resources, including those provided by the Disney parks, as well as a large part of the French population. Paris is thus a world metropolis thanks to the resources accumulated there, which had been facilitated by central government policies over several centuries.

Today, Paris concentrates a larger number of economic functions, centres of innovation, means of production and consumers as well as more of the country's wealth than in 1980 at the expense of other French cities, Marseille in particular (Sassen 2006). These mega regions are not the result of artificial political boundaries, nor are they just simply bigger cities. World cities are part of a global set of relations, an ensemble of the economic, political and cultural moments which are also shaped by the changing fortunes of capital. They are polycentric assemblages of urban areas and their hinterlands, emergent entities. A world city is always a work in progress, stretching well beyond the boundaries of the city as it brings relations into being. Apparently capital and talent concentrate where profitable opportunities are greatest, leading to competition between these world cities for the capture of wealth and talent. Paris is powerful, important (cf. the Company's investments) and a world leader in many domains.

So … does regulation through public authorities have a role in anchoring circuits of capital that will develop tourism and create economic growth without widening yet further income disparity and social inequalities? Is economic growth the only purpose? Successful regulation means that capital accumulation is accompanied by social benefits, i.e. the capital circuit becomes geographically stabilized and sustainable, functioning as an economic locomotive and the landscape is made more permanent. The free market is an indispensable element of democratic systems but it cannot resolve crises of accumulation when it lacks institutionalized rules for sustainable conduct. The creation and growth of sustainable regional economies result not just from atomized decisions of private productive firms, be they global or local, such as the Company, but also from a "politics of space" (Storper 1997) or the social regulation practiced, at the national, regional and local levels.

For the French state, based on the notion of new urban imaginaries, recast within the changing cultural economy and new technologies of communication, the Company was a successful enterprise whose continued growth the French government desired to foster because many of the government's projects could benefit from such a partnership. “You [The Company] are a prestigious partner, creative, enterprising and methodical. Implementing with you this major project is for us a guarantee of success” declared Jacques Chirac, Prime Minister of France, when he signed the 1987 Convention (*Libération* 25 March 1987). It would certainly revitalise the state’s new town programme, in particular in Marne-La-Vallée. The state recognised that great changes were re-inventing urban landscapes. Val d’Europe could participate in such evolution, of which Dubai has become the ultimate “dreamwork” (Jackson and della Dora 2011, 98). Roy (2009, 831) insists that “Dubai is the lodestone of desires and aspirations, the icon of supermodernity in … a dream world of neoliberalism”.

The state, in opposition to the intellectuals it subsidizes and who agreed with Roy’s critique of neoliberalism, concluded that the Company was a capitalist venture in search of increased profits which could be taxed. Such a major investor would then attract businesses and residents to the East of the Paris Basin. It would help turn France towards, giving support to, the new but growing markets of Eastern Europe. It would also boost the French economy by providing jobs. Has it meant a preference for market-enhancing over socially redistributive strategies through a subtle process of strategic prioritisation and exclusion (silencing any criticism)? Neoliberal practices may be misrepresented as automatic, self-actualizing feats. Critical studies have revealed that neoliberalism is not necessarily a homogeneous phenomenon always successfully squashing other practices. It is heterogeneous and hybrid, operating at different sites and at different scales and often has to compromise with local conditions (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010), as the Company discovered in France.

Many governments have identified planning as an appropriate device to address social objectives, environmental protection, and landscape enhancement (Boyer 1983; Castells 1977; Girardon 2010; Ward 1994). Beauregard (1990) and Friedmann (1987) had emphasized the morality of planning, its goals of social justice and redistribution. One of the biggest challenges to the development of less wasteful and more resilient forms of urbanization is the nature of city planning itself (see also Sibley 1998). Sennett (1996) critiqued planning’s obsession for order and predictability, which prevents surprise encounters; but then planning was not yet required to “be equipped to provide answers that are satisfactory for the dilemmas of difference” (Sandercock 1998, 21). Modern planning aims to rationalize

urban development towards minimally acceptable form and design standards. The challenge is to create a new concept of planning, which would move from prescriptive codes to more flexible, performance-based design and development policies, pronounced Frenchman (2014).

Planning in the face of the crisis of modernist urbanism need not signify a retreat from dreaming utopian alternatives, although it has often been accused of authoritarian production of spaces that deny differences. The public sector has generally been disparaged by neo-liberal trans- and multi- nationals but the French state and its representatives have always believed in state intervention and state planning. They strategized land use development to control private investment necessary to fulfil the state's vision and from which profits could be reinvested. They were following Gottdiener (1997) who had remarked that "the basic dynamic of capitalist development today is to generate new capital once products have materialized". The state is present even where unexpected. The informalized process of urbanization at the edges of the world's largest cities continues, in spite of state plans, because the state accepts that it happens (Roy 2009).

The Paris Basin has not been immune to dramatic crisis-driven urban restructuring. From the early sixties working and lower middle classes had found themselves progressively banished to outlying *banlieues*, to places like *Mourenx* (a planned housing development for employees of the nearby gas plant at *Lacq*, built by the gas extracting firm), or to new giant high-rise housing estates, *grands ensembles*, that peppered peripheral Paris and other big French towns. French cities had lost their sense of creative and collective integrative purpose as they denied working classes complete participation in urban life. The restructuring studied in this book, however, does not overlay or articulate with the old: Val d'Europe (the last section of the new town of Marne-La-Vallée to be urbanized; figure 0-4) is a brand new urban development, a kind of "terra-forming," defined by Jackson and della Dora as "creation, rather than simple transformation" (2011, 99).

At the same time, even when it occurs, economic success does not last forever. The ranking of any one city needs to be performed in an ever-shifting context. Any achievement is essentially precarious. To remain vital, economies need to continually assess their assets and liabilities, redeploy their unique qualities, capacities and comparative advantages and redefine their vulnerabilities. It has become truer as capitalism's most lasting product is new landscapes, which, in many places, it has rendered impermanent, forever exhibiting a new repertoire. The mobility of companies today can increase the fragility of local economies. As more entities participate in local development, they might motivate a search for new ways to manage

the complex challenges and to reduce uncertainty. But perhaps it can also support the discovery of the pleasures of wishful projections, the opening of perspectives on what might be.

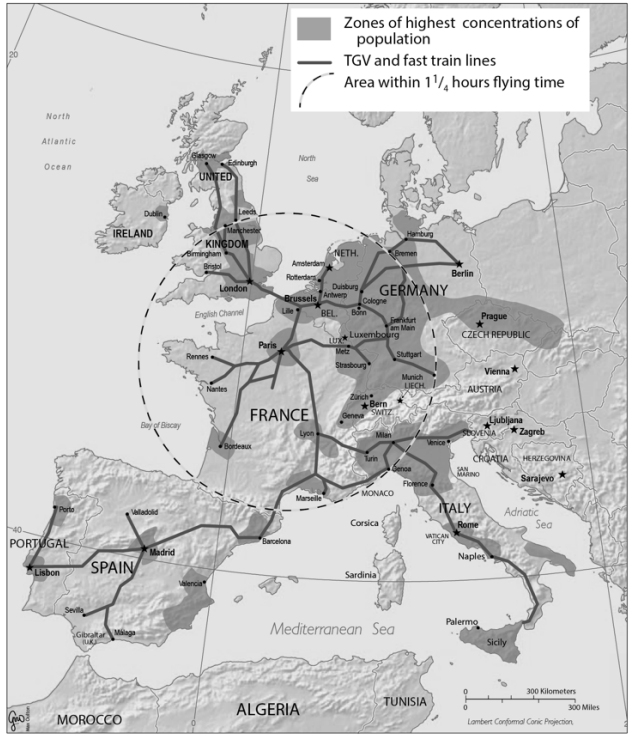

Figure 0-2: Disneyland Paris in Europe. Map drawn by Max Oulton.

Circumstances have sometimes offered unexpected opportunities for development. Lefebvre has theorized such possibilities as “moments” as early as 1925, which he tied to the emergence of new situations such as unexpected investment decisions. He said that moments appear simmultaneously as impossibilities, and as the heady thrill of chance, an “attempt to achieve the total realization of a possibility", however fleeting and relative it might be (Lefebvre 2003, 348). His “theory of moments” demonstrates the limits of the political desire for total control and search for mastery. Moments enable urban development to escape the straight jacket of linear evolution and its homogenizing effects (Lefebvre 1991). He also

insisted that cities should be inspiring places that people inhabit; Lefebvre uses the word "inhabiting" to evoke urban living as becoming, as growing, as something dynamic and progressive. Cities can obtain such a brighter and richer outcome by seizing Lefebvre's moments.

The Situationist movement, born in 1958 and led by Debord in the 1960s, had been sensitive to the usefulness of moments. At first the Situationists denounced how banal urban life had become (Simay 2008). Potlatch (1954) complained that "one's existence has to take place in barracks and the 1950s house is a box" referring to the cement housing slabs and towers, these large housing units whose total lack of aesthetics and whose functional architecture imposed a normalized way of life, through its mass production; so the housing units had become "machines for living". The movement had already foreseen a city constituted by "grand situations", using the subversive power of carnivalization, which the introduction of the Magic Kingdom© continued. They believed the everyday needed to be reinvented, to become more joyful (Lefebvre 1981 [1946]). The mandate was to invent innovative ways of living, offering eventification as one solution. The Situationists envisioned the construction of theatrical "situations" influenced by the emerging New York happening as well as modern theatre artists such as Brecht and Artaud (Simay 2008). Because Debord had found Lefebvre's moments too abstract, he used them to fabricate local situations (see Hess 1988). They were creative encounters, organized within existing urban areas that would transform them into more congenial habitat.

The movement did not reconstruct cities to provide an improved environment instead they relied on creating zones for free play, which explains their short lived influence. Experience qualities can be connected to urban design, where particular designs stimulate citizens' learning and activity within the existing urban space. They can thus be connected to large scale tourist related projects of experiential mass consumption as in the case of the Disney parks. Some state representatives underlined that the planning role of system maintenance could be expanded to include even more features of social policy formation. Policy-makers have then attempted to capitalize on service-sector advantages, including new leisure activities and real estate development (planning for tourism has been attractive because tourist destinations combine these elements). It was their way of dealing with otherwise intractable economic and social problems in the face of a continuing decline of manufacturing in western urban areas.

The Company's desire for a location in Europe was such a Lefebvrian moment, an opportunity to be seized, notion grasped by several high level government employees such as Jean Poulit, Michel Giraud and

Jean Séramy. Marne-La-Vallée was the French state's trump card. The urban area developed by the partnership in Val d'Europe would become their experimental utopia, a sort of crossroads of magic and positivism, supported by the Company. Those persons who worked for the French state in the early 1980s enabled it to win in every way because they demonstrated more imaginary vision than the intellectuals who critiqued the project. Mannheim (1929) believed that imaginary or utopian vision can cause social change. It can anticipate a better world already here in society (Bloch 2000) as it creates powerful stories that act from within. Narratives by planners and/or members of government carry visions.

The partnership has created issues about power, leisure, government priorities, representation, quality of life and environmental footprint. Val d'Europe is marketed as an idyllic landscape that offers a variety of lifestyle fantasies (EPAMarne/EPAFrance 2017a). Has it become the new neoliberal urban utopia or is it just reasserting a sense of place and community? The project has had impacts on the space it occupies and on its occupants (past, present and future) but has not been security obsessed like other new urban peripheral developments: no gated communities here. This is not to deny that walls exist in France but they generally surround individual properties rather than multiple occupant residential enclaves. The state still dictates how more vulnerable members of society (c.f. 20% of housing must be for low income occupants) should be included. The project has also impacted the organization of everyday life and representations of modes of living but not by following an American inspired alterity (d'Hauteserre 2013).

The French state was not interested in a temporary speculative investment disruptive of its surroundings. Much French urban planning has sought to escape from urban ills through selective regeneration, even if most French municipalities struggle with their multi-cultural identity and new, more complex power relations. Urban design characterized by inclusive processes to diminish or eliminate practices of exclusion is difficult to achieve. Val d'Europe was an opportunity to experiment on a large scale, thanks to a major investor, with progressive politics that seek social integration. Large theme parks, like mega events, seemed to promise potential economic development of the areas they localize in, through more jobs. This new geographic landscape in Val d'Europe, though, was produced not just by private capital to be dismantled at capital's whim (Harvey 1989a), but by the synergetic action of several different agents. Capital has had to negotiate with government the design of its commodified landscape, the continued organization of which has also been subject to pressures by its potential consumers.

Val d'Europe lies at the intersection of different realities that interact in complex and sometimes messy ways: neoliberal forces seeking profits through further investment in its tourism potential, a continued pressure by the Company but also by private commercial and industrial enterprises who have invested there; local (urban and rural) residents looking for or maintaining sustainably liveable environments but also the value of their investments in their dwellings (Brevet 2011; CERTU 2007c); and a national government with a social welfare mandate but potentially more interested in aggrandizing the image of Paris on the global stage: Paris seems to be the foremost world tourism destination but competition is stiff. In order for Paris to keep its pole position, the Val d'Europe tourism cluster invests in research and innovation to encourage new initiatives and to train future tourism professionals (Kinkela 2015, 34).

The partners were to reactivate the new town vision in the far sector (IV) of one of the original new towns, Marne-La-Vallée, sector named Val d'Europe by Jean Poulit, one of the promoters on the French side of this partnership. He envisioned it would spark into life the stalled urbanization of Marne-La-Vallée. He believed in economic development more than in just a tourism function for that site, whatever the size or future of the attraction(s); he was though firmly in favour of the introduction in France of the Company and in that particular site. Val d'Europe inaugurated in the 1980s a new orientation in the Paris Basin: at the local level, to balance growth of its western side. At the European level, it would signal an opening for economic and other kinds of exchanges in support of the recently freed countries of Eastern Europe. It would also affirm the position of the French capital on the world stage.

Once installed in France, the Company applied its American methods and outlook. Hence, it took a financial abyss (in 1994) to convince its American management to take French perspectives into account, so the project would become successful for both entities. The Company, for example, ignored European cultural differences. It also had no longer felt compelled to follow the dictates of the *Convention* and its associated plan (*Projet d'intérêt général, PIG*) once the infrastructure and the theme park were built. Unfortunately for the Company, the *Convention* mostly spelt out French rules and regulations which it would have to comply with any way, even if there were no contract. A few points were raised too through time because every so often each of the main stakeholders insisted on its perspective. It gave rise to major discussions but they often improved the original plan (interviews of architects and officials 2005; 2006).