

How to restrain urban sprawl? The French way

With more than 63 millions of inhabitants, France is one of the most populated country in Europe and, with a rate of population increase near 0,4 per thousand since the last 10 years, one of those which population increases the most. Fortunately, France is also one of the largest country in Europe (550 000 km²) and comparing with some of its neighbours, the Netherlands for example, space consumption has longly not been considered as a problem. Until the last decade French people only used to complain about the so called "mitage" ("moth-eating") for aesthetical reasons. It was more a question of landscape consumption than space consumption, and the struggle against "mitage" have been a major question for urban planing in rural areas since the 1970s.

Nevertheless, the spread of sustainable development related preoccupations has little by little set ahead the question of urban sprawl from now on considered as an important problem. So, for example, the "Grenelle de l'Environnement", an important though involving a lot of actors of French society and devoted to environmental and sustainability issues launched in summer 2007, led to stress on the question of urban sprawl and to try to improve the tools to measure and limit this hard to control phenomenon.

1. Urban sprawl in France.

Before presenting the different tools France has built, and try to improve, to fight against urban sprawl perhaps should we give some information about this phenomenon and its reasons in France.

In developping countries urban sprawl is due to the flood of people trying to flee poverty, coming from rural areas and hoping to find some facilities, jobs and freedom in big cities. These countrymen gather in these cities or in their outskirts, living in very bad conditions, in a lack of the more essential public utilities (water, sewage, energy...). In these countries urban sprawl consists in the the fast and uncontrolled development of cities with a construction of poor and precarious settlements in the outskirts.

In France, the situation is far different. Briefly we can say that a flight to the far outskirts takes over from the rush to suburbs. Considering the urbanisation of France since the Second world war, we must note, after the war and up to the 1970s, the development around the cities of districts of modern flats (type of urban planning and design inspired by the modernist movement) dedicated to the middle class or supposed to become so. From the middle of the 1970s, due to the State policy but also to the wish of the middle classes for a different type of housing, the french rush to the suburbs has led to the decline of the modern distric becoming trouble districts and to the spread of a single family dwellings belt around the cities.

Since the 1990s the cities try to slow down this movement and to maintain green spaces and pay more attention to the welcome of activities than to that of new inhabitants. This local policies are one of the multiple reasons of the tremendous increase of land and real estate prices that occures in France since about ten years. So we can see a double movement : on the one hand the upper classes go on with their reconquest of the city centers (gentrification) and, on the other hand, the middle and lower classes are forced to go always further to find housing, especially if they want to become private owner. The environmental, social and even economical consequences of this situation are now well known: increase of length and duration of daily commutings, increase of the budget dedicated to transport, increase of car use, urban congestion, pollution, increase of urban segregation, increase of space consumption, destruction of landscape....

But if the consequences of this movement are well known, the way to slow it down are more difficult to find.

To simplify, we could say that since fifteen years, France has been developing two kinds of tools which could contribute to control urban sprawl and the implementation of a more harmonious urban development :

- the first one deals with the governance of the territories, it consist in urging the municipalities to go further in intermunicipal cooperation;
- the second one is related to the renewal of urban planning, especially with the Act of December 13th 2000 relating solidarity and urban renewal (*Loi Solidarité et renouvellement Urbain, SRU*) which renews the french strategic and local planning by introducing *SCoT* (*Schéma de Cohérence territoriale*) and *PLU* (*Plan Local d'Urbanisme*).

2. Territorial Governance, deepening intermunicipal cooperation

In France, since 1983, urban planning and local land use regulations are a local responsibility of the municipalities (*commune*). Despite some attempts during the last two centuries, the number of municipalities is still very important (around 36700) and the municipalities are often small and not much populated. This heritage from the *Révolution française* and even from the *Ancien Régime* (through the parish) is one of those frenchpeople are the most binded to. One important thing to note is that whatever the size or the population, the municipal competencies are the same and, in fact, rather important. Through a large range of compulsory and optional competencies they are in fact in charge of a lot of domains of daily life: education, sport, leisure, social help, social housing, safety, health, public utilities and facilities... Concerning spatial planning and local land use regulations, we must remember that it is one of the municipal major competencies because of its impact on the territorial development and the land value. By changing a simple line on a local plan the major can change the value of a plot by 10 or 100; we must recognize that it is an important contribution to his local power. At last, it's important to note that if for a long time the State has closely controlled the municipalities with juridical, regulation an financial manners, since the decentralisation movement in the 1980s it is no more the case and the municipalities are responsible for the elaboration of their spatial planning documents : strategic plan (*SCoT*) and local plan (*PLU*) and its land use regulations.

The small average size of French municipalities is often considered both by politicians and citizens as a democratic asset but we must concede that for a great part of their competencies the municipal scale is for a long time no more the right one.

As it appeared that the merger of municipalities is very difficult because of the attachment of french people and politicians to their municipality, France has developed inventive approaches to intermunicipal cooperation to try to meet the needs of society since the industrial revolution of the 19th century and its urban consequences: development of services, infrastructure and facilities, town planning management and organisation of economic and urban development.

The first type of intermunicipal relation was implemented by the State in the late 19th century with the Act of March 22th 1890 creating *syndicat intercommunal à vocation unique (SIVU)*, an intermunicipal cooperation structure with a single purpose. These concerned "intermunicipal management" for technical services (water, sewerage, waste, public transport, etc.), social services or public facilities (hospitals). Throughout the 20th century, the State increased the possible type and scope of intermunicipal cooperation by prioritising more integrated forms of cooperation especially to deal with urban planning and economical development. This started in the late 1950s but accelerated in the 1990s. The key point was to develop new kinds of intermunicipal cooperation structures dedicated to the implementation of real "intermunicipal projects" in different fields such as economic, social, environmental or town planning issues. Rural and urban *communes* have largely seized these different opportunities for intermunicipal cooperation. This has resulted in the

proliferation of intermunicipal cooperation structures. In the 1990s, the State noted the complexity of and the lack of transparency in intermunicipal cooperation and tackled this problem with the Act of 12th July 1999 (referred to as the *Loi Chevènement*) relating to strengthening and simplifying intermunicipal cooperation. More recently, the Act of 13th August 2004 relating to local freedoms and responsibilities aimed to simplify the legal framework for intermunicipal cooperation.

There are now three types of intermunicipal cooperation structuresⁱ with their own taxation (*Taxe Professionnelle Unique*) or additional taxation. They all have at least two areas of responsibility: land use and economic development. The *Communautés Urbaines* concern cities of more than 500,000 inhabitants. They have a large field of compulsory responsibilities, including spatial planning. The *Communautés d'Agglomération* concern urban areas with 50,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. The *Communautés de communes* are reserved for areas with less than 50,000 inhabitants. These three kinds of *communauté* can be in charge of urban planning as a compulsory competency for the first one and as an optional one the the others.

Development of intermunicipal cooperation structures from 1965 to 2006

(Source: *Ministère de l'Intérieur/DGCL*)

	1965	1972	1980	1990	1995	2000	2008
<i>SIVU</i>	n/a	9289	10974	12900	14490	14885	11921
<i>SIVOM</i>	209	1243	1.962	2280	2298	2165	1468
<i>Syndicats mixtes</i>		153	439	750	1107	1154	2921
<i>Districts</i>	40	95	147	165	324	241	
<i>SAN (syndicat d'agglomération nouvelle)</i>			9	9	9	9	5
<i>Communautés urbaines</i>		9	9	9	9	12	14
<i>Communautés d'Agglomération</i>						50	171
<i>Communautés de communes</i>					756	1533	2393

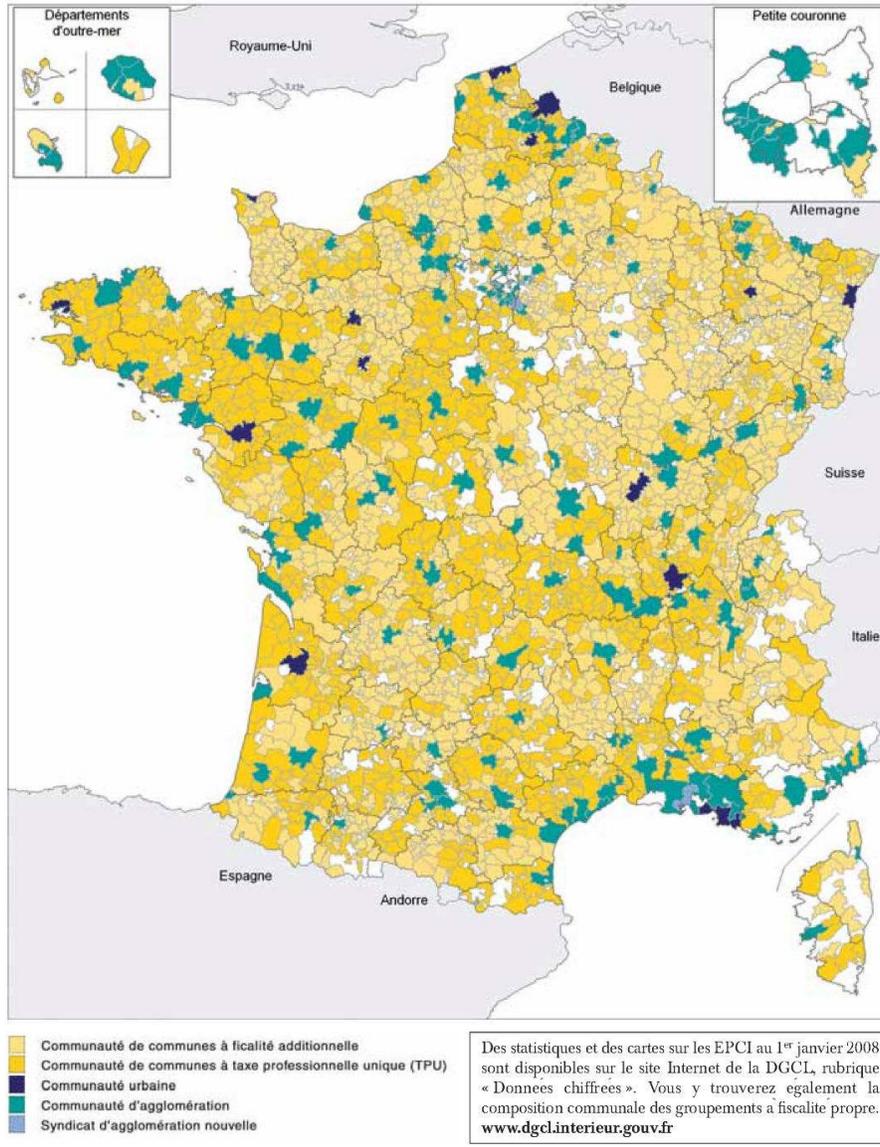
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On January 1st, 2008, more than 33,500 of the 36,700 French *communes*, covering around 90% of the French population, were members of a municipal cooperation structure with its own taxation. 50% of these *communes* were concerned by the *taxe professionnelle unique* (TPU).

This question is a very important one because the *taxe professionnelle*ⁱⁱ (tax on local companies whose rate is freely fixed by each municipality) is an important income for the municipal budget. When implementing a TPU the *Communautés (urbaines, d'agglomération or de communes)* replace communes for collection of the *taxe professionnelle* and fix a single rate for the entire area. This solution avoids competition between municipalities to attract companies and encourages financial solidarity between the municipalities. It can lead to a better planification of the implementation of economical activities. Indeed, when travelling in France one can note that each French municipality tries to attract companies by developing a zone dedicated to welcome activities. This multiplication of that kind of "zone d'activités", often half empty, participates to urban sprawl all the more since they often offer much space for that purposeⁱⁱⁱ. When cooperating through a *communauté* and especially when sharing TP, the municipalities often develop a single "zone d'activité communautaire" instead of several municipal ones and it's already a good contribution to the struggle against urban sprawl.

L'INTERCOMMUNALITÉ À FISCALITÉ PROPRE AU 1^{er} JANVIER 2008

2 583 EPCL, soit 171 CA, 14 CU, 2 393 CC et 5 SAN ;
33 636 communes, soit 91,7 % des communes ;
54 557 940 habitants, soit 86,7 % de la population française.



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illustration 1: Intermunicipal cooperation structures with own taxation in France on, January 1st 2008 (intermunicipal *communautés*)
(source: Ministère de l'Intérieur/DGCL)

3. A renewal of spatial planning with the SRU Act, SCoT and PLU

With its first planning law, the Act of December 30th 1967 (*Loi d'orientation foncière, LOF*) France introduced two kinds of spatial planning tools, a strategic plan, the *Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme (SDAU)* and a local plan, the *Plan d'Occupation des Sols (POS)*.

These two documents have been organized the same way: a presentation report which describes the area and urban development trends and a zoning plan. These spatial planning documents organised space development at two scales. At the level of metropolitan areas (defined by the local State representative, the *Préfet*) the SDAU defined the major strategic planning aims and their spatial location, at the local level (*commune*) the POS organized the land use and the local urban planning regulations. POS were supposed to be compatible with SDAU. These planning documents were developed by the State planning departments (*Direction Départementale de l'Équipement*, local services of the Ministry of Public works) except for the main cities where public planning agencies were created (with the State financial support). These plans were acted by *Préfet* (so by the State representative) after consulting local authorities.

The decentralisation movement, in the 1980s, did not change this system much, even if these spatial planning documents became acted by local authorities after consulting the *Préfet*. The name of the SDAU was changed into a simple *schéma directeur (SD)* but, in fact, planning tools and methods were not removed. We must admit that, in many cases SD stayed unlistened documents, were not taken into consideration any more even if not abolished. So, we can consider that, for two decades, most of french cities had no actually strategic plan and, further more, no actually strategic urban development policy. In fact, POS was often considered as the only useful spatial planning tool, establishing local land use regulations.

Nethertheless, step by step the need emerged during the 1990s for a renewal of spatial planning, first from the State which launched the *Directives Territoriales d'Aménagement (DTA)*, Act of February 4th 1995, *Loi d'orientation pour l'aménagement durable du territoire* were the State released its own stakes for strategic areas (national transportation network projects, national public facilities policies, landscape and environment protection...) and prescribed elements to be taken into account in local plans. At the same time, municipalities were urged to develop territorial projects and strategies, to increase project based intermunicipal cooperation. Perhaps should we also stress on the introduction of methods and way of thinking coming from the private sector into public administration and public authorities. So, like for intermunicipal cooperation, the renewal of spatial planning insisted on projects and strategies.

The SRU Act (*Loi solidarité et renouvellement urbains*, December 13th 2000) amended by the UH Act (*Loi Urbanisme et Habitat*, July 2nd 2003) introduced two new spatial planning tools replacing the old ones: the SCoT (*Schéma de Cohérence territoriale*) and the PLU (*Plan Local d'Urbanisme*). As we will see further, if the SCoT is by law an intermunicipal thought and document, it is not the case for the PLU.

3.1. Strategic planning at intermunicipal level, the SCoT

The SCoT is the key procedure used in strategic assessment and planning at intermunicipal level. It is drawn up on the initiative of the *commune* or a intermunicipal cooperation structure which defines the scope, decreed by the *Préfet* after verifying its appropriateness. It is then drawn up, implemented and monitored by an intermunicipal cooperation structure (a *communauté* or an intermunicipal *syndicat*) involving the municipalities and intermunicipal cooperation structures included in the scope that has been defined. The SCoT project is

decided upon and approved by the intermunicipal cooperation structure that has developed it, following discussions and a public inquiry.

The *SCoT* sets out the guidelines for development in the territory within the framework of a long-term sustainable development vision (10-15 years) and its objective is to promote coherent public programmes through cooperation between the various local authorities responsible for the concerned area. This strategic planning document sets out the general guidelines on organising space, restructuring urbanised areas and creating a balance between urban areas, areas due for urban development, farmland, natural environment and woodland. It is thus the primary document for dealing with land issues upstream of development, mainly through a land management policy ensuring its recommendations are implemented. Nonetheless, the *SCoT* does not include a land-use plan or define precise land-use regulations, but rather set spatial planning guidelines.

A *SCoT* is made up of three documents:

- a presentation report;
- a *Plan d'Aménagement et de Développement Durable (PADD)*, which sets out objectives for public policy on urban planning, housing, economic development, leisure facilities, transportation and conservation of the natural environment;
- a *Document d'Orientations Générales (DOG)* which contains general guidelines, stipulations that must be taken into account by other local spatial planning documents (especially *PLUs* but also lots of documents in different fields) and with which development projects must be compatible.

When interested in the content of these documents we can note that the question of the struggle against urban sprawl is always the very crucial point of the *PADD*. Politics and urban planners try to imagine new kinds of metropolitan areas, preserving green spaces and agricultural activities. Some imagine metropolitan areas with “green cuts”, cities with “urban fields”, or wish more dense cities, a “polycentric” development or the organisation of urban development around transportation axis or around railway or “multimodal” stations. The speeches and the visions can be rather different, the aim is still the same: how to restrain urban sprawl? But we can also add that one important question still remains: how to implement these nice visions?

3.2. Spatial planning at the municipal level, the *PLU*

The *PLU* is an urban planning document which, at the level of the *commune* or a intermunicipal cooperation structure, sets out an overall urban planning project and, as a result, specifies the general rules governing land use within the territory in question at the level of the plot. In fact, this text is based on information from the land register.

It is drawn up on the initiative and under the responsibility of the relevant *commune* or intermunicipal cooperation structure. The municipal council (*Conseil municipal*) debates the general guidelines of the *PADD* at least two months before the draft *PLU* is examined by the associated public bodies, discussed and then subject to a public inquiry before being approved by the municipal council.

A *PLU* is made up of:

- A presentation report, which may include an environmental assessment and a provisional schedule for opening up undeveloped areas to urbanisation and construction of the amenities required;
- A *PADD*, which outlines the urban planning project for the territory in question and defines the general planning and urban development guidelines;
- If appropriate, planning guidelines applying to certain neighbourhoods or sectors, relative to building and development operations and reflecting the local authority's commitment to specific action or operations;

- A regulatory text and related graphics, defining the limits of urban areas, areas to be urbanised, farmland, natural environments or woodland and setting the general rules and constraints on land use easements.

While the *PADD* is not directly enforceable for urban development authorisation requests, since building and development operations simply have to be in line with the development guidelines defined, the regulations and related graphics are enforceable for any public or private legal entity, for the execution of any works or building.

The regulations set out rules that have a strong influence on land supply and value, defining the possible allocation of land within the area of the *commune* (zoning, land use ratio, reserved sites, etc.) together with urban shape, *via* height and alignment rules. In addition, it may institute easements (for which land owners receive no compensation) by defining the perimeter within which building works of a certain scale are blocked pending adoption of a general development project, or reserving land or sectors for specific uses (social housing, roads, engineering works or amenities for general use or green spaces, etc.)

Finally, approval of the *PLU* opens the way for implementation of land use procedures, such as the scope of the right of preemption in urban areas, easements or reserved sectors and the land use ratio. However, if there is no local plan this implies construction restrictions, *i.e.* building may be prohibited outside areas that already have amenities and in line with existing urbanisation.

In fact, within the scope of an existing *SCoT* or/and the one of its *PADD*, *PLU* (and the former *POS*) can appear as the good regulatory tool to restrain urban sprawl if wished. But, as we know, this tool is in the hands of the mayors, and they have to compromise with the land owners – who are also their electors – and their strategies. One important thing to note is that, in the outskirts, the land owners (often farmers) try to increase their land properties suitable to be built. The difference of price between a plot described by the *PLU* as for agricultural use and a plot suitable to be built can be from 1 to 500 and France don't have any juridical tool to oblige a land owner to sell and no fiscal one to get back even a single part of the appreciation of the land for the owner. In fact if they have a plot in a zone described by the *PLU* as suitable to be built landowners are often well advised to keep it and (so as to) try to have another plot in the same kind of zone. It's the reason why the best plots for building, around the city centers, are not sold and then not built and why there is much pressure to have more distant plots turned into buildable ones. Land ownership can be a good way to make easy money and for land farmers to have capital when retiring or to give to their childrens. In this context *POSs*, or *PLUs*, often define rather important zones suitable to be built, taking into account an important "land retention rate", and it's a major reason for the difficulty to restrain urban sprawl.

4. The development of *SCoTs* , an encouraging state

By law, the municipalities or their groups (if the spatial planning competency has been delegated to an intermunicipal cooperation structure) have to define an area (approved by the *Préfet*) for the development of their *SCoT*. For this area, a public body, an intermunicipal cooperation structure is built, grouping together all the municipalities and the intermunicipal cooperation structures involved. This public body (often a *syndicat mixte*) can develop this spatial planning document by itself or give this task to a public (*agence d'urbanisme* for example) or private design office. This public body, managed by a board of elected representatives delegated by the public authorities involved, will live after the development of the document and will be in charge of its implementation, evaluation and, if the case, review ten years later. So, we can see that *SCoT* consist in a strategic planning document and thought but could also be considered as a tool for territorial organization.

Dynamique de l'avancement des SCOT au 1/1/2007

Source: DGUHC/DDE

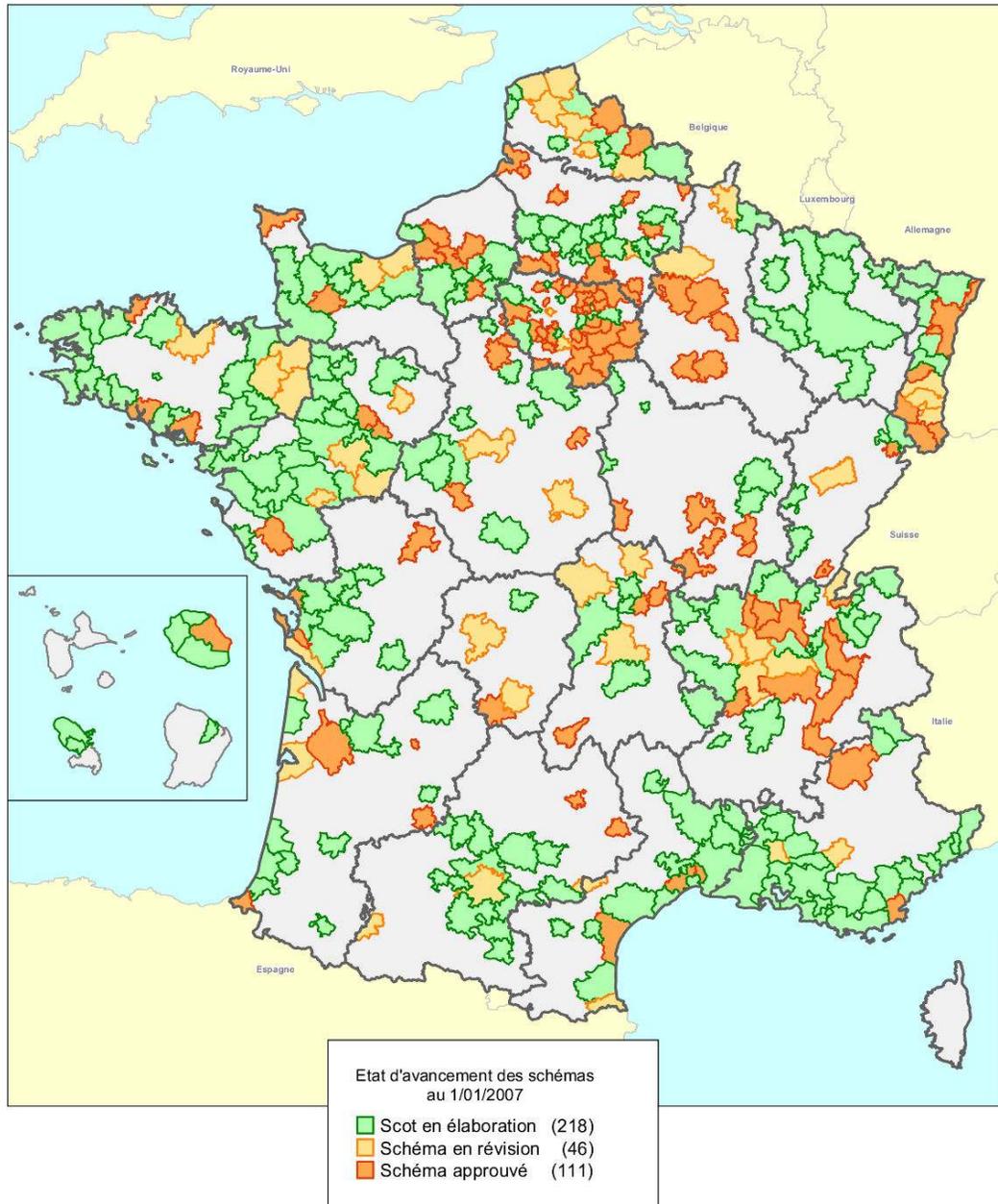


illustration 2: State of development of strategic plans on January 1st 2008 (approved, in development or in review process documents)
(Source: MEEDDAT/DGUHC)

Through the development of this strategic planning document, the public body in charge of can actually develop a political project which will be explained in the *PADD* and turned into general guidelines in the *DOG*. It will also be in charge of its implementation, evaluation and, if the case, review. In fact, this public body will be the local authority politically in charge of the urban development policy of the area concerned, it is the reason why, the definition of the area for the development of the *SCoT* appears as a major political decision.

Figures

The SRU Act introduced the possibility for existing *SD* to stay in use until December 1st 2010 when they must give way to a *SCoT*. So if we want to take stock of the state of strategic plans in France, mixing together *SCoT* and *SD*, we can note that on January 1st 2008, there are 126 approved documents, 44 in a reviewing process and 187 *SCoT* in development (the illustration above is drawn on the basis of January 1st 2007 figures). In an other way, we can say that around 17000 municipalities, which correspond to about 41 millions of inhabitants (2/3 of France's population) live on an area in which a *SCoT* or a *SD* is under construction or already available.

We must note that because of the local elections of March 2008, 2007 is a year when, on the one hand, relatively few *SCoTs* have been launched and, on the other hand, many *SCoTs* have been approved (27 during a single year compared to 26 approved on January 1st 2007). We can consider that with the year 2007 and the local elections of March 2008 ends what we can call a "first generation" of *SCoTs*. This "first generation" of *SCoTs* concerns 3201 municipalities and more than 9 millions of inhabitants, or around 15% of French population. The duration of the development of this documents, from the definition of the area to the final approval is around 5 to 6 years (the duration of a local mandate).

Governance

When looking at the definition of the *SCoTs*' areas we can identify two types of situations

- some are the same as the area of an existing intermunicipal cooperation structure (*communauté urbaine, communauté d'agglomération, communauté de commune* or a simple *syndicat*) and we can note that in this case the existing intermunicipal cooperation structure has got the competency for strategic planning;
- some group together different municipalities and intermunicipal cooperation structures, and a new intermunicipal cooperation structure (a *syndicat mixte*) has been especially built for this purpose and its is sole competency.

In the first case the existing intermunicipal cooperation structure has already built its political balance and its own way of working, so the work on strategic planning issues can start rather easily. Nevertheless, in the second case things are sometimes far more difficult and it takes time to negotiate, know each others, built a shared culture so as to be sure that the voice of each municipality will really be eared and then to start working.

SCoTs' areas and urban areas

We can note that all the metropolitan areas containing more than 50.000 inhabitants had a strategic plan (approved or under developpment) on January 1st 2007. Considering the number of municipalities involved in a *SCoT*, we can note that the average number is around 45 (more or less the same as for the old *SD*) with a large range of cases, from around 10 municipalities for some *SCoTs* established within the scope of a small *communauté d'agglomération* to more than 400 including several *communautés*.

Les schémas de cohérence territoriale et le zonage en aire urbaine

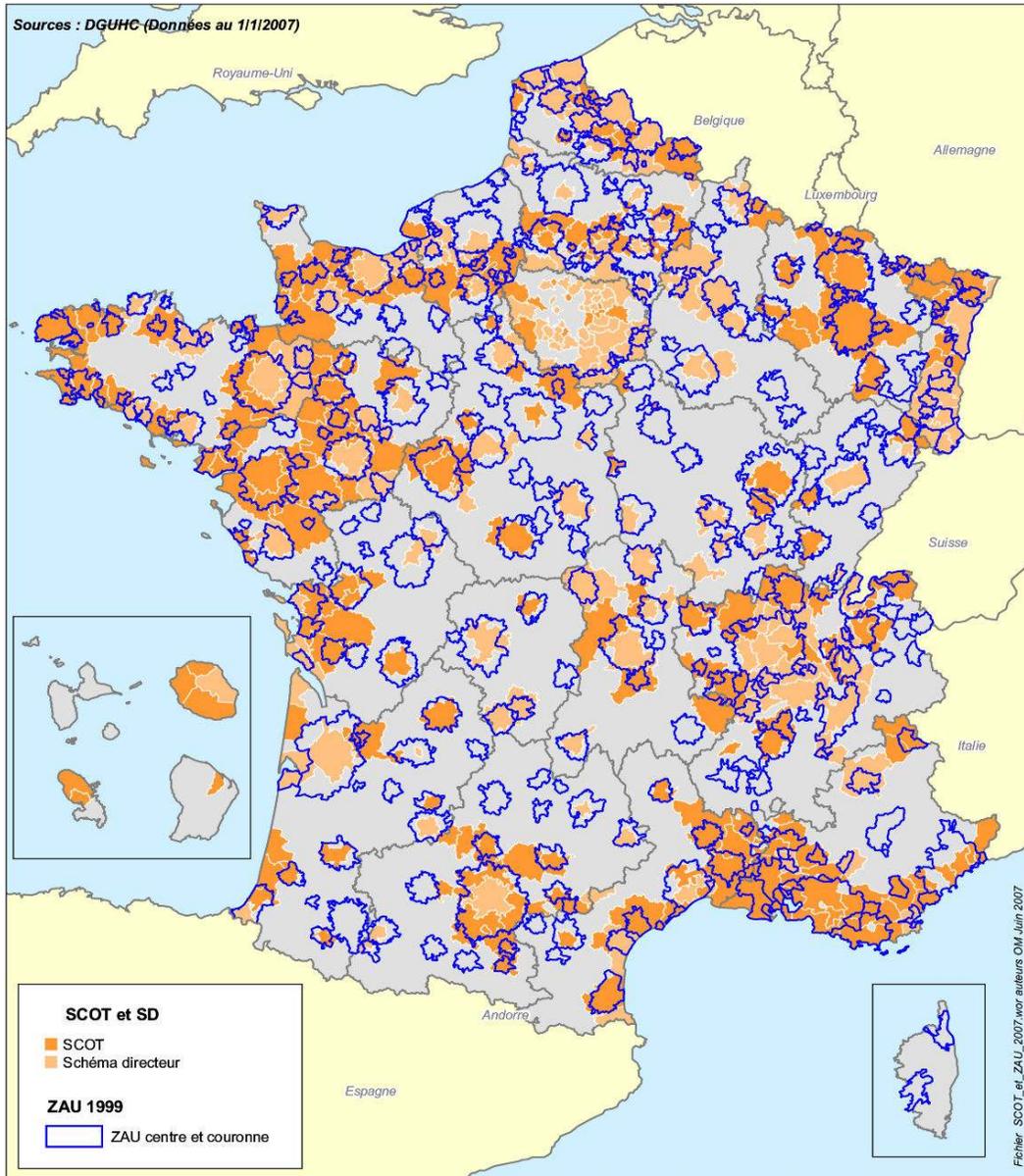


illustration 3: SCoTs' areas and urban areas on January 1st 2007
(Source: MEEDDAT/DGUHC)

Nevertheless, we can also note (see the illustration before) that using the definition of an urban area developed by INSEE^{iv}, *SCoTs*' areas often don't fit well with the urban areas. Even if we can discuss the relevance of the *INSEE*'s definition for urban areas [Vanier, 2008], we can see that *SCoTs*' areas are often smaller than urban areas and we can wonder if their areas are large enough to tackle with the problems of urban spread in the outskirts of most of metropolitan areas. We can note that, to deal with these questions some major French metropolitan areas (Lyon, Toulouse) have already set up *interSCoTs*' cooperation.

5. the difficult emergence of intermunicipal PLUs

As we have seen before, *SCoT* can be a good tool for the local authorities to implement a strategic vision for a metropolitan area within an intermunicipal scale and to give general guidelines for a more harmonious urban development. Nevertheless at the very local level *PLU* (the French local plan) remains the document which will determine land use regulations and building authorisations, and in fact where and how dwellings or activity buildings will be built.

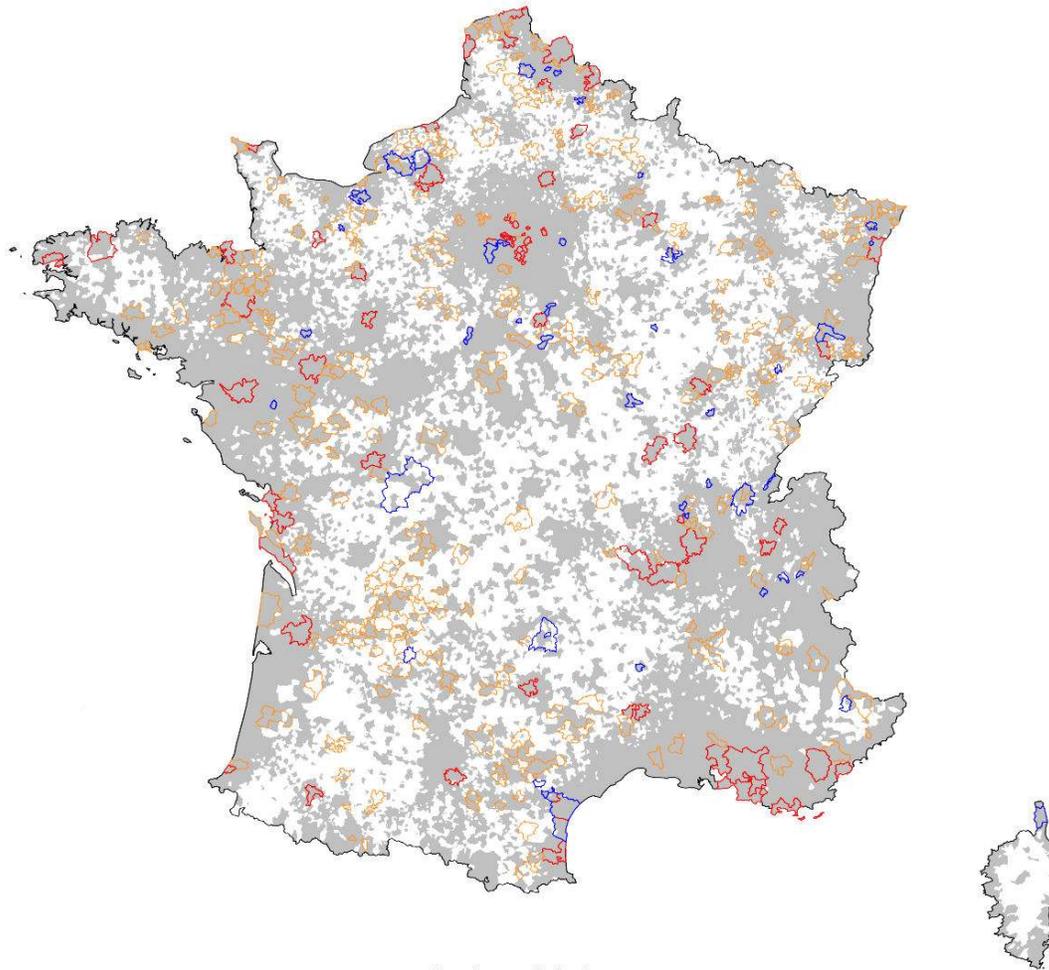
In fact, the crucial point is how to find a way to translate a general thought on the urban development of a metropolitan area (preserving space and restraining urban sprawl) into local land use regulations while respecting local power. On the one hand, we can hope that the spread of intermunicipal cooperation can lead to intermunicipal *PLUs* elaborated and implemented at a metropolitan scale and, in the other hand, we can think that, as law imposes *PLU* to be "compatible" with *SCoT*, the guidelines of this strategic vision will find its operational translation into the *PLUs* of its area.

Considering the hope for a spread of intermunicipal *PLUs*, we must first remember the attachment of the mayors to the power of defining land use regulations: *PLU* is the tool for this power and we can easily imagine that there is not much willingness to share this strategic power within an intermunicipal scale !

By law, *Communautés urbaines* have the competency of establishing intermunicipal *PLU* on their area. This competency can also be a compulsory one for the two other types of *communautés*. Nevertheless, less than 4% of these intermunicipal cooperation structures have got this competency. Moreover the intermunicipal cooperation structures in charge of the competency of establishing *PLU* are very few, as shown above (see **illustration 4**). Furthermore, considering intermunicipal *PLUs* we can imagine that, because of the need of preserving delicate balance of power in the intermunicipal structures, most of intermunicipal *PLUs* are not really fruits of an intermunicipal thought but, simply, municipal *PLUs* stucked together.

Considering the fact that law imposes *PLU* to be "compatible" with *SCoT* when existing, the problem is to understand what it means and how it will be eared. Should we imagine a strict respect of the guidelines and even a hardening of law on that point (as it was proposed in the *Grenelle de l'Environnement*) or a more understanding and conciliating approach? It is surely to early to have a serious answer but we think that there is a need for imaginative means of translation or discussion on the guidelines of the *SCoTs* and the way take there into account in *PLUs*.

Plans locaux d'urbanisme et intercommunalité



Plans locaux d'urbanisme

Source : D.G.U.H.C 2007

■ POS/PLU en élaboration, approuvé ou en révision

EPCI à compétence PLU

Source : DGCL 2007

- Communautés urbaines, communautés d'agglomération, SAN
- Communautés de communes
- Syndicats intercommunaux ou mixtes

illustration 4 : PLU and intermunicipal cooperation on January 1st 2007
(Source: MEEDDAT/DGUHC)

6 Conclusion, should we trust spatial planning tools or energy crisis?

When analysing French situation concerning spatial planning it appears that it's a difficult task to try to imagine ways of restraining urban sprawl in a decentralized planning system and with a multiplicity of municipalities jealous of their powers. The spread of municipal cooperation can be considered as a good thing. Even if it doesn't simplify the French institutional situation it forces local authorities to cooperate and to begin to think within a larger scale and scope.

SCoT appears as an innovative tool especially for two reasons. The first one is the strengthening of an existing intermunicipal cooperation structure or the appearance of a new one in the planning system. Time will make us know if this new actor will play or not an important part in urban development. The second is the *PADD*, a compulsory exercise of the spatial planning documents which presuppose an important strategic thought and lead to the development of a strategic vision for the area. But, especially for *SCoTs*, is their area the good one or shall we try to imagine more cooperation between *SCoTs*' territories (*inter SCoTs* cooperation)?

But the key point is the way *PLU* will succeed or not in being an efficient tool for a harmonious urban development and especially for restraining urban sprawl. A better link between *SCoT* and *PLU* should be a good thing. According to us, the political way would be better than the legal one. The point is to make local representatives think and act referring to the metropolitan scale and scope.

The question of land ownership also remains an important one; until now France did not develop any tool to force owner to sell or to get back a part of land appreciation. Land retention is one of the important reasons for the difficulties to restrain urban sprawl and to struggle against the second. It is important to find a way to struggle against the first one.

But thanks to the energy crisis, the fight against urban sprawl could be easier than ever. Whereas ideas related to sustainable development had reminded us for long about the crucial necessity of saving energy, the sudden and tremendous increase of oil price destabilize the principles of our society and urban development, based on the low costs of energy and thus of transport. The increase in the transport budget for commuters will probably slow down the flight to the outskirts. Thus, perhaps less for environmental reasons than for economical ones, we will have to imagine new ways of urban development and new means to allow everyone to live in the cities.

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ⁱ The *Communauté de Communes* is the simplest and most flexible structure, which mainly covers small towns and rural areas. It allows the *communes* to cooperate on a project, taking into account economic development and land use as these are compulsory responsibilities. The *communes* must also transfer at least one from the following four blocks of responsibilities to the *communauté de communes* :

- protection and promotion of the environment ;
 - housing and urban environment policy ;
 - creation, management and maintenance of roads ;
 - construction, maintenance and operation of cultural and sports facilities and pre-elementary and elementary school facilities.
- The *Communautés d'Agglomérations* concerns *communes* in an urban area with more than 50,000 inhabitants, including a *commune* at least with more than 15,000 inhabitants or a capital of a *département*. The *communauté d'agglomérations* has to manage economic development, land use, housing and deprived area policies. In addition it must transfer at least three of the five following responsibilities:

- Creation, management and maintenance of roads and parking areas ;
- Sewerage ;
- Water ;
- natural and urban environment ;
- construction, management and maintenance of cultural and sports facilities

A *Communauté Urbaine* covers *communes* with an urban area of more than 500,000 inhabitants. The compulsory responsibilities are extended because they concern not only economic development, land use, housing and deprived areas policies, but also management of public services, social services, culture and protection of the natural and urban environment.

ⁱⁱ In France, although the main State income is from internal petroleum products taxes (TIPP), corporation tax, household income tax and VAT, *communes* and other local authorities, aside from State contributions, receive direct local taxes from inhabitants and companies on their territory. These direct local taxes are made up of four types, the rate of which is decided by each local authority and can therefore vary greatly from one *commune* to another:

- *taxe d'habitation* (accommodation tax) is paid by all occupants of housing;
- *taxe foncière sur les propriétés bâties* and *taxe foncière sur les propriétés non bâties* are property taxes paid by the owners on built and unbuilt property;
- *taxe professionnelle* is paid by companies.

This income adds to the overall budget of the *communes* or to that of the intermunicipal cooperation structure in which they participate. It can be used to finance land purchase, infrastructure operations, constructions or equipment related to urban development.

The *Communautés d'Agglomérations* and the *Communautés Urbaines* created after the Act of 1999 take their resources from a *Taxe professionnelle unique* (TPU). The *Communautés de Communes* and the *Communautés Urbaines* created before the Act of 1999 can opt for additional taxation on a local basis. Their part, which is set fairly freely, is added to the local taxes collected by the local authorities. They can also opt for mixed taxation of the TPU and a rate on the three other local taxes.

ⁱⁱⁱ It's interesting to note that, in France, the struggle against urban sprawl exclusively refers to housing and never to the welcome of activities. If a garden is not far from being considered as a intolerable luxury, the space dedicated to activities and the size of plots offered to companies are hardly called into question.

^{iv} For the INSEE (*Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques*) an **urban area** is a continuous group of *communes* around an **urban pole** (metropolitan area with at least 5000 jobs) and a close belt of *communes* at least 40% the working population of which works in the area

For the 1999 census, INSEE determined 354 urban areas in France

Population (1999)	Number
More than 1 000 000	4
Between 500 000 and 999 999	10
Between 200 000 and 499 999	28
Between 100 000 and 199 999	36
Between 50 000 and 99 000	59
Between 20 000 and 49 000	119
Less than 20 000	98
Total	354