

PLAINE COMMUNE, THE GRAND PARIS PROJECT'S LAND OF CULTURE AND CREATION: CULTURE, DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE CITY COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT



LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CREATIVE ECONOMY
PARTICIPATION SUPPORT CITIZENSHIP BOTTOM-UP
COMMON GOOD STRATEGY CULTURAL POLICY
COOPERATION INSTITUTIONAL

1. Context

Founded in 2000, Plaine Commune became a Public Territorial Institution (*Etablissement public territorial*) with the creation of the *Métropole du Grand Paris*, and brings together 9 towns located to



the north of Paris. 414,000 residents are connected by this collectively developed institution. Plaine Commune describes itself as a cooperative of towns. Plaine Commune is a territory of people, notable for its young population. The territory has a unique urban and economic dynamism, which is indispensable for its worthy local residents, many of whom come from working class or migrant backgrounds. Social inclusion and participatory democracy are two of Plaine Commune's fundamental values. The prospect of the *Grand Paris* took shape in the early 2010s. In 2014, Plaine Commune signed a territorial development contract with the government, which set out regeneration, transport, housing, and economic development projects for the next 15 years, establishing then culture and creation as the governing principles and key indicators of its development.

At the heart of the programme is the goal of finding a different way of conceiving and building the city; to reinvigorate and bring new meaning, possibilities and sensitivities to this process. Culture is integrated into this territorial project within an approach that is deep-rooted in the territory and involves local people – and is therefore political. The President and local elected officials assert that culture is both a driving force for urban, economic and social development of the territory, and a lever for participation by local residents in building the city. The aim is a better integration between municipal cultural policies and the territorial urban and economic policies, with an integrated vision of culture within sustainable development. The programme brings a new approach to nurturing, challenging and driving forward all projects relating to urban and economic development and the design of public spaces. It also responds to the desire to renew ways of communicating with local residents and involving them, and of rethinking cultural governance. The programme is seen as a new cross-sector paradigm for local public action, developed in close collaboration with the towns.

THE PROGRAMME INVOLVES USING CULTURE TO CREATE A MEANINGFUL PARADIGM FOR A CITY, WHICH IS CONSTRUCTED WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS AND FUNCTIONS AS A VEHICLE FOR BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

2. Plaine Commune and culture

Each of the 9 Plaine Commune towns have had ambitious cultural policies for over 60 years, which have stimulated a rich heritage and arts landscape. The territory has a rich historic, industrial, religious and natural heritage. Recently awarded 'Towns of Art and History' status, Plaine Commune



is home to the Basilica of Saint Denis, the *Stade de France* stadium and the Saint-Ouen Flea Market: all landmarks linked to identity and tourism. Understanding the intangible cultural heritage of the area is intimately related to the cultural diversity of its local residents. Municipal cultural policies have created an important cultural network (national centres for dramatic arts, Académie Fratellini circus school, Zingaro Equestrian Theatre, numerous performance spaces and arts teaching spaces – hybrid cultural and creative factories), with major events: the Saint-Denis music festival; the *Panorama des cinémas du Maghreb* film festival; the *Rencontre des Jonglages* juggling festival. Over the past ten years, a creative hub has been established around the film and audiovisual industries, with the *Cité du Cinéma* film studio, and several universities, schools and research laboratories linked to culture and creation.

CULTURE IS NO LONGER JUST THE 'ICING ON THE CAKE' BUT PLAYS AN INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN PROJECTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

The towns have worked towards enhancing ownership of these places among local residents and developed artistic and cultural education policies that complement amateur activities and community projects. They have developed strong cross-sector cultural campaigns with relevance across the fields of child care, youth work and social welfare. However, there has been mixed feedback from a population that is increasingly removed from the public cultural context. A certain lack of interest, if not mistrust, is felt towards cultural policies. Financial resources, in turn, are dwindling. Also, a programme of cultural projects that is more bottom-up is necessary. The cultural approach is built on the project's identified urban, economic, and social goals. Its starting point is the territory and its needs and it considers that art, culture and creation can respond to these challenges. Culture is no longer just the 'icing on the cake' (a sculpture installed in a town square), but plays an influential role in projects for the benefit of the whole community. The programme relies on the collective capacity to find ways to achieve a common dialogue: between elected officials, civil servants, artists, local residents, urban planners, developers, landlords, landscape architects, businesses, etc. The President of Plaine Commune supports the programme alongside the Vice Presidents and Deputy Mayors responsible for culture. A network of local artists and cultural stakeholders was set up. A project to raise awareness among civil servants for Plaine Commune and the towns was entrusted to an artist. Key players in urban development and businesses are approached on a project by project basis.



Local residents can choose which of the active cultural projects to become involved in, utilising their local knowledge, making them active participants in the cultural project – and by extension the urban development project – and making their voices heard. The subsequent challenge is to accurately capture these local views and take them into account as much as possible in the final definition of the urban development project. The approach recognises the legitimacy of each citizen participating in the creation of cultural and urban policy.

3. Objectives and implementation of the project

1.1. Main aim and specific goals

The aim of programme is to consider culture as a driving force for urban, economic and social development and a lever for participation by local residents in building the city. It involves using culture to create a comprehensive and meaningful paradigm for a city, which is constructed with local residents and functions as a vehicle for bringing people together. Specific objectives are:

- Preserving, converting, attributing value to heritage, particularly in urban and economic policies
- Complementing urban change with artistic and cultural activities and involving local residents
- Promoting art in public spaces within the city
- Providing support for issues linked to the work of key cultural players (spaces, sharing of resources, networking, etc.)

1.2. Development of the project

Therefore, a series of participatory workshops built around the question 'If the town were... a haircut? a dance? a meal? etc'. Two designers in residency permitted to precede the opening of the station for the new *Tram Express Nord* in Stains with local residents, an artist residency in the Poètes area of Pierrefitte, permitted to accompany the urban regeneration project around the idea of 'link'. An artist collective in residency within the Pierrefitte-Stains-Villetaneuse parks service permitted to think about the challenges of COP21 along with the gardeners. The conversion of heritage buildings of Babcock former industrial and shaping the site's redevelopment as the project unfolds, with culture as a guiding principle permitted to showcase the history of the site. Finally, a study/action on the territory's cultural and creative 'factories' was conducted to encourage collaboration and sharing of resources, and think about several new economic models.



Communicating the programme politically, not just among the elected officials responsible for culture, but among all elected officials focused on other sectors, was complex. Culture is not a question of regulatory jurisdiction, but a question of giving meaning to public action. It was necessary to create a common vocabulary between artistic and cultural stakeholders and those from the fields of urban development, economics and local democracy. The imposed framework does not, therefore, take away from freedom of creation, even if the programme is in addition to the policies supporting artistic creation. Mobilising local residents, who are called upon through a programme of involvement and not just with the mind-set of providing a cultural offering was also an important challenge. The projects carried out are positive for artists, urban stakeholders and local residents. Capitalising on the projects is gradually raising awareness among a number of increasingly important project backers. Political backing of the programme is also progressing in the right direction. However, the programme is a long term initiative and its true impact on how the city is constructed and its capacity for bringing people together will strengthen over time. The programme is aimed at all Plaine Commune residents. Broadly speaking, the population of the territory is young, on low-incomes, from low-income backgrounds, and marked by the French history of migration. Politically, it is an inclusive community, fostering sought-after community life.

4. Impacts

1.1. Direct Impacts

Impacts on the local government

The programme has put culture on the political agenda, with a new paradigm for public action in Plaine Commune. This cultural challenge is integrated into the territory's development project, which affects all public policies, horizontally across the towns.

Impact on culture and local cultural agents of the city / territory

The programme has an impact on the governance of cultural policies. With fundamental policies remaining essential and complementary (supporting artistic creation, arts spaces and associated activities, etc.), the approach is no longer confined to its own sector but is integrated into all issues related to building the city.

Impact on the territory and people

The programme allows local residents to better understand and become part of the transformation of the city, and also changes their view of cultural policies, urban policies and policies relating to local democracy. It creates a more sensitive, poetic, happier town, that in its very nature is more inclusive.

1.2. Transversal impacts

The clear intention of the programme is to have a social impact. Since it deals with involving local residents in the process of building the city using artistic and cultural levers, residents feel legitimised in terms of their rights towards the city – in the sense of their right to participate. The programme is presented inclusively to all residents in an area, without distinction. Promoting the role of culture within the city is effectively taking action on the environment we live in. In this sense, it contributes to the challenge of sustainable development. The programme contributes to the town's economy by commissioning artistic teams, and by creating the necessary conditions for the development of cultural and creative activities, thereby encouraging networking between different stakeholders.

AT THE HEART OF THE PROGRAMME: FINDING A DIFFERENT WAY OF
CONCEIVING AND BUILDING THE CITY, TO REINVIGORATE AND BRING NEW
MEANING, POSSIBILITIES AND SENSITIVITIES.

1.3. Évaluation

The territorial development contract formulates goals to be achieved and gives a framework for the evaluation of projects carried out.

- Quantitative indicators: number of projects promoted, of local residents involved and reached.
- Qualitative indicators: networking and quality of dialogue between different stakeholders, quality of the citizen collaboration to create projects, impact of participatory cultural projects on the definition of urban or economic development projects, any boost given to local democracy, long term links forged with nearby associations, vibrancy in the local.

The evaluation therefore focuses as much on the project itself as the mark it leaves behind. In 2014, Plaine Commune also created *l'Atelier* as part of the *Land of culture and creation* programme. This is a physical space as well as a strategic approach, which aims to facilitate networking, provide visibility for the programme, and enable people benefit from the projects under the programme. *L'Atelier* is a concrete representation of the programme's strategy for continuous improvement.

1.4. Continuity

The programme fits into a longer term dynamic: as long as the town is being built, and public policies and projects are being rolled out, the question of culture and involvement of local residents will be raised. New cultural and participatory initiatives accompanying the Plaine Commune projects will soon be launched (redevelopment of the canal banks in Aubervilliers, regeneration project in La Courneuve, Pleyel large-scale urban project). These cultural and participatory projects also consider what will happen after the project is finished: for example, the artistic team working on the banks of the Aubervilliers canal plan to bring together a group of local residents who, in the long term, will continue to look after the community garden that is created.

5. Other informations

Plaine Commune was a nominated candidate for the second International Award 'UCLG - Mexico City - Culture 21' (January-May 2016). The awards jury produced a final report in June 2016 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to promote this project as a good practice for the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

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