Prospective studies and territories of the French urban policy

Summary and perspectives of prospective approaches applied to the territories of the French urban policy in 2008-2009

Report for the SG-CIV’s Prospective and Strategy Mission

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November 2009
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Conclusion
In 2008 and 2009, nine prospective studies applied to territories of the French urban policy were carried out. These approaches were undertaken by local teams in selected territories following a call for projects launched by the current General Secretariat of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Urban affairs (SG CIV); they were coordinated by Futuribles. This document offers a brief summary of the nine approaches and does not replace the reports issued for each relevant site. Its purpose is to reiterate the objectives and method used for these studies, and learn a few lessons relating mostly to the application of prospective approaches as part of urban policy.

I. Objectives

1. Origin of the project and objectives

The Inter-ministerial Delegation for Urban affairs (DIV)\(^1\) created a Prospective and Strategy Mission at the beginning of 2007. This creation was the result of a dual observation:

“On the one hand, urban policy could no longer be satisfied with the preponderance of curative logics which progressively prevailed and needed to outline, for its priority territories, perspectives going beyond mere social or urban adjustments. On the other hand, an observation was made that most of the territorial prospective studies carried out on the initiative of local authorities failed to focus on sensitive urban territories.” (Call for projects, April 2008)

After experimenting with a prospective approach applied to sensitive urban territories over three pilot territories in 2007 (Avignon, Besançon, Rennes), the prospective and strategy Mission decided to launch this exercise on a broader basis, considering that “this is the most efficient way to establish this practice in the field, thereby giving a new dimension to urban policy, reputed for concentrating too much on repair and not enough on anticipation.”

The call for projects specified the expectations with regard to prospective studies regarded as “a method which must benefit local stakeholders in the same way as diagnosis or evaluation, [which requires] that these stakeholders adopt it and familiarise themselves with its subtleties. The significant increase in the number of prospective studies applied to sensitive urban territories is part of this desired and well thought out strategy.”

At the end of the call for projects, nine cities and conurbations were selected by the DIV for this exercise. These cities and agglomerations all undertook a prospective approach targeting a sensitive area in their territory between September 2008 and September 2009.

Districts, cities, agglomerations, teams in the field were extremely diversified but the method complied with was, on the whole, the same. Thus, the summary of these experiments will provide a perspective which we hope will help develop and improve prospective studies applied to sensitive territories.

\(^1\) The General Secretariat of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Urban affairs (SG CIV) succeeded the Inter-ministerial Delegation for Urban affairs (DIV) in the spring of 2009. Both names will therefore be used in this report.
2. What are prospective studies?

The term “prospective” (or “foresight”) has various meanings. This is why it would be useful to specify its scope and major principles before presenting the guidelines of the method followed on the different sites⁵.

“Prospective” refers to any medium and long-term anticipatory approach which, unlike simple projections of past trends, tries to explore the diversity of possible futures (futuribles) in embryonic form in the present situation. Underpinning the notion of prospective study is the principle of a future which is not determined and is therefore open to several possible futures, and the anticipation of these different possible futures can constitute the support of policies and actions which are not only restorative or curative but genuinely proactive. This is why any prospective approach aims at discovering the flexibility available to those involved in this approach and identifying action levers.

The objective of so-called exploratory prospective studies is to answer the questions: “What may happen? What can we do?” To do this, they frequently rely on simple methods which, based on dynamic diagnostics, make it possible to envisage evolution scenarios and describe the different ways to get there. These different possible scenarios can be encapsulated in several scenarios presenting all possible futures. These scenarios are rigorously constructed based on the analysis of current trends to which educated conjecture is applied.

Prospective studies are most often used to understand how complex systems with numerous uncertainty aspects can evolve. Prospective studies, in particular when applied to territories, therefore operate in accordance with a multidisciplinary and systemic approach, with futuribles resulting from the interaction of numerous factors or variables.

Prospective studies can help develop and implement public policies when used to clarify medium and long-term issues or to anticipate the possible consequences of the decisions made now and in the future. When applied to sensitive urban districts, prospective studies can turn out to be a valuable approach facilitating the collective comprehension of the future of the territories, identifying the major issues at stake in these areas and contributing to the definition and implementation of local and national policies on districts. This requires that the timeframes selected for these practices are not encumbered by the near future, already “committed” to existing measures.

Prospective methods are designed to organise discussions on the future. There are various methods and selecting the right one depends on the subject chosen, the people associated with the reflection and the expected results. Of course, as with any other method, they must be true to the principles of the approach that they serve.

Prospective studies, in particular territorial, often rely on easily adopted scenario-building methods which organise the deliberations on the future into a few well-identified stages. This method was developed in different sensitive districts in 2008 and 2009.

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² These different aspects, notably methodological, will be developed in a guide in the near future.
3. What are the expectations / results?

Through the support of prospective exercises applied to sensitive urban territories, the DIV pursued three objectives:

- Familiarising working groups made up of elected officials, urban, social and city policy professionals, government representatives, local authorities, urban planning agencies etc. with the prospective approach applied to sensitive territories, thereby introducing the members of the working groups to prospective approach and methods as reflection, decision-making and planning aid tools.
- Establishing, on each of the selected sites and districts, shared prospective diagnostics and scenarios on the possible futures of these territories within their agglomerations.
- Comparing the experiences and results of the groups at national level with a view to improving the understanding of the district dynamics and helping steer urban policy.

The exercises were completed on 9 sites by teams of ten to twenty people who familiarised themselves with the prospective approach and methods. Each of the studies gave rise to a 30 to 100-page report summarising the different work stages and outlining the principal conclusions.

The purpose of this summary is not to sum up these proceedings but to put them into perspective so as to answer a key question:

Is the application of a prospective approach to the districts of the French urban policy relevant? If so, in what form?

This summary tries to provide tentative answers to this question by focusing on three points:

- A look at how projects are managed and the methodological lessons learned from them.
- A brief comparison of the different approaches relating to their content (comparison between sites, variables, scenarios).
- A section relating to the possible usage of the prospective approach for putting together territorial projects taking into account the development of sensitive areas.

II. Implementation of the approaches

The prospective studies carried out in 2008 and 2009 followed the same pattern. However, they were performed by working groups whose composition varied depending on the site, and covered territories with extremely different sizes, situations, social compositions and urban designs. Therefore each of these studies is unique and should be interpreted in the specific context of its execution. This is why it would be useless to attempt a word-by-word comparison between these studies. All we offer are elements enabling uninvolved readers to familiarise themselves with these studies and acquire the tools for an initial evaluation.

3 See the “prospective” page of the SG CIV’s website: http://www.ville.gouv.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=73.
1. Scenario-building method

We briefly present the method used by the prospective studies undertaken in the territories selected by the DIV in 2008-2009. This general framework may have been refined or slightly altered on certain sites.

The main objective was, with the help of a working group, to envisage the different possible futures of the district selected (scenarios) based on a dynamic diagnostic of the territory and in relation to its environment. This approach required 3 major phases.

**Phase 1: Project definition**

The purpose of this phase was to:

- specify the scope of the targeted district,
- establish the list of members of the working group (twelve people selected for the diversity of their skills and opinions as well as their involvement in the domains concerned by urban policy),
- envisage, in conjunction with the DIV, local adaptations necessary for the overall framework of the project and agree on a schedule.

**Phase 2: Dynamic system representation**

The future does not emerge out of thin air. Before constructing scenarios for the future, the idea is to obtain a shared representation of existing elements and the factors likely to have a significant effect on the district’s future.

1) The first day of the working group made it possible to:

- present the prospective study, the proposed method and objectives;
- work together to determine the variables (approximately 15) with most influence on the district’s future. This working phase was coordinated by Futuribles.

2) After this, influential variables were summarised (to a variable extent depending on the site). For each variable, a retrospective study was carried out (approximately 2-3 pages) to determine the evolution hypotheses envisaged for each of them. This was performed by local stakeholders. Methodological support was provided by Futuribles for the constitution of these data sheets. The sites used different methods to complete these data sheets.

**Phase 3: Scenario-building**

Based on the dynamic diagnostic established in the previous phase, the idea was to collectively construct a few possible scenarios for the evolution of the district. This construction was achieved by the working groups during a two-day seminar. The sessions, coordinated by Futuribles, made it possible to:

- discuss and collectively validate the evolution hypotheses established for each variable;
- assemble these hypotheses and therefore construct the framework of the overall exploratory scenarios for the evolution of the district.

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4 The abovementioned methodological guide provides a detailed description of this method, its underlying principles and specific application procedures.
At the end of this phase, the scenarios were drafted and validated by the working group. This phase required no physical meeting. However, those responsible for these exercises often brought the groups together at local level to validate the scenarios and to envisage the impact and possible use of these scenarios.

2. Districts and teams concerned

The first working stage on the different sites concerned consisted of assembling a working group and specifying the scope of the territory selected for the prospective study.

Working groups

The objective of the prospective approaches initiated was, as mentioned earlier, to have a collective reflection on the future of sensitive territories, which also made it possible to gain more support for this approach.

Collective reflection is a must in this type of approach which is by nature multidisciplinary and systemic. This also necessitated working with a limited group of 20 people at the most so that exchanges could be productive during the short time dedicated to this approach. Thus, services or individuals were sometimes solicited, notably during the dynamic diagnostic phase, without participating fully in the working group.

Within each working group, a steering unit was responsible for managing the project and guaranteeing the smooth running of the proceedings. This steering unit was represented by urban planning agencies, municipal services, public interest groups etc.

Working groups were determined so that the main stakeholders involved in the territory could be represented. Those with extensive knowledge of the territory and likely to contribute diagnostic elements to the joint reflection process were given priority. Participation in these working groups was also an opportunity to associate players who do not necessarily work together but whose synergy could be beneficial not only to the prospective study but also, more generally, to the development of these districts. Prospective studies were therefore an opportunity to create new partnerships.

Of course, all groups strived to durably involve elected officials, who supported the project from its launch by validating it and often monitoring and endorsing it.

The list of the different working groups is available in the reports established locally. We restrict ourselves to mentioning the principal categories of stakeholders involved:

- elected officials,
- municipal, urban and departmental services,
- social workers,
- registered social landlords,
- State services,
- Family allowance services,
- representatives of the economic world,
- representatives of non-profit organisations,
These working groups met in plenary sessions for 3 or 4 days. They worked between sessions to complete the “variables data sheets” constituting the dynamic diagnostic of the territory.

On the whole and despite certain inevitable withdrawals, the participants in the working groups followed the approach to the letter. On certain sites, some partners were keen to join the working group in the middle of the study.

**Territories**

The objective of prospective approaches was to anticipate the possible futures of sensitive urban territories within their agglomeration. The unique aspect of the approach was to focus on a determined sensitive district and not the entire agglomeration, with a view to explicitly taking the opposite approach to the countless territorial prospective studies which completely ignore sensitive areas⁵.

**Starting with one district to subsequently anticipate possible futures** means assuming that the future of these territories is (relatively) open and that some of the seeds of potential change are present not only outside the district but in its midst. Prospective approaches have been developed in this context, revealing uncertainties regarding the future of sensitive districts; these uncertainties constitute opportunities which can be seized by the stakeholders.

The objective was therefore to identify “sensitive” study territories with an urban planning and identity coherence. The perimeters of the French urban policy were not always entirely respected as we thought it would be preferable to reshape territories rather than work on a ZUS (sensitive urban area) with little relevance other than statistical. The territories selected could be qualified as project territories: they constitute a well-defined entity subject to cross-sectional dynamics which can be acted upon.

**Example:**

“Saragossa prospective study” perimeter

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⁵ See the study carried out by ESSEC and the DIV: “Study on the consideration of sensitive urban territories in the urban development projects as part of territorial prospective studies”, April 2009.
The size of the territories selected varied a lot depending on the site: from a population of 3,500 in Basse Ville (Dunkerque) to 20,000 in Hérouville Saint-Clair. The choices made always responded to local imperatives.

Obviously, an approach consisting of starting with specific sensitive territories within agglomerations involves a limitation which should be kept in mind and which we will develop further. It is not immediately possible to derive policies from these targeted studies on the scale of the city or agglomeration. The immediate relevance of these targeted studies can therefore be subject to debate.

In the following table, we provide the list of the sites concerned by the prospective studies as well as information on the districts.

### Summary presentation of the sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City / Agglo</th>
<th>City / agglo pop</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>District location</th>
<th>Urban design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calais</td>
<td>74,900 / 98,500 (Calais conurbation) (2005)</td>
<td>Beau Marais</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>In the city. In the north west and near the centre.</td>
<td>Lots of housing estates. Presence of small individual houses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunkerque</td>
<td>70,000 / 210,000 (Dunkerque urban community)</td>
<td>Basse Ville (1999)</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>Heart of the agglomeration Just outside Dunkerque city centre.</td>
<td>Housing estates in surrounding areas. Old apartment blocks in the centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pau</td>
<td>82,000 / 141,000 (Pau Pyrénées conurbation)</td>
<td>Saragosse / Dufau Tourasse</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>Heart of the city of Pau. Just outside the city centre.</td>
<td>Housing estates. Apartment blocks. Green areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Project management: summary and lessons learned

Project flow

On the whole, the teams assembled worked in a satisfactory manner from their own point of view\(^6\) and as attested by the overall progress of the project: the deadlines were complied with and the studies completed\(^7\). The few plenary meetings were well attended and the intermediate work, while mostly performed by project managers, also largely involved the members of the working groups.

The summary reports established on the different sites are proof of the interest elicited by this approach. The two most often cited benefits are firstly the possibility of taking the time to think about the meaning of the actions undertaken, therefore getting some perspective and, secondly, the opportunity to work within a group associating partners who do not often meet within the normal framework of urban policy systems.

Beyond the policies and strategies which may result from these studies and which will be developed further, those involved in this approach have also pointed out its usefulness in the performance of their daily activities. Prospective exercises have facilitated in-depth exchange periods covering more than just daily management issues. Longer time periods make it possible to free oneself for a while from daily preoccupations with a view to returning to these concerns with increased insight and understanding.

The smooth project flow was the result of the satisfactory adoption of the objectives and methods of the scenario-building approach by the teams concerned. The cities and agglomerations involved in the proposed system have effectively acquired a competence in terms of territorial prospective studies applied to urban policy issues, which was one of the objectives of the inter-ministerial delegation for urban affairs.

This competence was particularly developed for local project managers who had to deal with the brunt of the methodological and organisational difficulties of the approach. Each participant was able to familiarise themselves with an approach and methodology that they are likely to disseminate in their own working environment.

While certain people found it difficult to embrace the approach and adopt the frame of mind necessary for the successful completion of the exercise, the system on the whole was easily comprehended. This tends to justify the use of this relatively simple methodology as part of exploratory prospective exercises applied to urban policy issues\(^8\).

\(^6\) Stakeholders’ accounts are available in the detailed reports of the national meetings held in the SG CIV on 4 June and 24 September 2009.

\(^7\) At the time this report was written, all sites had constructed scenarios. Most groups had completed their final reports; only two are outstanding.

\(^8\) This report does not dwell on specific discussions on the method. A guide will be published soon in which feedback will be developed in more detail. This guide will notably go back over the relative importance of the different phases in the overall balance of the approach and the allocated resources necessary for the successful completion of the different stages.

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This report does not attempt to provide a more accurate evaluation of the prospective studies which we coordinated in the districts. This evaluation would however be useful for gauging the overall support for the approach, to evaluate its usefulness and potential scale as perceived by the participants and for a more detailed identification of the possible improvements which could make it more efficient.

**Productions**

The most concrete result of the exercise is the production, on each site, of a summary report presenting the objectives, the partners mobilised, the major work stages and documents produced by the exercise, i.e. primarily variable data sheets and scenarios. We develop each of these points below.

**Variable data sheets**

While it is possible to make a general assessment of the approaches and present the results, it seems equally important to show the intermediate products of the exercise, which we believe can be widely used for subsequent studies or programmes.

The first working stage (once the district, timeframe, working group have been defined) was to select the variables most influential on the district’s future and establish a data sheet for each of them, referred to as a “variable data sheet” recounting the history of the variable, identifying existing trends within its scope, the uncertainty or change factors and, in light of these different elements, examining the different possible futures of the variable (prospective hypotheses).

The constitution of these variable data sheets represented most of the work carried out as part of these prospective approaches. Therefore they are a rich material, useful not only for justifying the hypotheses established on each of the variables but also for improving knowledge of the dynamics at stake in the districts studied. These variable data sheets often contain a lot of new information, either collected specifically on the occasion of the prospective exercise or the dynamic summaries of existing data. In all cases, these data sheets constitute a dynamic diagnostic of the districts. They are not uniquely based on estimates but also take into account qualitative factors.

This material, more than the foundation of the scenario-building exercise, can be used to structure, restructure or develop a shared district monitoring and observation tool. It provides indicators and guidelines which shed light on the information collected. We will develop this point further.

**Scenarios**

The second major material of these approaches is the scenarios themselves. Scenarios are the stories of possible futures. On each site, four, five or six scenarios were constructed by...
combination of prospective hypotheses developed on the variables. These scenarios were recounted in stories which took various forms depending on the site.

These scenarios can be considered the result of the approaches undertaken. However, it would be naïve to consider that they constitute the only purpose of the approach and that this approach only aims at developing them. It is preferable to consider that these scenarios are the culmination of the approach and that they epitomise its completion. The importance of the scenarios should be put into perspective as they are of limited intrinsic value. The scenarios are empty if they are not associated with the underlying work and process of which they are the culmination.

Therefore it is extremely delicate to present the prospective study exclusively via the scenarios. While these scenarios make sense to the group who constructs them and knows that these stories illustrate a rigorously delineated range of possible futures, uninvolved readers or listeners may reject them if they fail to understand what these scenarios mean.

These scenarios show several possible combinations of events over time and the potential results of these sequences of events. Each scenario therefore generally includes two aspects: the “final image” of the district’s situation looking forward to the timeframe chosen (2025) and the “course” explaining the journey from the current to the final situation, under the influence of which players and factors.

The scenarios combine both these elements according to sometimes extremely variable procedures. On certain sites, the scenarios are deliberately very sober and debated; others leave more room to interpretation and imagination. There is no specific rule for this. The drafting of scenarios must be adapted to the target audience. An element of creativity can help give an account of what the future may be like but runs the risk of adding details to the crucial scenario elements which could discredit the entire approach. Minimalist scenarios may seem more credible but they are perhaps less striking and fail to respond to certain communication imperatives.

Nonetheless, scenarios must illustrate the range of possible futures in embryonic form in the present situation and show how these possible futures can occur over time. **Scenarios show how extremely diverse situations can emerge from the same starting point; without disregarding the influence of uncontrollable factors, they however clearly highlight the flexibility of those whose actions are decisive in the development of the future.**

**Assessment**

Despite varying degrees of development on all sites, variable data sheets and scenarios were constituted. They were validated by the members of the working groups, thereby recognising that the scenarios in question reflected the spectrum of possible futures. At first glance, the assessment seems largely positive for the groups who adopted the approach. It remains to be seen whether this prospective approach can have other effects. While we believe that certain members of the working groups are already satisfied with the reflection carried out and the resulting shared analysis, others are evidently waiting for the follow-up to these exercises, all the more so as the time dedicated to these approaches (if not the money provided by the DIV) may have seemed relatively substantial. It should also be pointed out that the prospective
approach consisting of imagining possible futures is a process of hope and action which is difficult to stop once the scenarios have been put in writing.

4. Content of the exercises: similarities and differences

The territories chosen as working groups concerned by the prospective approaches applied to sensitive districts in 2008-2009 were too different for the comparison of exercises to be in any way relevant. The aim of the approach was to embody the prospective reflection on specific territories and it would be futile to attempt to obtain general information on the future of the districts from the nine studies.

However, several comparison elements of the prospective system (i.e. the choice of key variables made by the different groups) can be used for illustration purposes.

Variables

The variables selected are more or less from five major domains: population, social cohesion, living environment, activities and governance.

The variables selected on the different sites are presented in the table hereafter. This table is imperfect by nature: its only purpose is only to provide information on the types of variable selected.

The headings selected by each site have obviously been changed; similarly, many aspects which were not the object of specific variables could be treated in the context of other variables. The idea is not to deduce what is missing using this table, but to look at slightly different perspectives.

Scenarios

It is impossible to establish a summary report of the scenarios. However, and at the risk of outrageously caricaturing locally constructed scenarios, several scenario archetypes are symptomatic of the logics at work in the districts.

A first scenario category could correspond with that of “ZUPs” (priority urban development areas). It is characterised by a negative spiral of district isolation. State interventions maintain a “tolerable” situation in these disadvantaged residential districts. In certain cases, the State disengages and the ghetto logic prevails.

A second commonly found scenario category is that of the “acceptance” of the district within the city. This type of scenario, epitomising a certain success of urban policy; is however characterised by the district’s loss of identity.

A third scenario archetype often encountered, notably in areas near the city centres, is that of “gentrification”. This trend, often boosted by the evolution of property prices, can be more or less obvious and result in a more or less harmonious or antagonistic social mix.
The fourth type of scenario, often outlined, is that of the “popular district”, a step up the housing ladder for families. This often positive scenario, at least looking forward to 2025, requires a genuine populating policy on the scale of the urban area and the development of economic activities. Certain territories affected by too many difficulties cannot envisage it.

The fifth type of scenario often cited but not always in writing because it is considered unrealistic, is the “sustainable development” scenario. This scenario develops a number of existing trends: sensitive districts are those in which urban rehabilitation is most advanced, associations most active and resident participation most encouraged. Therefore it does not take much for the district to become “green” and socially harmonious.

The sixth possible scenario category is that of the “alternative district” populated by extremely qualified young people without a job or underpaid (demoted in a way) who organise themselves to a certain extent based on a “free economy”… This scenario is not always far from the “popular district” scenarios, the main difference being that the State is less involved.

The scenarios presented are caricatures and none of them exist as such in the exercises carried out. These scenario categories are only valid as part of specific local processes which give them substance.

Scenarios are useful because they describe the possible territorial development logics, pushing them to the limit, but also because they represent the full range of possibilities. The gap between scenarios is as important as the scenarios themselves.

On all sites, based on the scenarios, it is possible to identify the major issues of the territory.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of variables / Cities</th>
<th>Ca</th>
<th>Re</th>
<th>Du</th>
<th>Sev</th>
<th>Mu</th>
<th>He</th>
<th>Pa</th>
<th>Sey</th>
<th>Sa</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population and populating</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographics (Structure by age, household composition)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Residential mobility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habitat / housing (size, structure, quality)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Security and feeling of insecurity</td>
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<td>Educational offer / role of schools</td>
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<td>Education and access to rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural diversity and “living together”</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of women</td>
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<td><strong>Living environment</strong></td>
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<td>District identity (for the residents)</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Access to employment (including qualifications)</td>
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<td>Higher education offer / role of students</td>
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Ca = Calais; Re = Rennes; Du = Dunkerque; Sev = Sevran; Mu = Mulhouse; He = Hérouville Saint-Clair; Pa = Pau; Sey = La Seyne sur Mer; Sa = Salon de Provence.
III. Perspectives

What are the possible perspectives of the approaches undertaken in 2009-2010?

Before we answer this question, it should be pointed out that the DIV wanted to launch these exercises to assess the relevance and feasibility of these prospective studies, without anticipating that these approaches necessarily lead to something else and without of course preventing the different sites from seizing these opportunities to go further. From this perspective, we would like to return to two possible and non-mutually exclusive types of usage for these exercises: the constitution of prospective observation and monitoring tools and the development of territorial projects.

1. Development of prospective monitoring tools

Territories are extremely unequal in terms of observation and analysis resources. While some of them are equipped with experienced observatories or urban planning agencies, others do not always have the knowledge tools to support their reflections and decisions. However, it seems that the prospective approaches undertaken in 2008-2009 enabled all the territories to improve their knowledge of the districts.

Two specific characteristics of prospective approaches explain why the data researched often differs from that available to the principal resource centres.

- The data collected by prospective studies is both quantitative and qualitative.

The indicators selected as part of prospective approached are not just figures. Prospective studies strive, in spite of difficulties, to take into account not only measurable variables (volume of population) but also soft variables of recognised significance but difficult to measure (conviviality for example). The information on these soft variables will be in the form of estimates more so than figures.

Thus, prospective exercises encouraged the working groups, even in well-equipped territories, to determine variables on little-known aspects. In Rennes for example, despite the presence of a quality urban planning agency, an ad hoc survey was conducted to determine a variable relating to health conditions.

- The data collected by prospective studies is only valid for its own dynamics.

Figures at a given time are of little significance to prospective researchers who strive to identify evolutions, trends of varying strength and inertia which condition the future to a varying extent. Thus, unlike many observatories trapped in the present time and short term, data research in prospective studies is based on long series and only focuses on short-term variations if they are indicative of structural changes.
Prospective approaches therefore led the working groups to taking an interest in the evolutions of the past twenty years to put the present situation and its evolutions into perspective.

Data research, while facilitated in well-equipped territories, was not a simple process. It however made it possible to enhance the range of existing indicators with new features or approaches. Certain organisations therefore decided to enhance their knowledge tools with these new items.

In addition to enhancing the knowledge of territories, prospective approaches can also enable the implementation of dynamic territorial monitoring or observation.

Prospective approaches can provide a framework for monitoring systems as well as the keys for interpreting the data collected. The variables selected in prospective exercises are domains for which evolutions have been regarded as requiring close scrutiny because they are potentially fraught with consequences for the future of the territory. To determine the evolutions of each variable, indicators have been identified, subject to research and for which long series are therefore theoretically available. Furthermore, prospective evolution hypotheses have been outlined for each variable. Thus, these prospective visions can provide guidelines according to which the new data collected by a permanent observation or monitoring process can be interpreted. What is true on the scale of a variable is also true on a more global level: scenarios provide an intellectual framework according to which the evolutions observed on a daily basis can be interpreted.

The entire prospective process therefore corresponds with the architecture of a system designed to observe a constantly evolving territory. It provides a reference system for interpreting rather than just collating the data collected, while the monitoring process constantly enhances the prospective work carried out which may eventually be (or seem) obsolete if not updated.

Obviously, the switch from a given prospective exercise to the development of a prospective monitoring system is not automatic, it requires adjustments and team mobilisation.

2. Prospective studies on territory projects

Exploratory prospective studies describe the possible futures of a territory; they say nothing about what is desired or dreaded. They offer no value judgments. In fact, they may seem totally gratuitous and useless. Elected officials sometimes have this opinion because, as they have a vision, they may consider speculations on the future to be a waste of time. However, prospective studies are not meant to be disassociated from actions, quite the opposite. While exploratory prospective approaches can lead to the creation of a shared culture, the construction of monitoring and observation tools, their primary goal is to shed light on issues and constitute decision-making tools.

Based on the exploratory approaches undertaken in 2009-2010, we would like to point out how, and under what conditions, prospective studies can be a useful tool for the development of territorial projects, in particular in sensitive urban territories.
Generalities: exploratory prospective studies and strategy

All territories and all stakeholders and organisations involved in these territories have a certain flexibility. This flexibility is all the more significant as these stakeholders are keen to monitor and anticipate, are not forced into exclusively managing emergency situations (with circumstances overwhelming decision-makers), have managed to explore what may happen (exploratory prospective process) sufficiently early to be able to think about what they can and wish to do and therefore determine objectives and adopt a strategy (ways and means) for achieving these objectives.

Therefore all territorial players, primarily politicians, are more or less in the position of navigator, usually equipped with two devices, a lookout post and a rudder.

The primary function of the lookout post is to examine what may happen (exploratory prospective process), identify possible futures by distinguishing, as much as possible, between the possible futures of the external environment and those of the territory. This requires the detection and analysis of the major trends (or “strong trends”) structuring the evolution of the territory, as well as the identification of early warning signs of possible evolutions, which in prospective terms is referred to as seeds of the future, roots of possible futures or “key developments” or “low-level signals” modifying or confirming these major trends. The function of these exploratory prospective studies carried out in the districts in 2008-2009 is certainly not to predict what the future will be but to identify the range of possible futures and the medium and long-term issues which we must prepare for.

If strengths and weaknesses, i.e. flexibility, have been correctly evaluated, and if an end has been defined, i.e. a medium and long-term objective, the rudder must enable the implementation of a strategy, the adoption of a trajectory which can help us switch from the current situation to the objective determined.

The prospective approach applied to territories therefore comprises two very different but complementary aspects: one aimed at exploring the future and the other at constructing the future. The exploratory aspect must enable decision-makers to identify major alternatives; the strategic aspect, once the choices have been made, must enable their implementation.

Thus, an increasing number of territories are resorting to the prospective approach as a decision-making tool involving strategic choices committing them in the medium and long term. Decisions made today (not only in terms of infrastructures) have a significant impact on the future whereas the diversity of factors and stakeholders to be taken into account makes it difficult to make medium and long-term predictions. However, this concern for the future cannot mean sacrificing the short term for the long term. Therefore a combination of short, medium and long term is necessary, by starting from the present to explore possible futures looking forward to different timeframes or by starting from a long-term objective and returning to the present, establishing a countdown of actions to be taken.

Thus, the prospective approach is clearly designed to protect us from the pitfall of only dealing with emergency situations, thereby giving us a certain flexibility in terms of choices and actions. Its purpose is to clarify issues and help decision-makers make strategic choices
which can subsequently be concretely implemented in plans of action, planning documents, etc.

The approaches initiated in 2008-2009 in the districts deliberately focused on the exploratory aspect of prospective studies. The objective of these approaches orchestrated by the DIV was to encourage local authorities to implement prospective approaches so that they can take action regarding the future of the districts; the DIV was however unable to undertake strategic approaches involving political choices alongside local elected officials.

**Move on to strategy?**

Can local authorities rely on exploratory prospective approaches to construct a strategy for their districts? This question was raised many times during the national meetings which involved the local SG CIV managers responsible for the prospective approaches in June and September 2009. While one of the primary objectives of prospective approaches is to shed light on the issues and therefore help elected officials make choices affecting the future, it is necessary to be cautious when combining the exploratory prospective aspects carried out in 2008-2009 with the development of strategies for the districts. This caution is important in light of the nature of the exercises carried out; we will develop this further.

Switching from exploratory prospective studies (what may happen?) to strategy requires several stages the implementation of which raises several issues, general and specific to our context.

### The different stages of exploratory and strategic prospective studies

The work carried out in the districts made it possible to describe scenarios presenting possible futures for the district within its agglomeration. Moving on to a strategic and therefore action phase requires:

- The determination of the **desired future** by choosing a scenario among those constructed, or by reconstructing one based on the morphological table. The scenario
identified as desired becomes a project. This phase is therefore the direct responsibility of elected officials (What do we want?).

- The identification of action levers which can be activated to avoid unwanted scenarios and facilitate the occurrence of the desired scenario (What can we act upon?). These levers can be identified for each variable.
- The identification, for each identified lever, of the actions to be taken to achieve the objectives. This requires a schedule of actions, the monitoring of their coherence and combination with the other ongoing projects (Who does what when?).
- The execution and monitoring of the actions decided upon, guaranteeing adaptations over time.

This traditional approach can use the prospective studies conducted.

However, several points should be reiterated:

- **Prospective studies do not describe the future**

  The prospective approaches carried out are the result of rigorous proceedings, based on data and the expertise of the members of the working group. However, they do not provide illusory scientific knowledge of the future; the image of the districts in 2025 will probably differ from that described in the scenarios. In addition, the same work carried out by another working group would certainly give partially different results. This element of subjectivity must be kept in mind.

  In other words, this approach enables the detection of existing dynamics, the identification of possible ruptures, the highlighting of the principal issues and the outlining of the different possible futures. These various elements are very useful when making decisions and can be used in the implementation of a territorial project. The connections established in scenario constructions must however be re-examined.

- **Prospective approaches have been undertaken on the scale of the district**

  The scenarios relate to one district selected from other districts, not to the city or agglomeration. They contain indications on these broader scales but these scales have not been analysed in detail. In a way, these studies examined the city or agglomeration via the district.

  Certain scenarios which can seem desirable for the district are not necessarily good for the city and vice versa. Certain districts can be envisaged as a concentration of all the difficulties of an otherwise pleasant agglomeration; a formerly sensitive district can now be idyllic although surrounded by deteriorating districts.

  For local authorities, an alternative results from this:

  Either the project that we wish to develop is global, and the decision of the desired scenario must be made on a broader scale, which leads to the necessity of extending the proceedings beyond the exercise carried out (it may be worth discussing the issue as part of upcoming CUCS – social contracts for urban cohesion).
Or we wish to develop local actions with no impact on a global territorial project, and the prospective exercise conducted is a good starting point, keeping in mind that the action levers are more limited than those tackled in the variables.

Furthermore, switching from exploratory prospective studies to the project and strategy assumes knowledge of who decides on the project (the State, the agglomeration, the city, a partnership etc.?), who the mobilised stakeholders are (stakeholders involved in the district are also involved in other domains etc.) and therefore what flexibility there is for the completion of the project and, at the same time, what the uncontrolled factors are.

Switching from exploratory prospective studies to the project, i.e. identifying action levers, involves the correct assessment of the flexibility which itself depends on the decision-making level and stakeholders involved.

- **Prospective studies develop a systemic process**

The scenarios were constructed based on a number of interacting variables. The prospective approach attempts to take this interaction into account and highlight its complexity. “Pink” or “black” scenarios can sometimes use the same prospective hypotheses which, in one context, can be positive and, in another, become negative. Therefore it is important not to assume necessary connections between two variables from this exercise but, on the contrary, to stress the **necessary global dimension of a project** to achieve the desired result.

Thus, the switch to strategy requires not only the identification of action levers but the determination of the interaction of these levers to create the desired dynamics.

The different points mentioned above should encourage us to take time to reflect before launching into the strategy so that the project is not built on sand or rendered inoperative by the lack of levers enabling its implementation.

Switching to strategy from the exploratory approaches established in 2008-2009 requires the clarification of the scope of the project (global project? On what scale?). This is essential for the accurate definition of how to construct the territorial project based on the prospective approach. Similarly, it is essential to know who the project manager is.

### 3. Scenarios on the local perspectives of the exercises performed

Several scenarios can be outlined on the possible local consequences of the exploratory prospective approaches carried out in the districts:

a. Either the municipality (or agglomeration), after familiarising themselves with the benefits of prospective studies and experiments, initiates overall proceedings on the future of sensitive districts and underprivileged populations in its territory (perhaps in anticipation of the new CUCS), in which case a prospective reflection must be reconstructed, possibly by adapting the method in light of what was
achieved in 2008-2009. This overall prospective reflection can result in a genuine city (or agglomeration) scale strategy.

b. Or elected officials consider that the exercise is interesting and can bring about desirable changes in the district. It is used as a suggestion box and there is not much more to do than has already been accomplished.

c. Or elected officials consider that the exercise is interesting and can bring about desirable changes in the district. A working group is assembled to take it further and design a genuine plan of action in order to strive for a desirable future validated by elected officials. The flexibility available must be accurately determined before launching into action (for example: can demolitions-reconstructions be envisaged? Road developments? etc.)

d. Or elected officials find the exercise interesting and adopt it as part of participatory democracy, in which case they can discuss the scenarios constructed after altering them.

e. Or elected officials do not embark on a strategic approach; local stakeholders can use the prospective study to coordinate their actions, in which case it is used as a common reference system. It can even be formalised as guidelines. In a more advanced case, the prospective approach enhances and structures a dynamic observatory of the territory (see above).

Prospective approaches can therefore be used for different purposes depending on the objectives pursued. These objectives must be clarified before establishing how the prospective study carried out can be used.

4. Local prospective studies and national perspectives

The ten exercises carried out as experiments raise the question of evaluation and the possible consequences, no longer on the scale of the each of the nine territories involved in this approach but at national level. Has the territorial prospective approach proved successful? Can it be used in any way in and for the territories of French urban policy? Under what conditions? And in what context?

We would like to provide food for thought on these different questions, which would be all the more useful in this context of reforms of urban policy. Projects relating to priority geographical locations and contractualisation are currently being discussed. Debates on the reform of territorial authorities evidently have a significant effect on this.

In this evolving context, we would like to outline the role of prospective studies in urban policy systems. Without claiming to be the ideal solution to all problems, we believe that the

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10 In this report, we do not tackle the issue of a prospective approach to urban policy as such which nonetheless would be extremely interesting. We deal with the possible benefits of territorial prospective studies for urban policy.
Prospective approach can constitute a useful tool for urban policy. To do this, it must not become an additional and superfluous step in existing systems. The prospective approach can help harmonise observation, diagnostic, project and evaluation processes if it is integrated as a global approach by all stakeholders involved in these systems. This obviously requires that the approach be coordinated and steered.

**Prospective studies: an urban policy tool**

Prospective studies can be useful to urban policy if they (partially) respond to three inherent difficulties of this urban policy:

- Urban policy suffers from an accumulation of systems difficult to decipher, lacking in transparency and upgradeability and the fairness and efficiency of which are regularly criticised.
- The stakeholders of urban policy suffer from an erratic policy marked by a frequent system changes, resulting in a lack of legibility of the objectives pursued and lack of continuity in the actions undertaken.
- Urban policy is contract-based by nature; its complexity is inherently linked to that of territorial governance.

However, the prospective approach is a tool which enables:

- The combination of long and more immediate timeframes, thereby facilitating the legibility of actions according to the objectives.
- The construction of a shared reflection, associating the different stakeholders.
- The constitution of a reflection tool also used as decision-making aid.

**A combination of timeframes**

Prospective studies are a medium and long-term process, i.e. often looking forward 10, 15 or 20 years. These timeframes are distant enough to exceed those of the projects committed to and envisage genuine ruptures or turns in relation to the current situation; they are however close enough so that the actions undertaken today have some impact on the final situation envisaged.

While prospective studies attempt to develop a reflection on the future, it is of course underpinned by knowledge of the present and organised around this knowledge. In other words, the entire scenario building approach is based on the combination of timeframes, from the past to the future and including the present. This approach therefore relies on dynamic diagnostics of the territory and constructs scenarios of possible futures, starting right now and continuing until the specified deadline.

The scenarios offer different outcomes and “final images” as well as well-argued courses leading from the present to the future.

**Shared reflection**
Prospective studies, at the least territorial and notably when the promotion of a strategic reflection is envisaged, relies on a working group involving the different stakeholders in the process.

The objective of exploratory prospective studies is to construct a dynamic diagnostic (past and future) of the territory on which the stakeholders can reach a consensus. A “simple” description of the different possible futures in embryonic form in the present situation, the explorative prospective approach must lead to a shared diagnostic, setting aside ideological or political differences.

It should be pointed out at this stage that exploratory prospective studies say nothing about “desirable” futures which can be a source of disagreement.

- A reflection tool used for action

The time dedicated to exploratory prospective studies is not only useful for the construction of scenarios. It enables the creation of a common culture for those involved, the acculturation of the different partners which facilitates the commitment of these partners to the implementation of projects which they will have partly initiated. Generally speaking, exploratory prospective studies and the development of policies or strategies come together naturally as the prospective approach is designed as a decision making tool (see above).

Prospective studies and development of CUCS

The different characteristics of prospective studies as mentioned above show that they could constitute a useful tool for the development of territorial projects as part of CUCS (Urban contracts for social cohesion). Several cities and agglomerations involved in this approach in 2008-2009 are planning to use the prospective work in the development of upcoming contracts.

Without going back over the methods of the prospective approach, which will be the object of a specific guide, it should nonetheless be noted that the prospective approach seems to fulfil a number of objectives expected of CUCS and that it offers interesting tools to be used in this context.

- On objectives

We believe that the contract-based approach requires the development of territorial projects combining large-scale vision and specific objectives, notably regarding priority territories. The prospective approach offers global scenarios as well as the courses leading to the objectives and therefore offers the possibility of defining intermediate objectives which could be subject to contracts.

Of course, this requires that, among the different possible scenarios, a desirable scenario be identified and negotiated by the stakeholders to become the project; the procedures of these negotiations and choices have yet to be determined.
• **On methods and tools**

The scenario method has been tried and tested in the territories. It has the advantage of constructing a **structured and relatively simple collective reflection framework** allowing stakeholders to work together although they would not necessarily be inclined to do so. It leaves room for subjective assessments while being based on robust data.

The production of global reflections and dynamic data makes it possible not only to achieve scenarios which can help with the decision-making process but also to develop tools to monitor territorial evolutions (see specific section on the development of prospective tools above).

A rigorously conducted prospective study based on the scenario method often takes several months. This is an important process which involves a lot of energy. Thus, for this type of prospective study to be effectively useful for urban policy, it is necessary to specify the expected results and apparently necessary implementation procedures (who manages the study? Who validates it?). An integral part of urban policy systems, the prospective approach could, under certain conditions, help enhance the consistency and content of CUCS and make expected results more legible.

**Conclusion**

In 2007, the proposed territorial prospective approaches applied to urban policy territories seemed like a major challenge. Nowadays, the reactions of the different working groups and elected officials involved in the ten exercises carried out as part of this experiment are proof that the prospective approach fulfils a need.

This need takes several forms:

- Urban policy professionals and elected officials concerned aspire to move away from the management of systems for analysing ongoing changes and re-examining the objectives pursued. The prospective approach, by focusing on long timeframes, provides the opportunity for this reflection as well as its framework.

- The second need fulfilled by the prospective approach is the combination of approaches and skills. By encouraging team work, the prospective approach makes it possible to confront different points of view, construct shared diagnostics and create new partnerships based on jointly identified issues.

- Finally, the prospective approach is an instrument used for the establishment of territorial projects. From this perspective, it constitutes a tool usable by elected officials. It can also support the development of collective projects in territories where different powers coexist.

These different observations lead to the conclusion that a prospective approach applied to urban policy territories is a recommended course of action. However, certain precautions must
be taken so that the prospective approach does not become yet another project for urban policy professionals.

- The objectives pursued by a prospective approach must be clearly established.
- An efficient prospective approach must associate the different players concerned.
- A rigorous territorial prospective approach takes time and must be carefully prepared.

At the end of this experiment, we believe that it would be beneficial to consider prospective studies a necessary stage in the development of territorial projects, in particular for the new urban contracts for social cohesion. Should this be the case, the expected results of these prospective approaches would need to be clearly specified.