the New Town travel guides

CERGY PONTOISE

MAIS OUI! CERGY!
Congratulations!

By opening this guide, you have taken the first step towards expanding your horizon! After all, the city of Cergy-Pontoise is not likely to be the first destination popping up in your head when planning a trip in the region surrounding Paris. This guide intends to guide you through the fascinating village of Cergy-Pontoise and helps you understand this small, contested city and its neighbourhoods.

The New Town Cergy-Pontoise one of the five New Towns of Paris that were built from the 1960s onwards and it is assumed to be the most successful one. About 30 km northwest of Paris, this urban agglomeration was built 'on top of' 15 ancient villages in the loop of the river Oise, to be named after only two of them eventually - Cergy and Pontoise.

By introducing you to the history of the New Towns - or 'villes nouvelles', as the French call them - in France, and of 'Project Cergy-Pontoise' itself, the first part of this Alternative City Guide' offers the context you will need to understand this relatively young city.

The second section literally takes you around town: no better way to understand the present-day functioning of a city than a walk through its neighborhoods!

To conclude, this guide will eventually provide you with a bicycle tour through the whole village at once, providing a complete image of this unusual tourist destination.

Enjoy your trip!

the *New Town* travel guides
Cergy-Pontoise

INTI - International New Town Institute

Colofon

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Content

Introduction: The First French New Towns

What is a New Town?
Before explaining what makes this New Town interesting from a tourist's perspective, we should clarify the term 'New Town'. Although Cergy-Pontoise is a very unique New Town in some ways, it is also part of a large family of New Towns with similar features and characteristics. It is one result of a long tradition of developing new cities from scratch. What characterizes a New Town? New Towns are typically designed from the beginning by professionals as a totally new city according to a Master Plan on a site where there was no city before. This aspect distinguishes a New Town from a 'normal' city that gradually grows and evolves over time. A second aspect in which New Towns are distinguished from 'normal' cities, is that they are often the result of a political (top-down) decision. They are the product of a deliberate action plan.

The planning regions of France

France
France can be distinguished into twenty-one regions, each headed by a regional office or 'superprefect'. The Préfecture of Paris, also known as the 'Île de France', dominates the country, holding the main sources of economic activity and social, political and cultural power. Its growth would eventually lead to the emergence of the very first French New Towns.

To control this growth, since 1963, the Interministerial *Delegation of Land Planning and Regional Attractiveness* - abbreviated in French as DATAR - has been responsible for the development of a sophisticated regional development policy in France, which is still partially founded on the notion that the economic and demographic growth of Paris must be scaled down, in favor of the development of other regions in the country. Therefore, DATAR selected eight urban regions: Marseille, Lyon, Lille, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Nantes-ST. Nazaire, Strasbourg, and Nancy-Metz. By focusing on the (industrial) development of these eight cities,

DATAR aimed to provide some counterweight to the strong pull of Paris. Yet, in spite of the attempts to correct the historical imbalances between Paris and the provinces, the Paris region continued to grow: from a city of one million in 1851, to 1.8 million in 1866, to 2.5 million in 1891, and to 6.6 million in 1946. To put this in perspective: in 1946, Paris' share of the national population was 15 percent.

Grands Ensembles
To house all these people, planners of the 1950s and 1960s built large-scale housing estates, called 'grands ensembles', in the suburbs. These massive social housing blocks soon turned out to become areas intoxicated by crime and social insecurity, causing the city to become more and more socially and spatially segregated. In spite of the large number of people living there, the connections between the city centre and the edges of the city were rather poor, even though many of the inhabitants had their jobs in the centre.


Sarcelles, Grand Ensamble, Paris

This rather disadvanteous situation led Paul Delouvrier, Director-General of Paris in the period of 1961-1969, to the idea of having multiple centres of such a large urban area - new urban centres within the region of Paris, but still with enough distance from the capital to function on their own, with enough green space and facilities to be called actual cities on themselves.

Delouvrier's idea became the first step towards a history of New Towns in France. In 1965, when planners estimated that the Paris population would increase with 65 percent to 14 million people by 2000, the first government document supporting New Towns appeared. The SDAURP (*Schema d'Amenagement et d'Urbanisme de la Region Parisienne*) was founded. For the first time, planners chose to focus on long term development and started planning five New Towns surrounding Paris: five independent New Towns which were well-connected to the capital.
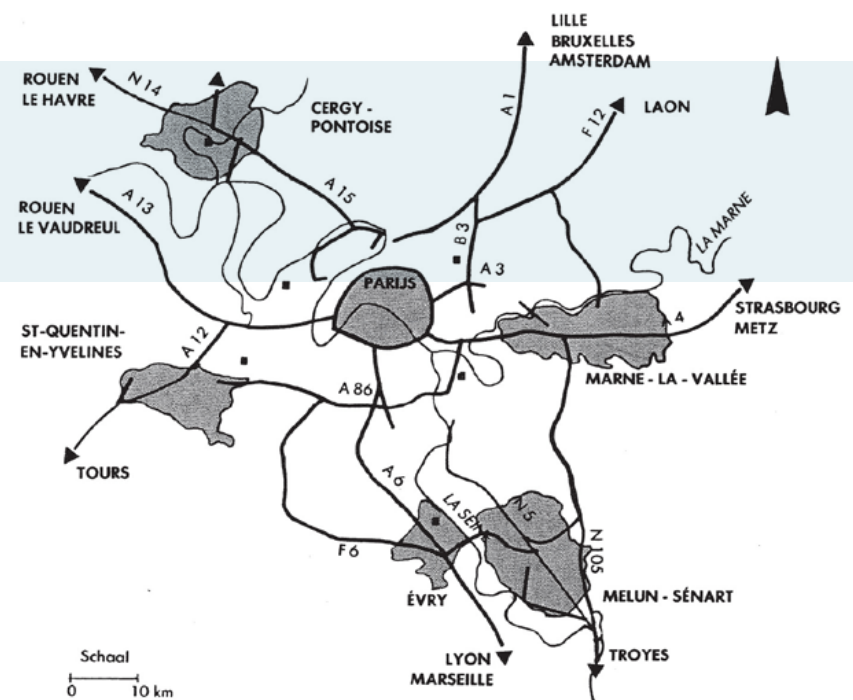

Le grand Arch de la Défense
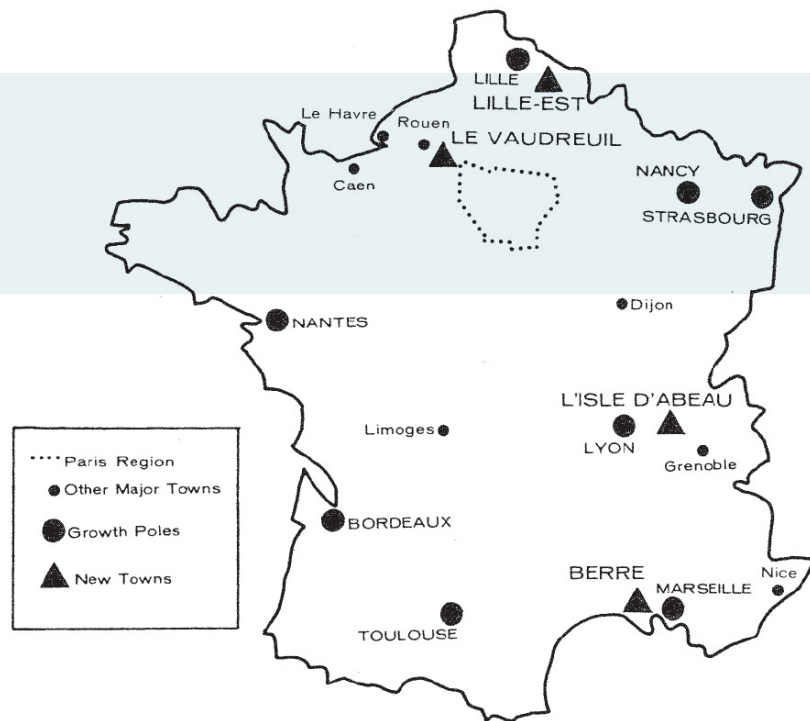
Villes nouvelles in France

The villes nouvelles of Paris

Villes Nouvelles

The execution of this plan started quickly: in the early 1970s, the construction of Marne-la-Vallée, Evry, Saint-Quinting-Yvelines, Melun-Sénart and Cergy-Pontoise started. In addition to these five *Villes Nouvelles* around Paris, L'Etang de Berre, 15 kilometers northwest of Marseille, Lille-Est, 5 kilometers east of Lille, L'Isle d'Abeau, 35 kilometers east of Lyon and Le Vaudreuil, 25 kilometers southeast of Rouen, were also built. Each of them was meant to house between 14.000 and 300.000 inhabitants.

During the 1960s, Paul Delouvrier was in charge of the SDAURP: he became responsible for the construction of the New Towns for which his thoughts had been the foundation. His nickname became the 'building master' of president de Gaulle and he took his job very serious. He was not the type to design a city for people he had never met. Rather, he took his cabriolet car through the outskirts of Paris and sproke to the people living in the *Grandes Ensembles* there, learning about their problems and their wishes. On the basis of the outcome of this 'one-man-fieldwork' he distilled several improvement points for the planning of France's first New Towns.

New Towns were perhaps new in France at the time, but by no means were they new in Europe. New towns were a response to the industrialized cities of Europe. Put simply, New Towns, in which green space was combined with residential areas and other necessary facilities, provided the healthy alternative for urban living which was so utterly needed in the overcrowded, dirty centres of industrial cities.

In the case of France, the construction of Villes Nouvelles assembled a wide range of financial professionals, planners, sociologists, psychologists, demographers, engineers and architects in the EPA, the *Etablissement Public d'Amenagement*, an urban planning service which became the engine behind the new urban development since the 1970s. It held the highest authority and could push through or freeze urban projects. More importantly, it integrated insights from psychology and sociology into its plans. The EPA controlled the construction and managed the further development of the new cities until 2002, after which the SCoT (*Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale de Cergy-Pontoise*) replaced the EPA, taking care of new city development up to today.

The French New Towns were presented as the opposite of the failed *Grandes Ensembles*. To emphasize that fact, as well as to make sure there were clear goals which these cities had to live up to, the planners structured their ideas by means of three different guiding principles:

I. Villes Nouvelles were not meant to be an extension of a large urban centre, but had to develop their own functioning economy.
II. Villes Nouvelles had to be accessible for everyone, providing a social mix of income and origins of their residents.
III. To not make the same mistakes as were made with the building of the *Grandes Ensembles* - which were completely disconnected from social services and other facilities - this time, all public amenities were to be built first.
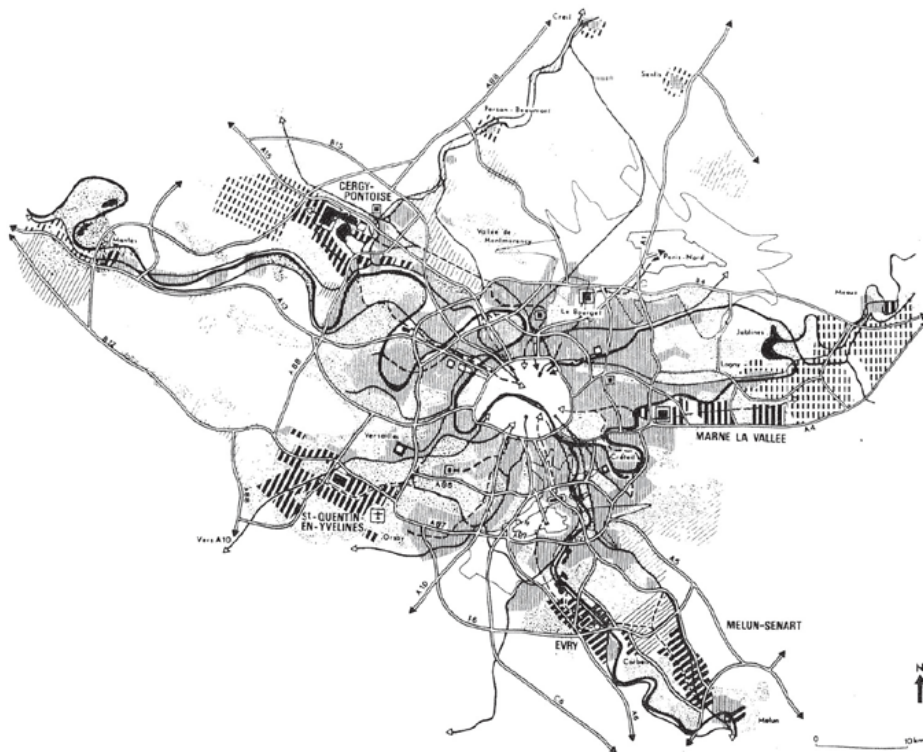
The Paris region master plan of 1965.

The revised Paris region master plan of 1969

Next to these goals, the most important and renewing aspect of French New Town planning was perhaps the way in which New Towns were built to suit their users in an almost consumerism-driven manner. Many planners and policy makers saw them as products that needed to be sold in order to be successful.

That shows in the advertisements: when we look at Cergy-Pontoise, the brochure for this New Town in 1968 no longer promoted dwelling units, shopping centres or office buildings, but 'a new way of life' deeply intertwined with modern notions of urbanity: to work close to home and spend the weekends in the countryside or the coast without having to face the nightmare of traffic, to enjoy the liveliness of an urban centre without suffering from its noise, to leave the children to go to school by themselves without being afraid they won't get there safely.

Every New Town was branded with a a new, pleasant lifestyle, though not everyone was convinced of this utopian idea. Most inhabitants of the places where the new cities were planned - also in Cergy, Pontoise and surrounding villages - people remained rather sceptic.

Early History

Though combined into a New Town, the history of Cergy, Pontoise and their neighboring villages goes centuries back. As is not uncommon for urban settlements, their history starts with the geographical advantages of their region, be it different ones than the perks which would make it the foundation of the Cergy-Pontoise Project. Its long history makes Cergy-Pontoise a unique New Town in which the past and the present intertwine.

Chapter 1:
Cergy-Pontoise

In the twelfth century, the villages along the Oise (Cergy, Pontoise and Saint-Ouen) developed gradually along one road running parallel to the river, which is nowadays known as the Rue National and Rue Vauréal. All three villages were built on the slopes of the hills; close to the river, limestone quarries, farmlands and vineyards, but just above flood-level of the river Oise. Wine production remained the regions prime source of income for centuries. Yet, the urban expansion of the 1970s only had little to do with agricultural output, but everything with top-down planning and new infrastructure.

Zooming in on the most important village in the region, the history of Cergy starts in 1120, when it still was a feudal town where king Louis VI and the Pope decided to build a monastry on top of the hill on which the village was situated. The original village church was enlarged, expanded with accomodation for (traveling) monks and given the name of 'Cergy'. During the centuries that followed, the church was the central point of the village. Over time, the house of worship was

extended, modified and reconstructed after it had been destroyed during the 100 Years War (1337-1453). The town itself continued to develop itself as a typical strip village, consisting of separate homes, farms and other buildings which gradually assembled along the road which linked all villages in the 'Loup de l'Oise'. Its quaint, rustic charm is still closely intertwined with the New Town it is today. Thanks to this particular urban form, and because the ancient parts of the village have remained untouched, all layers of history are very well visible and provide the foundation for the sense of identity which Delouvrier and his planners hoped to build the modern identity of Cergy-Pontoise on.
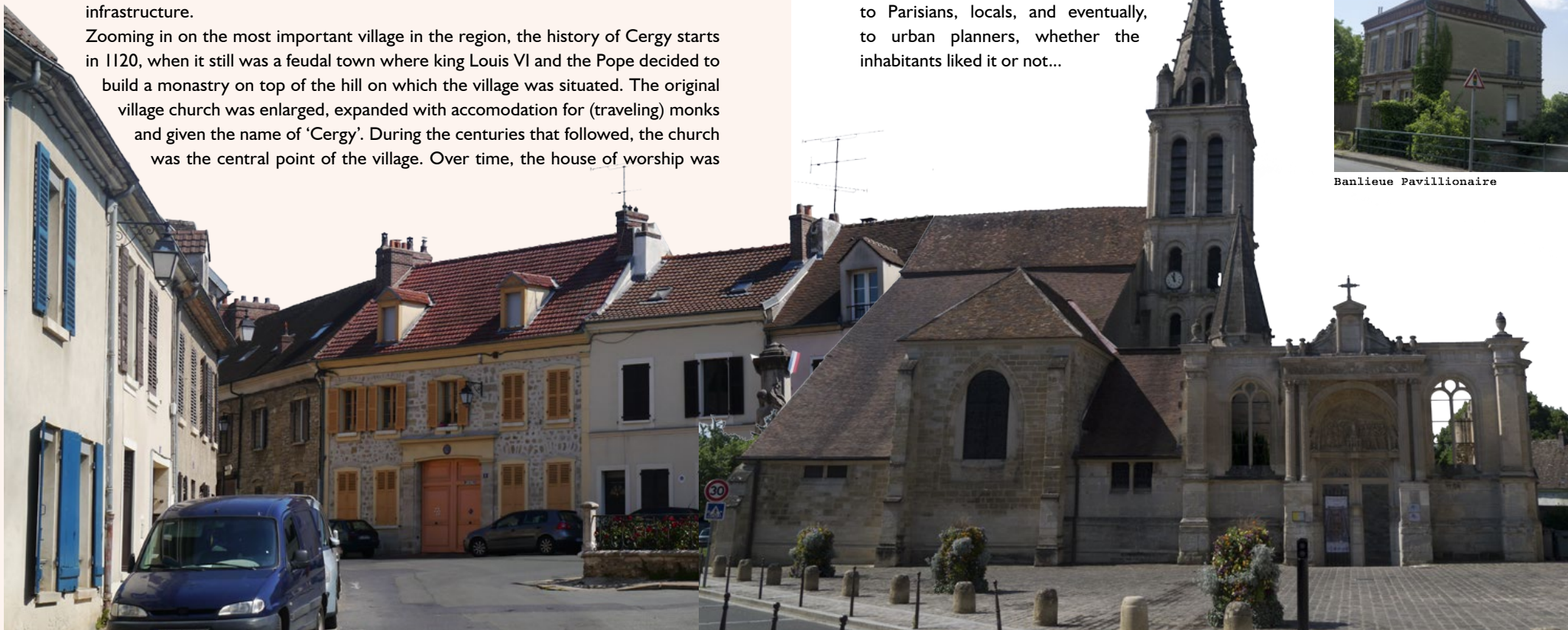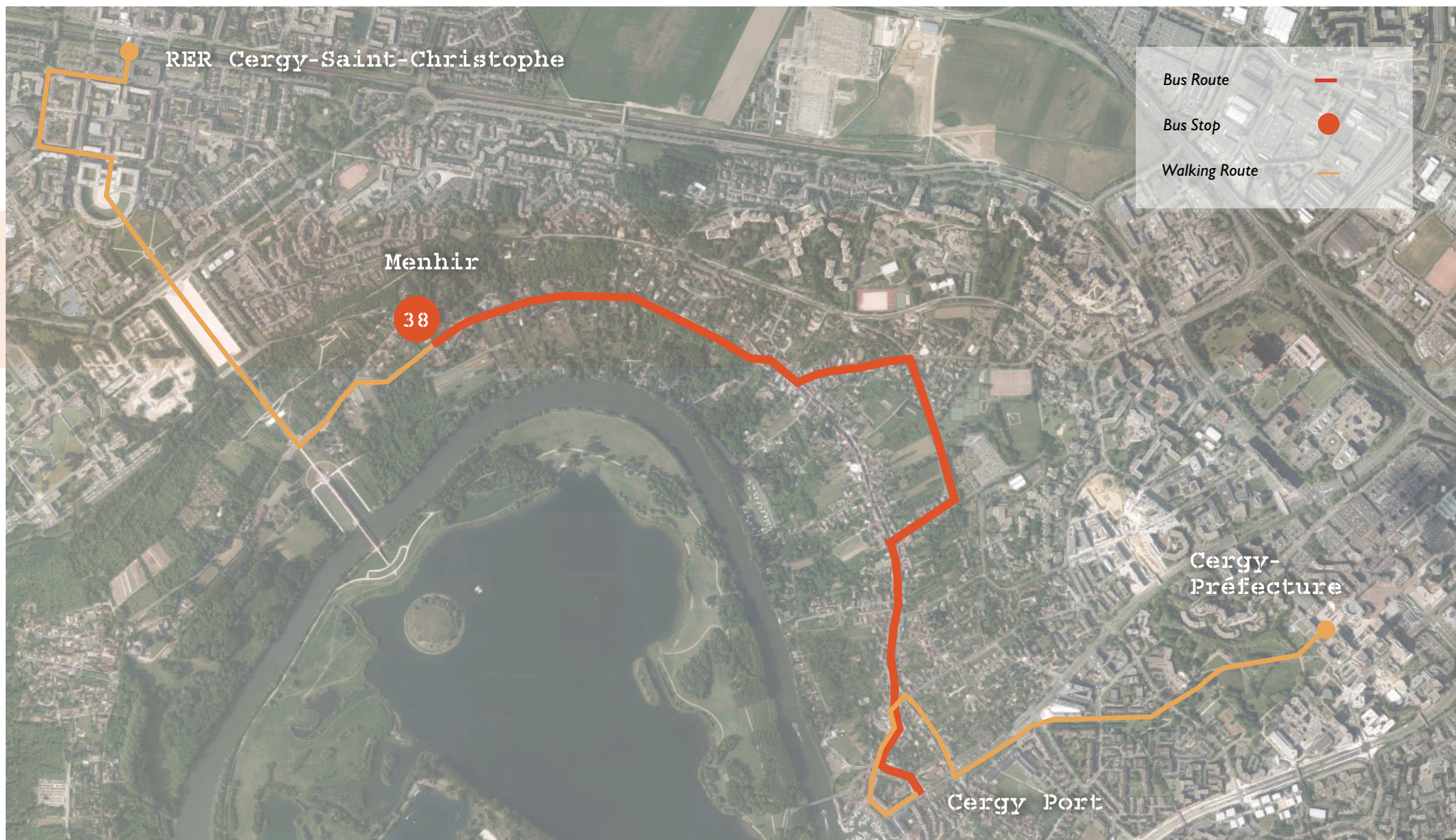
Cergy: une banlieue pavillionaire

During the 19th century, but before the middle classes migrated *en masse* to the villages, Cergy grew as a '*banlieue pavillionaire*': a village of summer villas for the Bourgeoise upper middle class of Paris. The lush hills and open space did not only attract the well-off from the French capital: with them, a variety of artists also spent some months out on the countryside of the loop of the Oise river. All in all, this led to a charming village of luxurious houses and rural cottages in a typically French architectural style, all linked together by small roads paved with cobble stones - the physical backbone of a close-knit, prosperous rural community.

Throughout centuries, the pittoresque landscape would continue to appeal to Parisians, locals, and eventually, to urban planners, whether the inhabitants liked it or not...

Banlieue Pavillionaire

RER Cergy-Saint-Christophe

Menhir

38

Cergy-Préfecture

Cergy Port

Bus Route

Bus Stop

Walking Route

Walking Route:
Historical Cergy-Pontoise

1. Hôtel Levasseur de Verville (Hôtel de la Coutellerie)
2. Menhir de Gency
3. Site archéologique de l'Allée Couverte
4. Église Saint-Christophe

1.

2.

3.

4.

Project Cergy-Pontoise

During the 1970s, the residents of Cergy-Pontoise were not at all excited about the idea of having their birth ground being transformed into the vibrant urban community which Delouvrier and the SDAURP envisioned. The New Town of Cergy-Pontoise was to be built on top of 15 villages, to be named after only two of them eventually.

In 1973, Cergy, Pontoise and the 13 other villages were all placed under the control of one single city council, which initially led to riots before and during the construction of the Préfecture building. At the time, the overall plan seemed a rather surrealist situation due to the urban, brutalist ziggurat of the Préfecture positioned in an otherwise rural context.

The locals had to deal with it nonetheless: as (public) transport improved and as the population pressure in suburbs closer to Paris increased, more and more middle class Parisians began to buy big old houses in Cergy and Pontoise or built new ones on the hillsides overlooking the river.

When it was decided that a new freeway from Paris to Rouen would pass through the Oise valley (between Cergy and Pontoise) the region only became more geographically advantageous: both in terms of distance and (public) transport, these villages were very well reachable from the outskirts of Paris.

This, in combination with the abundance of free space in the region, made a regional population explosion seem inevitable. Villagers feared to see their hills and farmland covered with housing blocks and the old towns crumbling in concrete modernity.
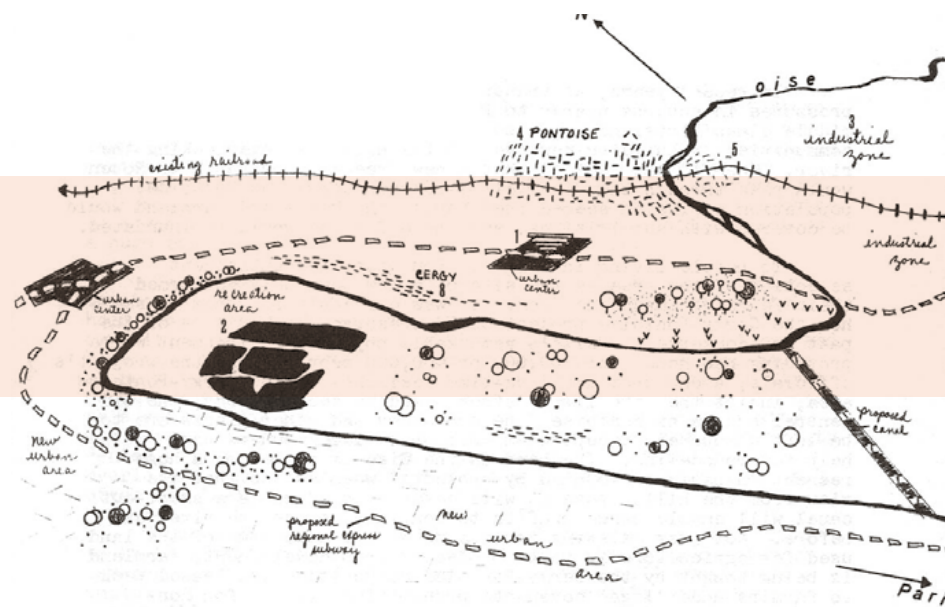
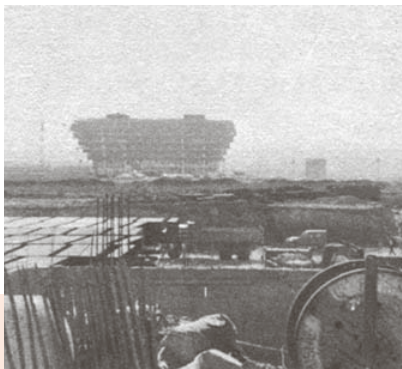Schematic drawing of Cergy-Pontoise site

Aerial photo of Cergy-Pontoise site (present)

Aerial photo of Cergy-Pontoise site (past)

Pedestrian bridge leading to the Préfecture

Préfecture from commercial and residential construction site

Structural plan for Cergy-Pontoise in 1970

When the government decided that their home towns would be the construction sites of a large scale new urban settlement, the people of Cergy, Pontoise and surrounding villages saw their worst nightmare coming true. No one was able to see how the Cergy-Pontoise project would guarantee preservation of their homes, heritage and the lushious hills surrounding them, while building new houses for 300,000 to 400,000 new residents. But the project's officials, among whom were long-time residents of the Cergy-Pontoise area, insisted that the little streets and houses of Cergy, the old central square of Pontoise, the monastery and other places of historical value were to be left untouched, unless the property owners asked for help with the remodeling specifically. The green space in the loop of the Oise was to become a huge recreation area surrounded by protected woodland to make sure that the view from the hills above would not change, while a short-cut canal would enable barge traffic to continue passing the river as before. Both the already existing forests and parts of the surrounding farmland were to be protected from urban development: the land was bought by the Cergy-Pontoise Corporation and leased back to farmers under legal contracts prohibiting its use for non-agricultural purposes.

Between 1966 and 1968, the developers drew up a 'Schema de Structures' for the new, polycentric agglomeration of Cergy-Pontoise and its direct surroundings, including the existing village of Pontoise, and the forests and lakes that were being envisioned as recreational zones. Rather than a set of functional zones, this new functional scheme represented a complete urban network. In order to guarantee the walkability of the city, the Schema de Structures emphasized high densities and an 'urban feel', but was keen on preserving the rural surroundings of the new city.

Public facilities were located in residential areas and separate pedestrian and car circulation systems were maintained throughout the first master plan. In addition, an extensive network of public transport was there to connect the old town square and the train station in Pontoise to the new Préfecture neighborhood and the surrounding new residential areas and shopping districts in the centre of the New Town.

The planners of Cergy-Pontoise first considered the construction of infrastructure and key public amenities, and only then turned their attention to housing programs.
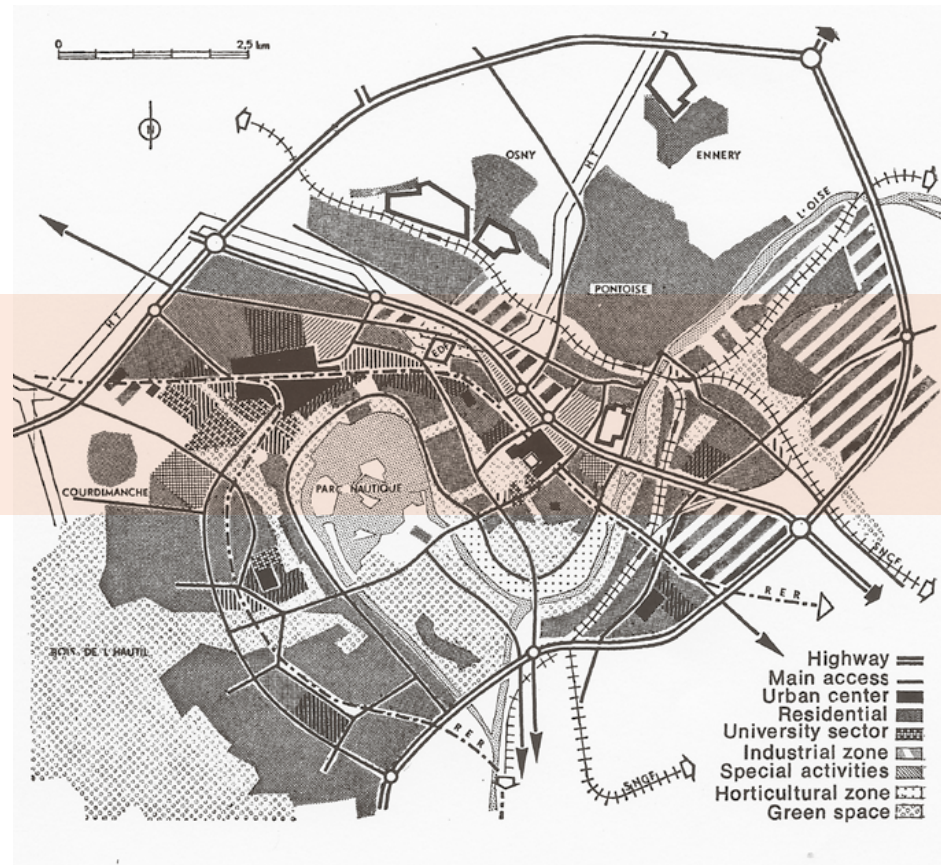
This way, the Préfecture and the departmental administration offices were built first. In order to provide public facilities for the first inhabitants that would soon arrive, the building also contained a public atrium, a cinema, a restaurant, a bar, an art gallery, and about 15 shops, including a hair dresser, a shoe maker, a travel agent, clothing shops. By doing so, the planners aimed to build a completely new city without bothering the first residents with the nuisance of construction work: a 'dream come true' in the words of the real estate agents which sold the properties.


'A city without construction sites' promised by a 1969 promotional brochure for Cergy-Pontoise

Cergy-Port

But before this dream would actually become reality and before the new houses, facilities and lifestyles could be sold, there still was a lot to do. To facilitate the construction of the infrastructure and the first public amenities of Cergy-Pontoise, in the 1960s, the river banks of the Oise in Cergy were transformed into a harbour from which construction workers were supplied with materials for the new Highway 15, which would connect the city centre of Cergy-Pontoise to Paris and other major cities. The harbor remained in use until 1989, when architect and urban planner François Spoerry and his son Bernard replaced it with a small marina and a shopping centre, which blended in with a residential area: it would become the very first and only neighborhood which integrated the river into its urban fabric.

By extending a river arm of the Oise towards a small island in the river, François and Bernard Spoerry created an artificial harbour which was crowned with an obelisk monument. This obelisk forms the end of the axis along the Boulevard du Port to the neighborhood of Cergy-Préfecture. It is nothing more but a funny reference to its much larger brother, the Axe Majeur, the impressive post-modernist land art monument which runs through the centre of Cergy-Pontoise. In a straight line, the Axe Majeur assembles twelve different post-modernist monuments varying from gardens to gates to landmarks, sometimes oddly exaggarated in size and scale.
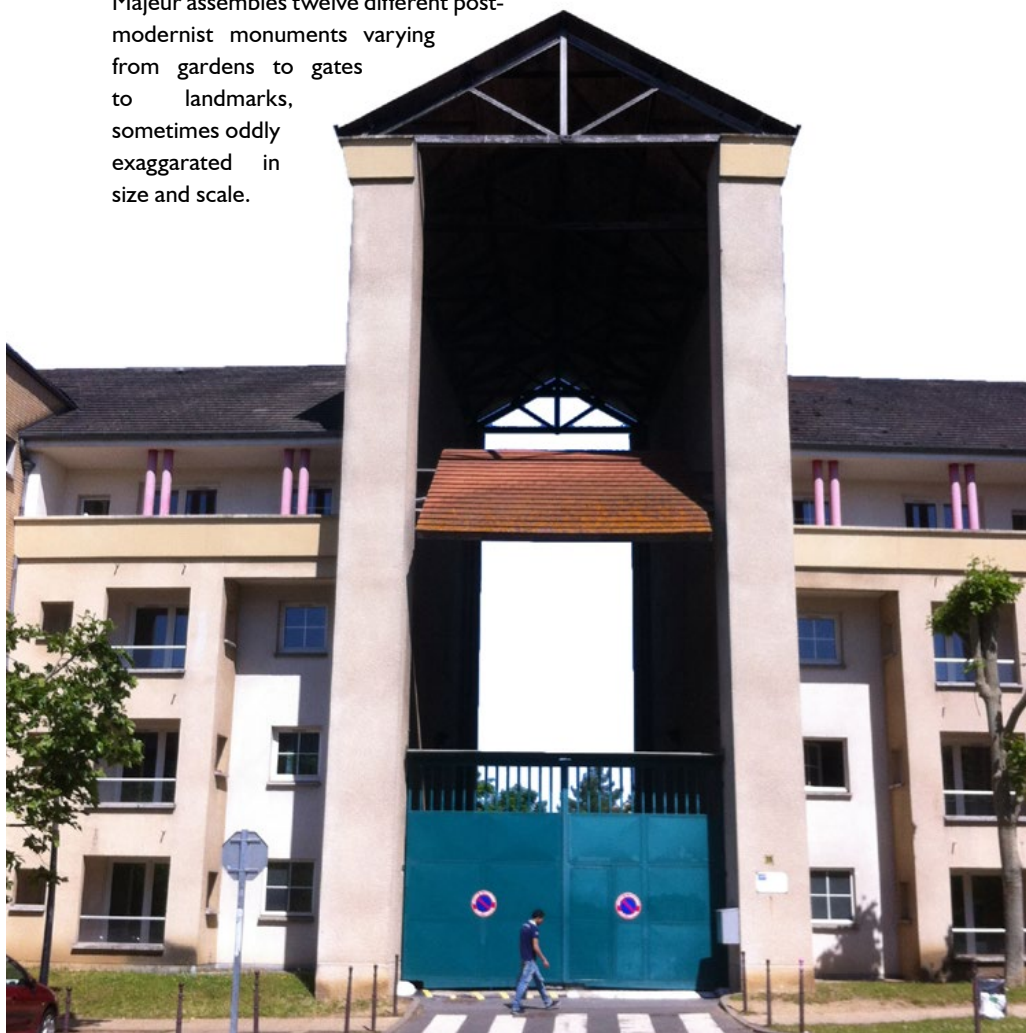
Construction of the harbor

Today, the neighbourhood of Cergy-Port is one of the few places to find proper. internationally oriented restaurants, which are primarily visited by tourists, boat owners and wealthy inhabitants of Cergy-Pontoise. Also once you are finished eating, you do not yet have to leave: the neighborhood also has some modest night-life facilities (English pub, disco). Due to the variety of restaurants and cafes, the picturesque architecture and its location next to recreation area 'Ile de loisirs' and the ancient town of Cergy, the place is booming: every night, every restaurant and pub is packed.

Cergy-Port

Cergy - St. Christophe

The *Axe Majeur* is part of the second neighborhood of Cergy-Pontoise - literally the second neighborhood, because St. Christophe, as it is called, was built after Cergy Préfecture was finished. The first inhabitants of the second neighborhood of Cergy-Pontoise - initially meant to be the city centre - arrived in 1980. Learning from the experience of building Préfecture, the urban planners of St. Christophe, or to be more specific, of Axe Majeur-Horloge, aimed to create a more 'readable' urban fabric, while, at the same time, introducing more (functional) diversity.

In reaction to modernist urbanism in which public space is merely the void space between buildings, the designers of this neighbourhood took on the tradition of classical French urbanism, according to which the first (and extremely important) phase of the design of the city is the definition of public space between buildings (squares, streets, pathways etc.). Afterwards, around these spaces, the designers of the neighbourhood organized the urban frame composed by buildings. Because of this, the planners paid a remarkable attention for the composition of the space. Little squares and 'geometric' shaped public spaces, as the long 'corridor' defined by rue de l'Abondance, compose the structure of the neighbourhood, offering several and different points of view for the visitor.


The centre of the district was structured according to a grid of orthogonal void spaces. The spaces along both sides of the central axis, formed by the Rue de l'Abondance, have a perfectly symmetrical, geometric organisation. With this in mind, one could even say that the urban form of the neighborhood looks somewhat similar to the typical orthogonal plan of the medieval fortified towns in the south of France. Its organization is modelled on Roman cities, where the Cardo, (the North-South axis of Rue de l'Abondance) equals the so-called 'decumanus' (the East-West axis which was central in the ancient Roman urban grid). The intersection of the two axes in the centre of the city corresponds with the location of the forum that is, in Cergy Pontoise, the Market Square or Place du Marché.
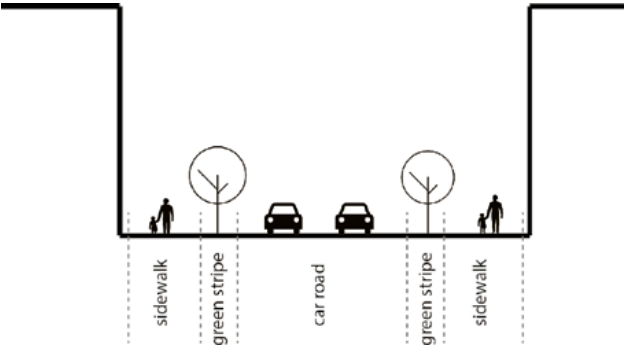
Identity through architecture
The public spaces and architecture of the St. Christophe neighbourhood are marked by the desire to introduce specific landmarks to reinforce the spatial identity of the city. Thus, the station is 'crowned' with a clock, and the neighborhood of St. Christophe is partially structured by the Axe Majeur, a monumental construction which connects 12 separate works of art and which runs straight through the neighborhood, making it one of the most emblematic places of the agglomeration of Cergy-Pontoise.

To further enhance placemaking and a sense of identity, St. Christophe also took on a new (or an old) approach towards livelyness on street level. Where the neighborhood of Préfecture was designed to separate pedestrians and car traffic, St. Christophe was built to do exactly the opposite. Referring back to a characteristic of traditional cityscapes, in this 1980s neighborhood, planners returned to mixed car and pedestrian traffic, which resulted in the re-appearance of parking strips, pedestrian crossings and traffic lights in the streetscape. *La dalle*, on which pedestrians made their way on bridges hovering over car traffic, was replaced with wide, monumental boulevards, matching the monumentality of most of the neighborhood's architecture and the Axe Majeur.
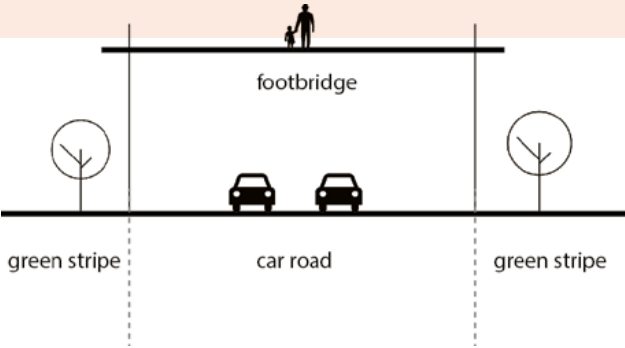
Grand Centre - Schematic Diagram of separation of car-pedestrian routes

Saint Christophe - Schematic Diagram back to mixed traffic

dalle

Bosphore Restau
Notre expérience au service de vo
PIZZA - KEB

Restaurant ZOZAN
Spécialités Kurdes, Turques et Grecques
GRILL - PIZZA - GREC
PLAT DU JOUR

La Mer
Noire
sandwicherie
fast food

TU'R' Copies

Jean-Luc
PARAMS
Agent
Général
gan
01 30 38 05 15

La Mer Noire

PIZZA

scène nationale de
L'apos
théâtre des Arts

VINCI
P   LES ARTS -   A   L

Chapter 2:
Up & about

Knowing the history, the facts and the figures of Cergy-Pontoise is one thing, but knowing the city itself is something completely different. What does this 'New Town on historical grounds' owe its identity to? And what is that identity like? This New Town provides a unique mix of eighteenth century Parisian architecture, beautiful scenery and modernist style urbanism. By means of explaining the architectural highlights of various neighborhoods in Cergy Pontoise, this chapter aims to provide you with a grasp of the urban identity of Cergy-Pontoise.

Thus, we continue with several tours through the neighborhoods of Cergy Préfecture, Cergy Sud, Cergy St. Christophe and Cergy Le Haut. Each of these tours is introduced with a short intro to the neighborhood, followed by a map of the neighborhood and a route past all of its architectural highlights.

Walking through...
Cergy-Préfecture

The ambition of Cergy-Préfecture was to create a lively multi-functional centre with its own identity and cultural meaning. In the Préfecture, a combination of shopping facilities, residential blocks, businesses and cafes was spread over a continuous grid of streets and squares with diverse building typologies. The Préfecture building, built with the intention of providing the New Town of Cergy-Pontoise with a vibrant central meeting point, combined a bus and train station on the ground floor with shopping facilities and La Grand Place, a green square surrounded by offices and houses.

In the 1970s neighborhood of Cergy-Préfecture, we encounter the modernistic *dalle*, a car-free pedestrian zone with infrastructure below. The high level of facilities, with every commune enjoying their own library, cultural centre, theaters, cinemas, and sports facilities is the remarkable aspect of this type of planning. This can be attributed to the political system of Cergy-Pontoise, where every commune has its own mayor, working together at the level of the agglomeration. Since the mayors are judged on the results in their own commune, it is important to preserve all these facilities. To fund them, local authorities rely on the French tax system, in which taxes are collected and spent locally.

Restructuring and urban renewal

Despite the planners' ambitions of integrating public facilities in residential areas and the communes' efforts to promote the use of public transport and bicycles, residents still argue that living in Cergy-Pontoise still requires a car. 'The main streets have become so busy that these roads are no longer pleasant to walk on.' For this reason, at the moment the municipality is investing in restructuring the infrastructure of the town.

According to the latest masterplan, the *Schema de Coherence Territoriale* (SCoT), adopted in 2011, the public facilities are aging. Although, in comparison with the *grand ensembles*, social problems are not so bad, some HLM housing complexes are restructured. Yet, what may be a lot worse is that Cergy-Pontoise is both aging and shrinking. Therefore the expansion possibilities are limited and yearly 1300 new homes are built by mainly intensification and restructuring projects.

Cergy Préfecture highway network

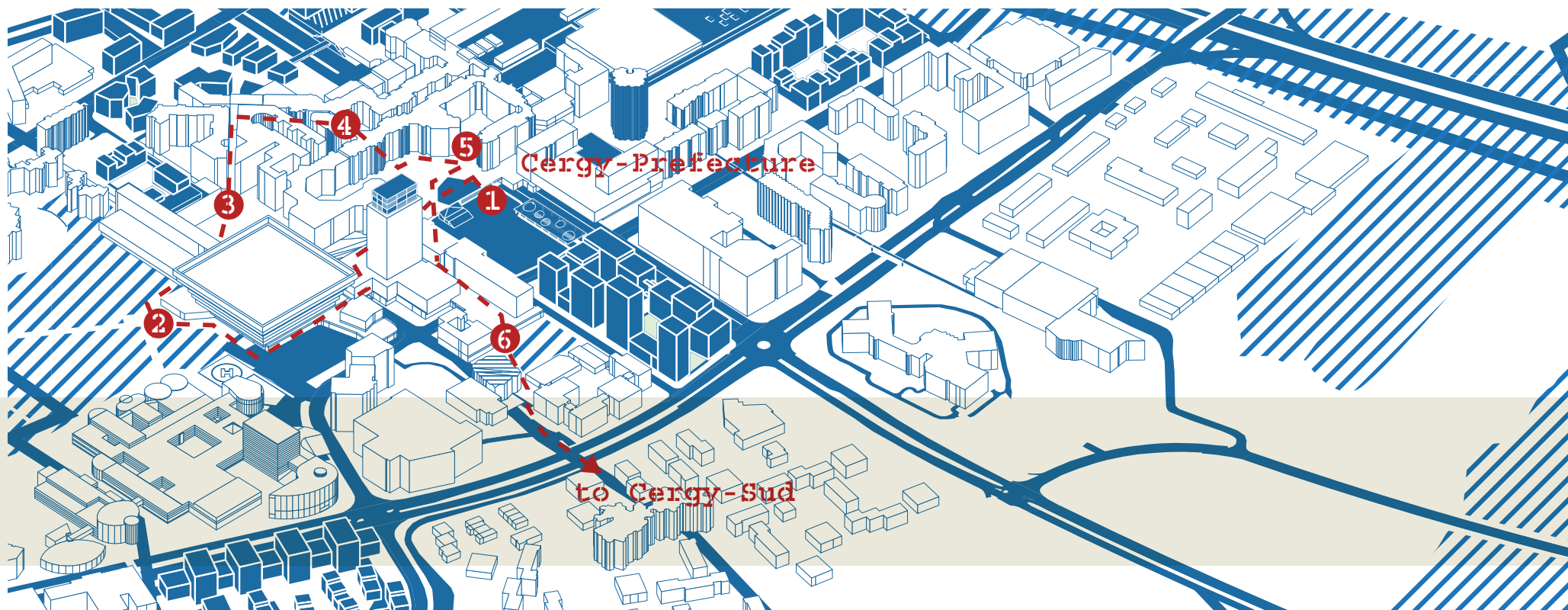Cergy Préfecture pedestrian network
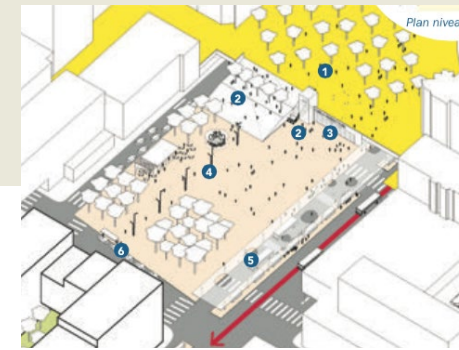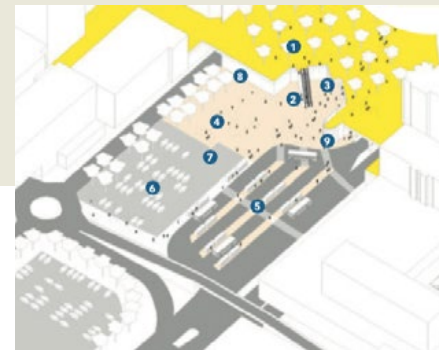
Plans for urban renewal Cergy Préfecture
1. Grand Place square
2. New pedestrian access square
3. Opening station on the square with glass facade
4. Lively square with bike rental station, shops and services
5. Bus station covered by a lightweight structure
6. Drop-off parking

Columbia Square

Cergy-Préfecture

to Cergy-Sud

Walking Route

[1] Columbia Square

[1] Bar Columbia in L'ami de mon amie

1. Gare de Cergy-Préfecture

Start of the tour is Gare de Cergy-Préfecture, a RER railway station connecting the New Town with Paris. Above the train station you will find the Grand Place or Columbia Square. The square owes its name to a sister-city program in 1984, during which a group of French students went on exchange to the city of Columbia in Maryland, USA. Following this exchange, Columbia City named one of its squares the 'Cergy-Pontoise Square', and Cergy-Pontoise returned the gesture.

The lesson learned from the monofunctional modernistic *grand ensambles* reflects in the architecture surrounding this square: a lively centre implies a variety of functions but also of architectural typologies and styles. Monoliths, towers, courtyards, loggias, covered squares,

elevated pathways and terraces on one hand; modernism, brutalism, structuralism, (critical) regionalism and postmodernism on the other, offer a showcase of the second half of 20th century architectural history. To make such a variety possible, the EPA Cergy-Pontoise divided the area in small plots which were all developed by different developers under the supervision of an urbanist.

From the station and the square, our walk continues to the county hall...

Renewing and modern as it was, the very first neighborhood of Cergy-Pontoise appealed to the imagination of not only urban planners and citizens, but also of movie directors. The New Town was the setting for, amongst others, 'L'ami de mon amie' ('Boyfriends and Girlfriends'), and 'L'enfance d'une Ville', which explores the potential and the perks of Cergy-Pontoise.

PORTES OUVERTES Samedi 25 Mars C OMTO
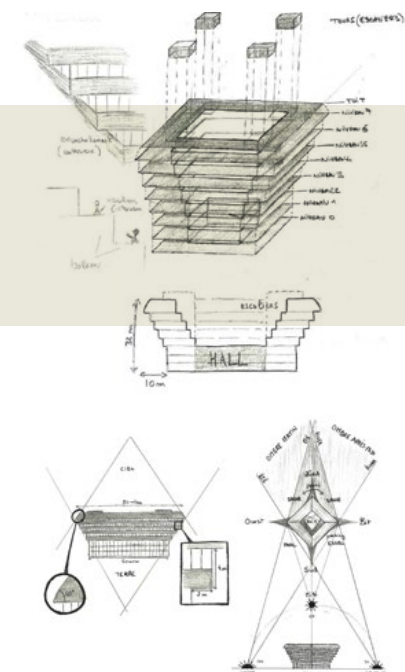
[2] View of the county hall and EDF-GDF tower (1970's)

[2] Drawings of the building structure and lighting principle

[2] Details of the work of Francois Stahly

2. The county hall and the Parc Francois Mitterand

The county hall was built in three years between 1967-1970 on the former sugar beet fields of the Oise valley. As this was the very first building of the city, it had to be something special - something on which the rest of the city could build its identity. Therefore, it had to be a building with a recognizable and unique formal language. Architect Henry Bernard made this happen with a modernistic, almost brutalist building, following the tradition of the Boston city hall (architects: Kallmann, McKinnell, & Knowles) and Le Corbusier's unrealised Governor's Palace in Chandigarh.

Based on the principles of an ingenuous shading system - the upper floors always standing out an extra two meters compared to the level below - Bernard created a building shaped like an upside down pyramid, in which the office spaces were divided in balconies with a great natural lighting system. The use of contrasting materials - concrete and glass - nearly appear to make the building float. In addition, the robust building has also a subtile layer of artistic details, designed and realised by sculptor Francois Stahly.

The park behind the county hall building was designed by the renowned landscape architect Alain Provost in 1974. This park, named after François Mitterand, the first socialist French president, underwent a large scale renovation in 2013. The riverbanks are filled with wetland vegetation and lagoon zones to allow phytoremediation of the park's water.

Right next to the park, you can find the Les Linandes housing estate, a good example of French architecture that was influenced by the former French colony of Algeria. With its clever clusters of slum housing: cellular construction and individual vaulted roofs, it echoes the characteristic vernacular architectural forms.

The same type of architecture can be found at the north of the Préfecture region. designed by the Algerian-born architect Roland Simounet. The

[2] Parc Francois Mitterand

colourful clusters are a typical example of the goals Cergy-Pontoise seized to communicate.

[2] The colorful Les Linandes housing at the time of its completion

3. Hotel d`Agglomeration

After anchoring the plateau of the Préfecture with these buildings, all leftover space was filled up during the ten years that followed. Together with the county hall, also the shopping mall Trois-Fontaines was built as one of Cergy-Pontoise's first buildings. Of this construction, the Hotel d'Agglomeration is one of the major projects, realised in 1978, designed by the architects Claude Vasconi and Georges Pancréac'h. The building, which accommodates two libraries, a theatre, a music school and several other institutions, is an important cultural hotspot of the city. Its colourful tiles have a clearly symbolic character: the green alluding to nature and the blue to water (Oise) and strongly contrasting the overall concrete character of the Préfecture plateau at that time.

[3] Hotel d`Agglomeration

County Hall

Parc Francois Mitterand

Place de la Fontaine

[4] Place de la Fontaine

[5] The mountains of Viarmesson

[6] Theater 95/gpaa

4. Place de la Fontaine

In an attempt to create a multifunctional centre, Cergy-Pontoise's first planners also included 1500 residential units. Place de la Fontaine is one of the squares in Cergy-Préfecture on which shopping and living blend in naturally. Shaped like a courtyard, this square combines living and shopping without having the two interfere with each other. Residential space has deliberately been divided from the commercial ground floor, with a loggia protecting shoppers from the vicissitudes of weather on one side and inhabitants from intruding gazes on the other.

5. The mountains of Philippe Viarmesson

Just a few steps further, one arrives in a similar courtyard where ground floor and residential levels are again carefully separated, although the difference in the approach is evident. The architects of this residential square clearly took on a functionalist approach, creating spacious and sunny terraces for the residents, which provide open space without compromising residents' privacy.

6. Theatre 95

In 2012, Theatre 95 was completed. It is an extension project to the former architecture and art school of Cergy that was later turned into a theatre. The building aims to be a lantern in both the literal and figurative sense of the word. It is a complex project which delicately links to the sophisticated, layered infrastructure system of the centre of Cergy.
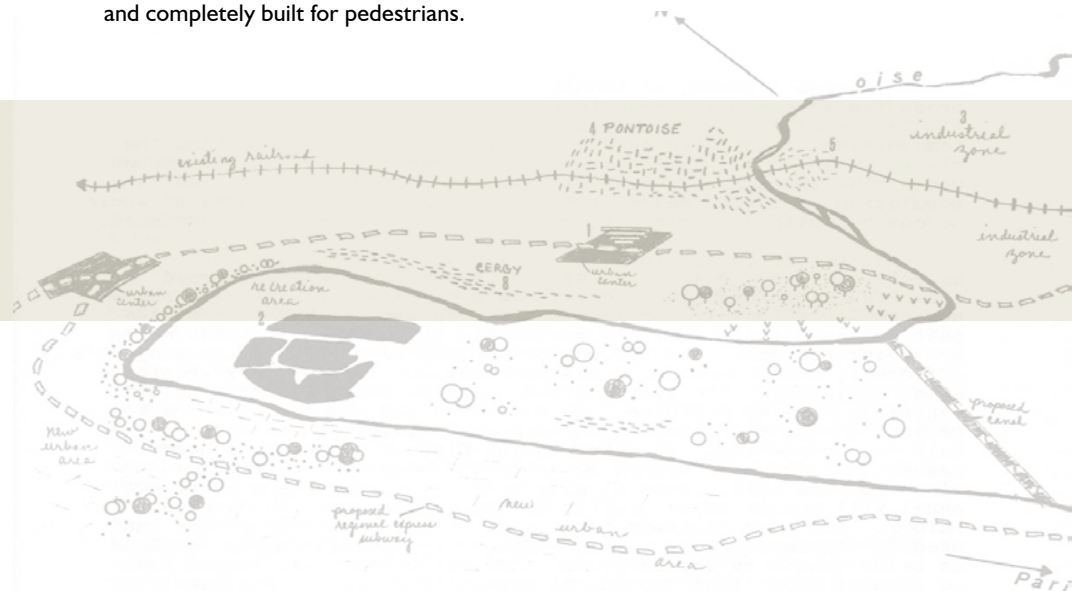
Walking through...
Cergy-Sud

About Cergy-Sud

Cergy-Sud is a residential area that was realized in 1974 in order to quickly house Cergy-Pontoise's large number of new residents. All neighborhoods are planned around schools and each one can house up to 5.000 people. Each neighborhood of Cergy Sud is extremely green and completely built for pedestrians.

Cergy-Sud was designed in a way that would guarantee that a child could walk from his/her home to school without encountering any traffic. Each neighborhood evolved around its school building, which thus became essential to each neighborhood's identity, which is why each neighborhood was named after its local school. Furthermore, to showcase this special identity, each school has a unique architectural style.

While walking around in these neighbourhoods you may notice the poor quality of certain buildings and the randomness of their placement. This is due to the fact that it was built quite fast to politically speed up all 'villes nouvelles' developments but also to be sure that the visions of the first planners of these villes nouvelles were actually realized.
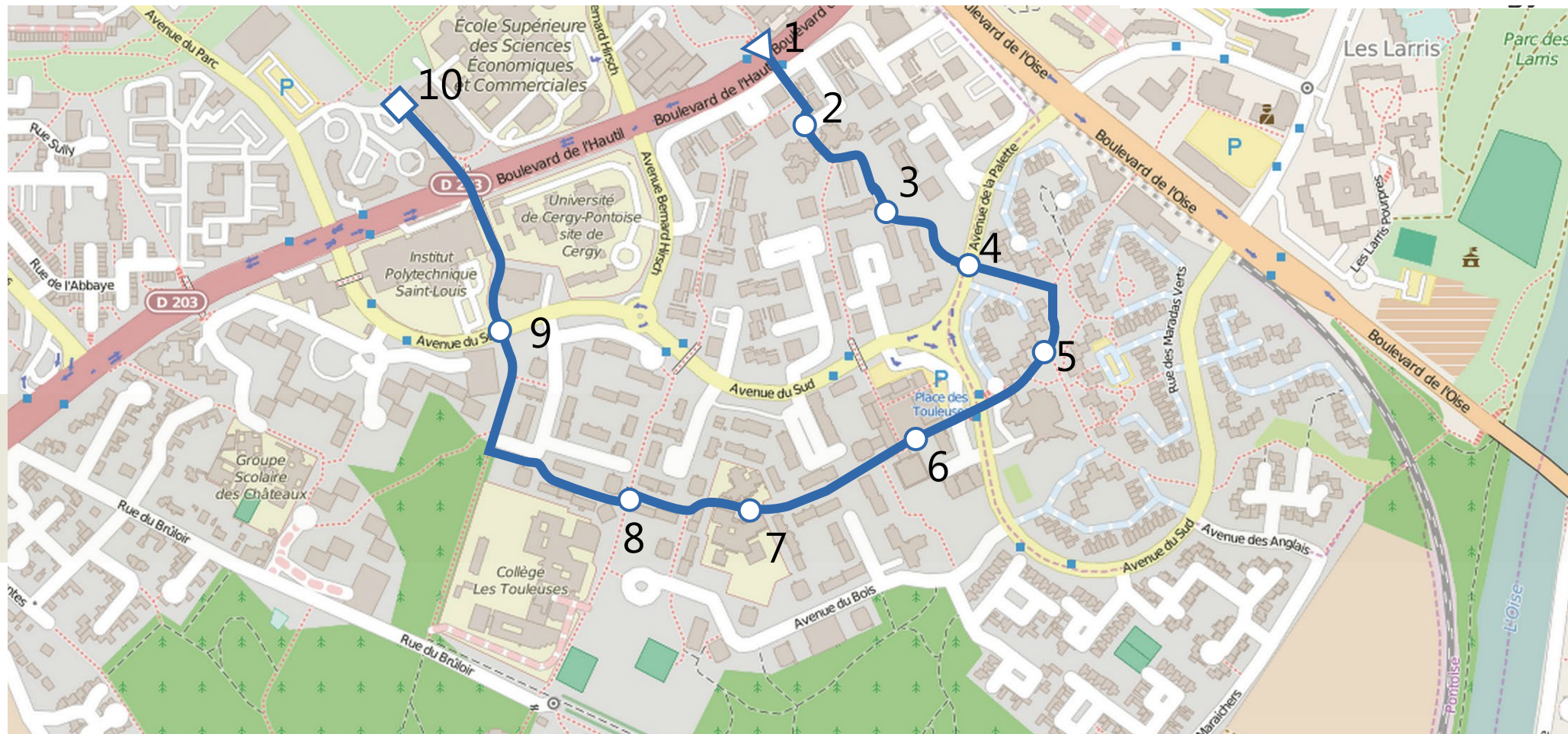
Walking Route

On Tour! For the sake of the clarity of this walking tour, all neighborhoods are treated like islands surrounded by roads for car traffic. These roads are crossed by pedestrian bridges which make clear that you are leaving one neighborhood and entering another (point 1 + 4 + 9). Every neighborhood is interspersed with green spaces which are locally maintained. You can feel a sense of ownership towards these public spaces when you come across the small vegetable gardens and landscapes entrance porches.

Les Plants

The first neighborhood that you will enter as you cross your first bridge crossing Boulevard de l'Haulit is the *Les Plants*, a neighborhood characterized by an overabundance of communal gardens in between flat roofed plastered building blocks and single family dwellings. Soon after you enter the neighborhood, you will notice a strange structure hovering above a pedestrian passageway. This is the *Ecole les Plants*.

Ecole les Plants was designed by Jean Renaudie and his wife in 1970. Designed in cubist style, this organic honeycomb structure is made up of hexagonal modules which are organised according to the function. Built with wood and

Ecole les Plants

steel, each module comprises of a classroom. These modules vary in height by a maximum of 70 cm to create a sense of privacy. The design also creates large free flowing spaces inside and opens up to outdoor play areas for children.

The school most definitely stands out in the mundanely designed housing blocks. Though its design is unique to say the least, the execution could have been better: due to the use of poor quality material, noise complaints from the streets down below are not uncommon. Recent renovation has done something to improve this, but all in all, the building still looks somewhat rickety.

Les Maradas

The next neighborhood *Les Maradas* has a distinctive street pattern which defines the structure of the housing blocks. The curved walking route leads you to a few dead-end streets in which most of the dwellings can be found, causing the streets to resemble small, closed courtyards on which most of the social activities take place.

Also here, the neighborhood is planned around a school. The Ecole les Maradas can be found in the centre of the neighborhood, surrounded by high-rise apartment blocks. The building was designed by Georges Pencrea'h, who received a silver bracket award for the design. This school is also based on a modular design, but here the modules consist of south-facing wedges organized around a central point. The modules were placed at different levels for different age groups of students. The building was punctured with skylights and terraces facing the playground.

les plants

les maradas

Les Touleuses

As you walk from the school in Maradas towards the neighborhood of Touleuses, you will approach a 15-story residential building. This building functions as landmark for all three neighborhoods you have just walked through. This square is the not only the centre of the Touleuses neighborhood, but of Cery-Sud as a whole. It contains a supermarket, various restaurants, a health centre and a cultural centre which opens out into the square. You can look for fun activities organised by the cultural centre of the neighborhood.

This central neighborhood owes its name to the Ecole les Touleuses (a kindergarten) and the College des Touleuses (a secondary school). The school operates at the scale of the neighborhood and the college, with its sports facilities, serves all the three neighborhoods.

As you cross your next bridge, one can see the district of public institutions like the ESSEC, University of Cergy and Institute Polytechnic Saint Louis. These institutions are lined along the main boulevard de l'Haulit and functions at the scale of the city.

les touleuses

Ecole les Touleuses

Walking through...
Cergy St. Christophe

The neighbourhood of Cergy St. Christophe was built after Cergy-Préfecture was finished. Situated on a plateau, overlooking the loop of the river Oise, most of the 5,000 houses of this neighborhood enjoy a marvelous panorama view over the West of Paris. Initially, mostly because of this outstanding location, St. Christophe was meant to become the central district of the Cergy-Pontoise agglomeration, but it never did. The first neighborhood of Cergy-Pontoise, Prefecture, better connected to Paris and with more facilities, would eventually take on the central role in the city, leaving St. Christophe to become a mainly residential area surrounded by business zones.

From its urban planning and its architectural characteristics, you can easily tell that St. Christophe originates from the 1980s. Its principles of organization strongly differ from the ones of Cergy-Préfecture. When building their second district in Cergy-Pontoise, the desginers made use of their experiences (both the good and the bad) with the first and adapted their ways where necessary. In the midst of all discussion, debate and innovation in 1980s urbanism, the second quarter of Cergy-Pontoise was built by urban planner Marcel Bajard. The urban character of the area was indented to be monumental, composed of long facades along the streets. The first inhabitants of Cergy-Saint-Christophe arrived in 1980. In the subsequent years, the district of St.-Christophe became the home of people migrating from former Sub-Saharan French colonies. These pioneers gave the district a multi-cultural social structure, which continues to become more diverse by the year.

What is fascinating about the neighborhood's construction plan is its bold ambition. Apart from counteracting social segregation, the new housing developments were supposed to boost the economy, the production industry and improve the well-being of its inhabitants. All this was intended with the focus on formal complexity, varied typologies, and flexible housing through industrial production. Surprisingly, while it is nowadays primarily associated with homogeneous architecture, this architectural diversity was to be achieved by using industrial construction types.

Different small plots with both public and private housing (with each plot accounting an average of 600 units) were planned to be physically autonomous in a way to recreate a collective democracy. These smaller units were planned to allow residents to build their own communities. Contradictory to the impersonal *grands ensembles* and based on the idea of the '*Locale collectif résidentiel*', each plot has a place where people can meet and socialize. These blocks are usually oriented around an elementary school and within walking distance to the shops and amenities. Locations of these schools are strategically positioned for the catchment of multiple neighborhoods, resulting in a patchwork of small urban ensembles around the centres.

1. La Bastide

La Bastide was part of an important urban restructuring complex which involved the covered market, car parks and housing. L'lot de La Bastide, designed by G.G.K., Celeste, Schoulier and Franck (1985), is a postmodernist reference to historical architecture. The orthogonal grid of traditional houses of Southern France, in combination with the use of bricked façades from the Northern provinces and the simplicity of forms create a well-accomplished harmony between de the buildings.

The former town hall is situated on the narrow 'Reu de l'Abondance' shopping street. Here, the architects were told to build something monumental, but there was only limited space to build a market entrance. This is why the architect decided to give the façade a strong accent with roundings that extents from the wall.

An important part of the rehabilitation of the Bastide was the development of the Marché Couvert (by Grumbach, 1999) at the corner of the market square. This covered market was realised in 1999 and therefore stands out from the neighborhood, which is characterized by 1980s monumental, post-modern architecture.

This contrast in architectural styles has become typical for this part of the city. The covered market has a more classical appearance. Its square shape and the used materials such as iron, brick and glass are a reference to classical halls of
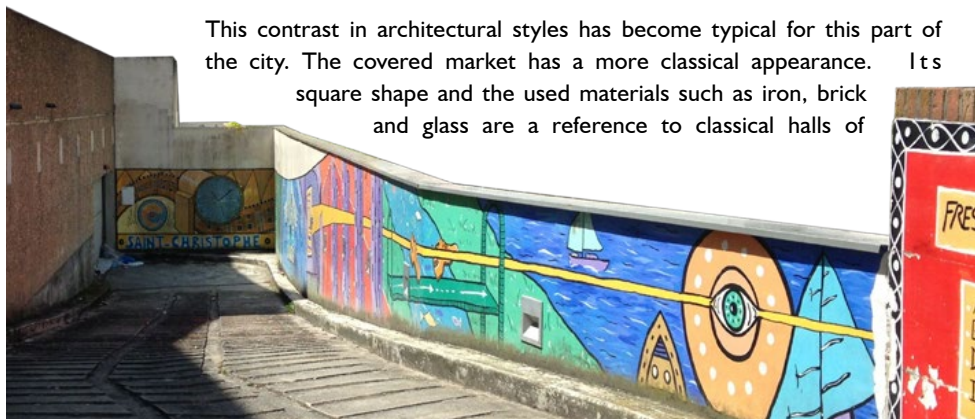
Parisian markets. The supporting structure is entirely made of metal. The roof is raised at the northeast corner, which creates a slope towards the west-, southwest and east corner to open up the building towards the square in order to strengthen the physical relationship between the building and square.

The rehabilitation project by Antoine Grumbach consists of five actions based on three different levels: that of the city, the neighbourhood, and the domestic architecture:

▨ Development of Rue des Deux Marché and public spaces
▨ Construction of a hall for the market and the restructuring of public parking which was first situated at the places of the new market.
▨ Individualisation of plots and restructuring of housing and access to parking
▨ Restructuring the plot of the town hall
▨ Restructuring the plot of Maison de Quartier

Before rehabilitation project: The market square is surrounded with brick buildings

After rehabilitation project: The market square is opened up and parking lots make room for the Marché Couvert

2. The Belvedere

The Belvedere building complex is situated on the 'Place des Colonnes Hubert-Renaud'. Without doubt, the most iconic element is the Tour Belvedere; an enormous obelisk with a flat top instead of a pointed one. The building was designed by Ricardo Bofill and the monumental square was designed by Dani Karavan, who is also responsible for the Axe Majeur.

The Belvedere building complex contains social housing. In his work, Bofill always searched for a balance between aesthetics and the social housing function. To make a statement against the massive French HLM (*Habitat à Loyer Modéré*) social housing units, which he saw as 'engineered architecture without identity', he tried to design monuments for the socially and economically less fortunate. The buildings were completed in 1986 and have a total floor area of 31.000 m².

Ricardo Bofill is a Spanish architect and leader of the '*Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*'. Next to Cergy-Pontoise, he also worked in other French New Towns surrounding Paris in the same period. When Bofill started working in France (because of the problematic economic situation in Spain), he was inspired by the classical French architecture. He referred to this particuar style in his own work, using

symbolic elements in his post modern designs. Bofill began to focus on social housing from the late 70's.

La Belvedere is part of years of research and innovation in the social housing sector. The housing units within the building have a functional layout which optimises the use of natural light indoors, and allows for cross-ventilation and view variations. The building contains 380 apartments and shops on the ground floor.

It is interesting to analyze the post-modern adjustments made to the classical French Versaille-style architecture: the windows on the ground floor are nearly extended to the ground, and the Axe Majeur cuts right through the building, leaving the cutting planes completely flat without any classical finishing.
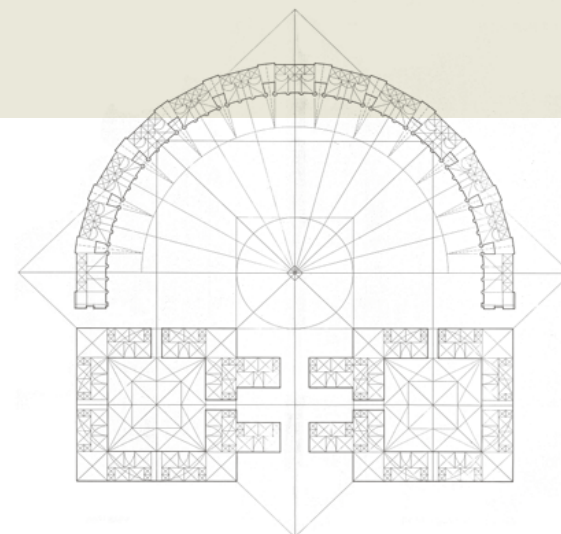
The Belvedere

The Belvedere

Axe Majeur

3. Axe Majeur

The Axe majeur, built in 1980 by Dani Karavan, is 3 km long and is designed to recall the Circus and Royal Crescent in Bath (England, Ricardo Bofill). This long, wide boulevard connects 12 symbolic monuments in a unique fashion. We elaborate on a few of them:

La Tour Belvedere: With its 1,5 degree angle the obelisk points towards Paris. The laser on top symbolizes the future and points out the route on the axis.

La Place des Collonnes - Hubert Renaud: Nicknamed 'little Versailles' Bofils design is a tribute to 'le Roi-Soleil' Louis XIV. The round square represents the world and the months of the year (360 degrees = 12 x 30);

Le Verger des Impressionistes - Camille Pissarro: This orchard dates back from before the construction of the New Town and represents the agricultural history of Cergy. The name refers to the nineteenth century impressionist painters who were inspired by the magnificent landscape of la Vallée de l'Oise.

L'Esplanade de Paris: Inspired by the Negev desert, the sandy square reflects Karavan's Israeli roots, while also providing an excellent jeu de boules pitch. The white pavers placed on both sides are actual blocks dug out from the Cour Napoleon du Louvre to make place for Peis' pyramid. This the historic axis of Arc de Triumph, Defense.

Les 12 Colonnes et la Terrasse: The 12 are funded by 24 local businesses who with the city. The columns form a with a panoramic view on Cergy On a clear day you can even see the symbolizes the connection between Louvre and Grande Arche de la columns at the end of the esplanade wanted to demonstrate their affinity portal to the natural surroundings, Préfecture and the banks of the Oise. Eiffel Tower and the domes of the

Sacre Coeur. The connection of the Axe Majeur with Paris can be read as a resonant symbolic gesture, linking the modern day New Towns to the glory of France's imperial past.

Les Jardins des Droits de l'Homme-Pierre Mendes France: Following the 300-steps stairs of the Axe Majeur, these gardens form the transition between the urbanized plateau and the Oise valley. When the garden opened in 1990, President Mitterand planted an olive tree there, as a symbol for peace, which is still there to be admired.

L'Amphiteatre-Gérard Philipe: At the base of the stairs an amphitheatre is located where one can enjoy open-air shows.

La Scene et le Bassin: This pool is directly connected to the Oise and is designed to create an illusive elevating effect which emphasizes the connection with the Axe Majeur.

La Passerelle: This red bridge spans over the Oise linking the amphitheater with the other bank at the leisure centre. This modern artwork provides an interesting combination with its bright red colour in a green and blue background.

L'ile Astronomique: Formed by the remnants of a sandbank, this island is home to geese, herons, rodents and other unusual urban flora and fauna. It was meant to include an astronomical garden with sculptures such as Jantar Mantar (Jaipur), as homage to the history of ancient Arabic astronomy.

La Pyramide: The pyramid is designed to make the sun and wind interact with light and sound. The bird sanctuary you can find here, with its blue interior, is only accessible by boat.

4. Allée de la Sébille

The Allée de la Sébille has several beautiful examples of experimental housing blocks from the 1980s, designed by Claude Vasconi and George Pencrearc'h. New construction methods created possibilities for larger and slimmer cantilevers which resulted in a complex landscape of terraces and balconies. Both Vasconi and Pencrearc'h, separately and together, have built more projects in Cergy-Pontoise of which the Hotel d'Agglomération in Cergy-Préfecture is probably the most famous.

5. La Gare RER

The station of St. Christophe was designed by the much-appreciated couple Phillipe and Martine Deslandes and opened in 1985 together with the rest of the centre. The station is designed as a perfect post-modern iconography, with a massive clock as a facade. A local architectural guide claims it is the largest clock in Europe. 'Together the pointers weigh an impressive 350 kg on each side, and the mechanism that keeps them turning 400 kg. The clock can withstand wind speeds up to 160 km/h and the tip of the seconds pointer travels 45 kilometres a day.'

6. Maison de Quartier - L'Observatoir

Southwest of the slightly lowered Place du Marché one can find an interesting tower with a dome and transparent viewing points stands out in relation to the perpendicular buildings of 'La Bastide'. Dating from 1983, Pierre Venencie's 'Maison de Quartier' functions as a communal centre, a theatre, a music school and a gym. The dome-shaped crown of the tower is actually an astronomic telescope.

In 1993, the very first concerts were given in the building. At the moment, the venue is also used for weekly concerts and regional festivals (such as Jazz au fil de l'Oise, B-side Reggae, Voix/Publics, concert Starter), boosting the Cergy's importance as a cultural centre.

7. Marché de St. Christophe

On Wednesday- and Saturday mornings, the square in the middle of La Bastide transforms into a multi-cultural open-air market. The market offers a vast array of fresh foods and supplies from all over the world, ranging from meat and fish to vegetables, flowers, spices, clothes, shoes, fabric, and jewellery.

Walking through...
Cergy-le-Haut

Cergy-le-Haut is the northwestern part of Cergy-Pontoise. This neighborhood was built in the 1990s and some parts are still under construction. Though originally intended as a continuation of the St. Christophe neighborhood, Cergy le Haut may be seen as the third and final centre of Cergy-Pontoise. These three centres, each built in a different period, allow for an interesting tangible overview of architectural styles and ideas: while Cergy Préfecture is exemplary of the architectural trends in the 1970s, St. Christophe is of the 1980s and Le-Haut of the 1990s and the transition into the twenty-first century.

While constructing this final major part of Cergy-Pontoise, the architects and planners of the New Town had already some time and opportunities to reconsider some of their earlier ideas. The experimental days of urbanism were over and the formal language became more and more traditional. The centre was supposed to have an urban character and to achieve this, the designers continued to look at Parisian typologies in both urbanism and architecture. This third centre needed its own identity (that would be distinguishable from the other centres of Cergy-Pontoise), and that was partially achieved by using traditional formal languages.

The plans for Cergy-le-Haut were subjected to the decentralization period where local municipalities had more to say in governing and thus planning of the built environment. In the case of this particular New Town, however, the national government kept its large influence in order to achieve its goals of guaranteeing diversity in housing and inhabitants. To do so, the village of Cergy, the *Syndicat d'Agglommération Nouvelle* (SAN) and the *Etablissement Public d'Aménagement* (EPA) signed a contract dealing with housing demand, public spaces and green areas. The district of Le-Haut was meant to provide a balance of housing, offices, green spaces and public facilities.
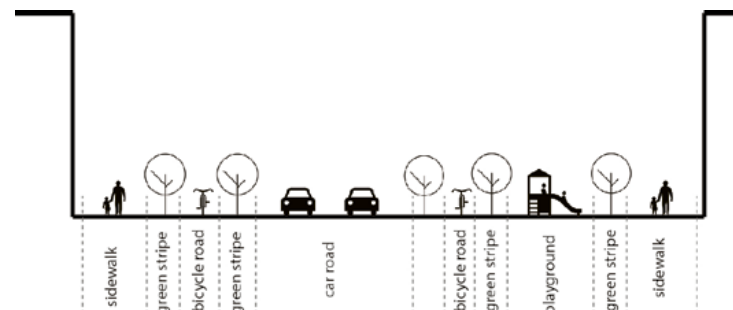
Planners and urban designers sought to make the most out of the existing geography and made use of already existing sightlines, forms and natural morphology. The RER station is situated at the highest point, with a great view over the valley. The street structure is based on the meander of the river, connecting the local centre with the suburban districts of Bontemps.

Unlike any other district of the New Town, the RER station of Cergy-le-Haut and its surroundings were built at the same time, which explains the neighborhoods architectural coherence of the blocks surrounding the RER station. With the RER already at their disposal, the first inhabitants of le-Haut came in a vast number of 7.000 inhabitants.

Generous pedestrian streetscape provision

Cergy-Le-Haut Schematic Diagram of mixed function and circulations on the ground floor

sidewalk | green stripe | bicycle road | green stripe | car road | bicycle road | green stripe | playground | green stripe | sidewalk

La Gare RER, Cergy le Haut

College des Explorateurs

The square in front of le Lycée Jules Verne

Le Lycée Jules Verne as one of the first buildings in the area

Place des Trois Gares

The RER station of Cergy-le-Haut is directly connected with Paris and the other parts of Cergy-Pontoise. The station, designed by J.M. Duthilleul and E. Tricaud, was finished in 1993, around the same time that all of Cergy-le-Haut's first 7.000 new inhabitants moved to the neighborhood.

The train tracks run below the central square and through a large hole in the centre of the square, also the people waiting on the platforms below can still enjoy some sunlight. The design of the station, with its large glass walls topped by an arched roof is, is as monumental and light as the rest of the neighborhood.

Facing the RER station, one finds the bus station designed by Ducharme: a canvas tent protecting the waiting passengers from wind and rain. The facades of the seven-story residential building blocks closing the square echo the architectural styles of Haussmann and are a witness of the shift from experimenting with typologies back to referencing, or copying traditional ones.

College des Explorateurs

This college building is another example of the many fascinating educational buildings that Cergy-Pontoise has. Built in 1997, designed by the famous Cuban architect R. Porro and the French architect R. de la Noue, the interior of the building and the facades, seen from the patio, are impressive to say the least, but the exterior façade seems to have aged relatively quickly. With its Gothic buttresses and its colored, butterfly-shaped, glass windows, the building is full of references to medieval architectural styles, but it remains questionable whether one modern reference - seeing the eyes of Batman in the corner of the building, seen from the Boulevard des Merveilles - really hits the spot.

La Lycée Jules Verne

Also finished in 1993, this college was one of the first ones to open in this new neighborhood. The building was designed by the Parisian office 'Architecture Studio' and has been described as a interplay of the lightness of metal and glass, and

the contrasting heavy masses of the concrete façade. The use of these particular materials can make one wonder whether the school is as open and sheltering as schools often are or whether the character of the building is more that of a prison. The square in front of the building is used by students to relax or play basketball after classes.

For those interested: The school owes its name to the French science-fiction author Jules Verne, whose 1870 novel 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas' tells the story of the travels of a submarine, the Nautilus, to which the close-by square, Place du Nautilus, actually owes its name.

Place du Nautilus

The Place du Nautilus is the one square of Cergy-le-Haut on which the development of architecture and urbanism over the past few decades may be most evident. The square breathes a twentyfirst-century atmosphere of sharp lines and open spaces, with the l'Eglise Bienheureux Frédéric Ozanam on the north side, the cultural centre on the south and glass cubes scattered around on the square itself. The church was designed by H. Grison, finished in 2003 and has space for up to 1300 people. It is one of the few churches in Cergy-Pontoise that is traditionally placed on a main square. Facing it is the Visages du Monde, a community centre designed by M. Badia and D. Berger, which was finished in 2012.


Visages du monde, Place du Nautilus

The walks in the previous chapter have given you an idea of the diversity of Cergy-Pontoise's neighborhoods, but to understand how everything connects and makes a city, it is best to simply connect the dots.. not by foot, but by bike. The bicycle route in this final chapter reveals that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and guides you past all architectural highlights you have already read about and more.

So...

.. hop on a bike and cycle through the centres of Le-Haut, St. Christophe, Cergy Village, Port, Préfecture and Pontoise!

Chapter 3:
Cergy-Pontoise by Bike
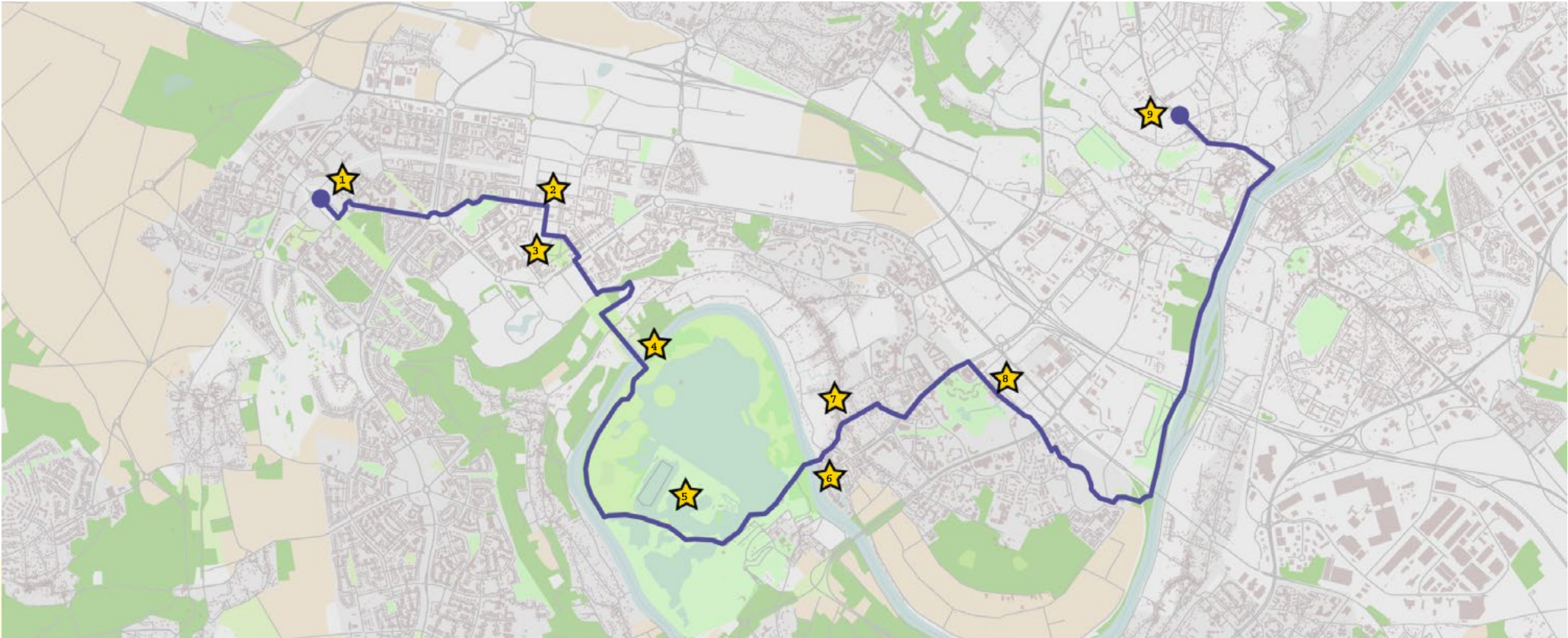
Bicycle route

1. Cergy Le Haut
2. Cergy Saint Christophe
3. La Belvedere
4. Axe Majeur
5. Base de Loisirs
6. Cergy Port
7. Cergy Village
8. Cergy Préfecture
9. Pontoise

Note:

To see the most
highlights in one go, and
to assure yourself of an
easy bike ride, it's best
to cycle downhill, from
Le Haut to Pontoise.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

22.   25.   32.   40.

Équipements

1. La Préfecture 1969 • Henri Bernard

2. École des Plants 1975 • Jean Renaudie

3. ESSEC 1976 • Ivan Seifert 2004 • extension Marc Seifert

4. Hôtel d'agglomération 1978 • Claude Vasconi et Georges Pencréac'h

5. ENSAPC École nationale supérieure d'art Paris-Cergy 1982 • Jean-Pierre Buffi

6. Horloge Gare Saint-Christophe 1985 • Martine et Philippe Deslandes

7. Hôtel de ville 1990 • Dominique Armand, Thierry Melot

12. Espace des Calandres 1998 • Frédéric. Jung

13. Maison de quartier des éguerets et son beffroi 1980 • Bernard Mathieu et Luc Martel

14. Site de Neuville de L'Université de Cergy-Pontoise 1996 • Bruno Gaudin, 1999 • Michel Kagan

15. Lycée Paul-Emile Victor 1996 • Gilles Lehoux et Pierre Phily

16. École des Maradas 1973 • Georges Pencréac'h

17. Site Saint-Martin de l'Université de Cergy-Pontoise 1994 • Guy Autran

Architectural Attractions

8. Site des Chênes de l'Université de Cergy-Pontoise 1991 • Michel Remon

9. Halle du marché Saint-Christophe 1992 • Antoine Grumbach

10. Lycée Jules Verne 1993 • Architecture Studio

11. Collège des Explorateurs 1997 • Ricardo Porro et Renaud de la Noue

18. Palais de Justice 2005 • Henri Ciriani

19. Auror'environnement, usine d'incinération 1990 • Jean-Robert Mazaud et Catherine Parant

20 .Gare de Liesse 2002 • Jean-Marie Duthilleul et Étienne Tricaud

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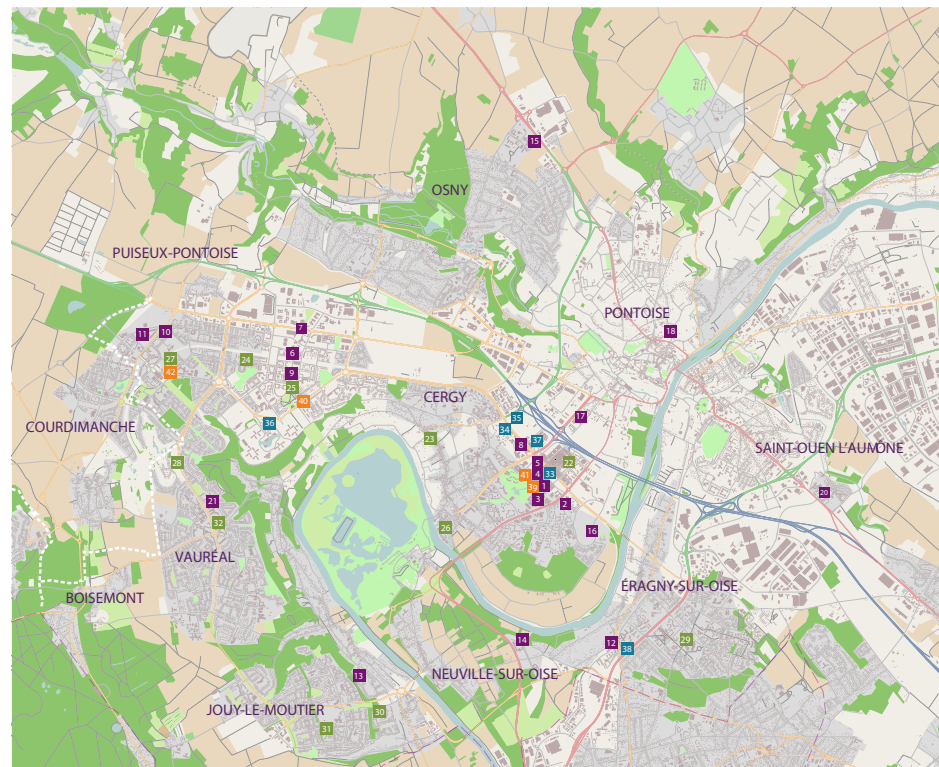
Logements

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23. Résidence Cergy 7 1975 • Georges Pencréac'h et Michel Gaillard

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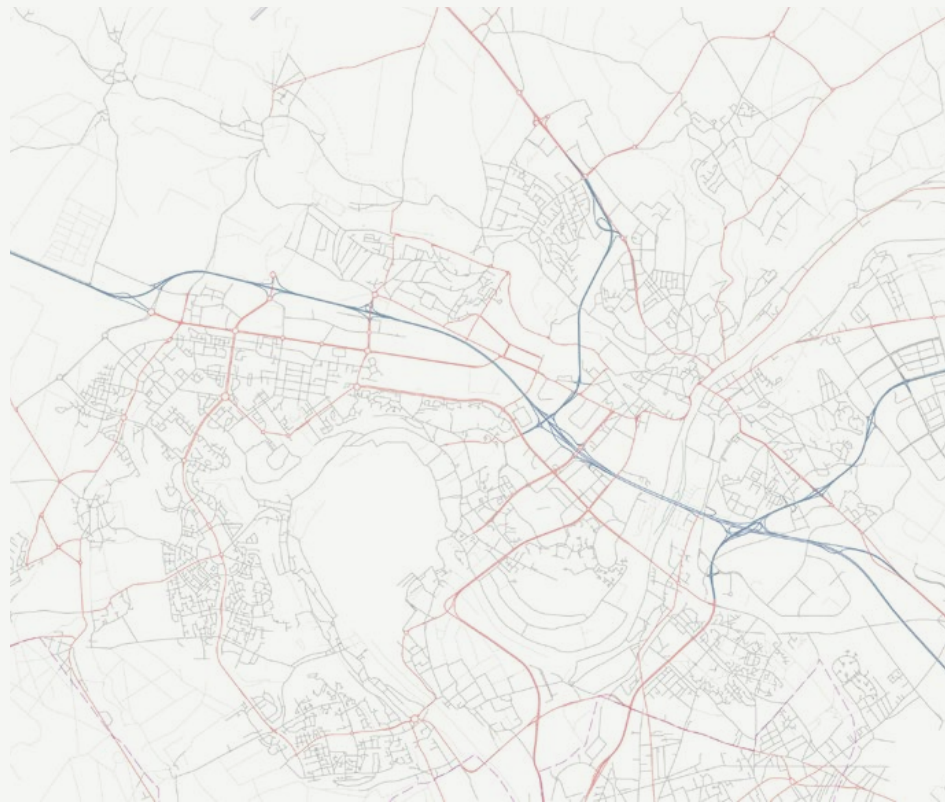32. Quartier « Coeur de Ville », Place du Coeur Battant 2005 •

1.   17.

6.   21.

Road Network   ■ Highway   ■ Secondary network   ■ Tertiary network

Getting to and around Cergy-Pontoise

Bicycle Network   —— Existing   --- Proposed

The initial infrastructure of all New Towns surrounding Paris - and thus also of Cergy-Pontoise - was based on the same dissociation of movement: first, there was an open network of highways, boulevards and avenues (blue on the map on the left page), secondly, there is a closed network of driveways and car parks ending in a loop, and finally, there is a network exclusively for pedestrians and cyclists superimposed on the first. In all parts of Cergy-Pontoise there is a strong hierarchy; the highways lead to the boulevards and avenues, which are connected to car parks (the secondary network).

Also throughout town, it is easy to get from A to B thanks to the 'dalle'. The dalle is an elevated sidewalk in the original centre of Cergy-Pontoise, Cergy Préfecture, that was designed to prevent the mixing of car traffic with pedestrians. Pedestrians literally walk on top of the traffic, causing walking and cycling to be the easiest modes of transportation in and around town.

footbridge

green stripe   car road   green stripe
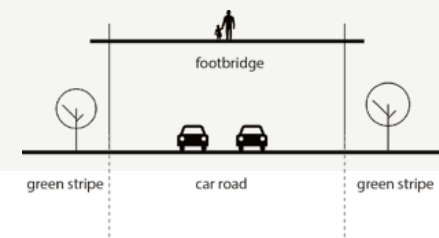
La dalle, on which pedestrians literally walk above car traffic.

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Mais Oui, Cergy!

Though largely unknown as a tourist destination, Cergy-Pontoise, one of the five New Towns surrounding Paris, has a lot to offer. Situated in the beautiful countryside, Cergy-Pontoise is a typical allgomeration which embodies the suburban history of Franch urban planning of the past decades. This guide will take you through the city's history, urban context and - most importantly - its different neighborhoods, to introduce you to a completely new idea of French urbanism.

This is the second instalment in a series of Alternative Travel Guides initiated by the International New Town Institute. We've done the research so you can enjoy these undiscovered and unloved New Towns—before the rest of the world finds them!