

LA SEINE AS A GREAT PARK SYSTEM



Watercolor , Phil Enquist

An old practice at the Ateliers de Cergy is get external contributions from partners who have an interest in the topic of the year. This has been the case with Stockholm, Barcelona, Gdansk, Wageningen, Edinburgh, Rome but also Tokyo, Sao Paolo, Berkeley... and many more.

This year it was Chicago and we have had remarkable contribution from Philip ENQUIST, from SOM-Chicago, and a member of the AMERICAN INSTITUTE of ARCHITECTS, Drew WENSLEY, a Landscape Architect of TORONTO (Moriyana and Teshima Planners) and Meiring BEYERS from HAMILTON, an Engineer at Klimaat Consulting & Innovation. They have formed what we call the «CHICAGO TEAM».

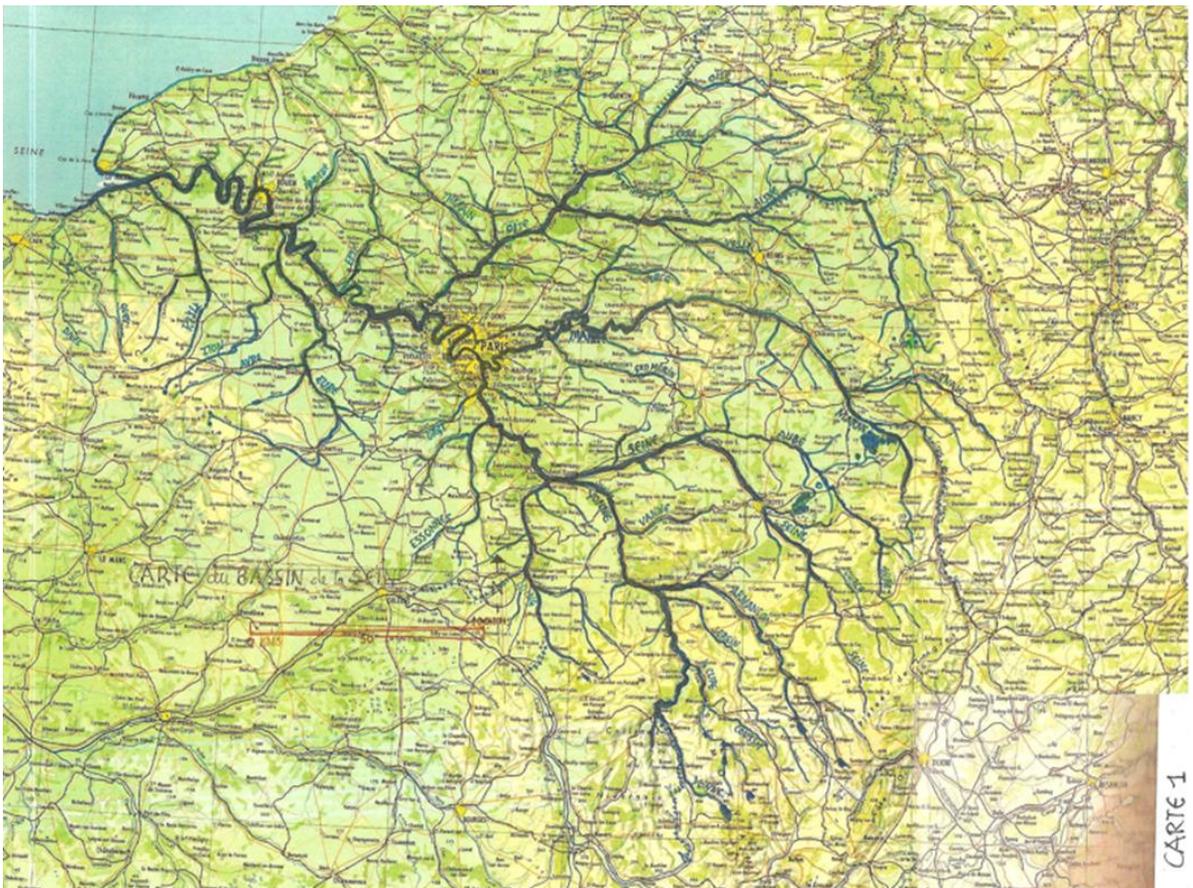
The members of the Chicago team are involved in several countries all around the world and are working on very large scales across huge territories.

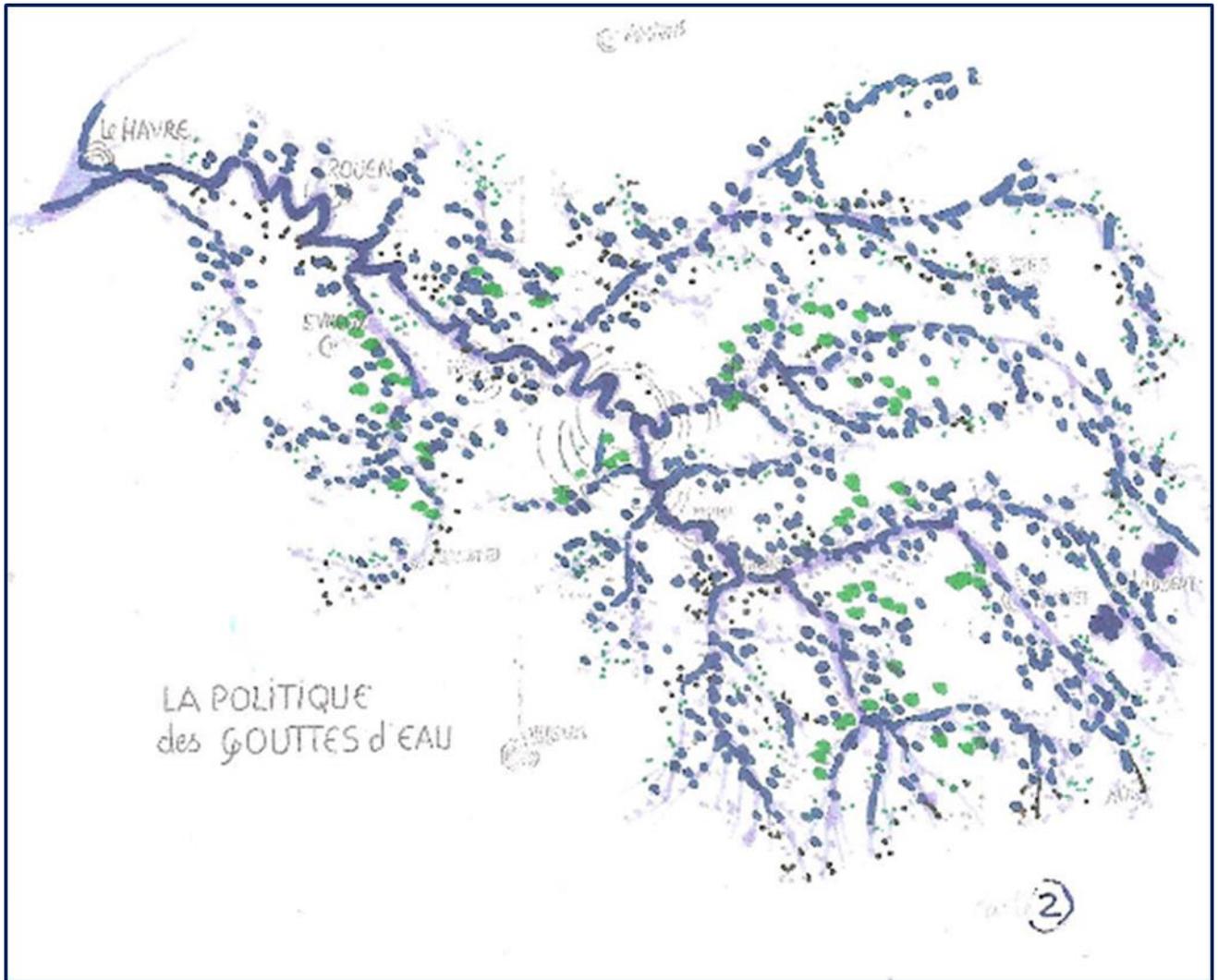
Their approach is to try and outpace the ever growing dramatic “brutalities” done to the blue planet. The aim is to give nature its rightful place back. Nature has the tendency of getting its own way in any case and with unexpected strength. “In Central Europe the average temperature will be 5°C. warmer by 2100” and the anticipated increase in precipitation should reach 15 to 25%).

To give nature its rightful place, is to take the whole River Seine as a scale, from source to mouth with all its tributaries.

To give nature its rightful place, is to imagine « *THE SEINE RIVER as a NATIONAL PARK* » a vision, the basis of which is a healthy environment, on which everything depends (economy, mobility, quality of life, etc).

It actually is a different way of planning, by taking into account - from the very start- the basic elements of **WATER, AIR, EARTH and SPACE**.





WATER

It is the TREE of LIFE of an urban area inhabited by 18 to 20 million people - of which 12.2 million in the Ile de France Region. This huge water network is the backbone of the chosen geographical scope (map 1). WATER is LIFE, water is survival, water is wealth in a privileged region.

It is essential to PRESERVE it as best as possible.

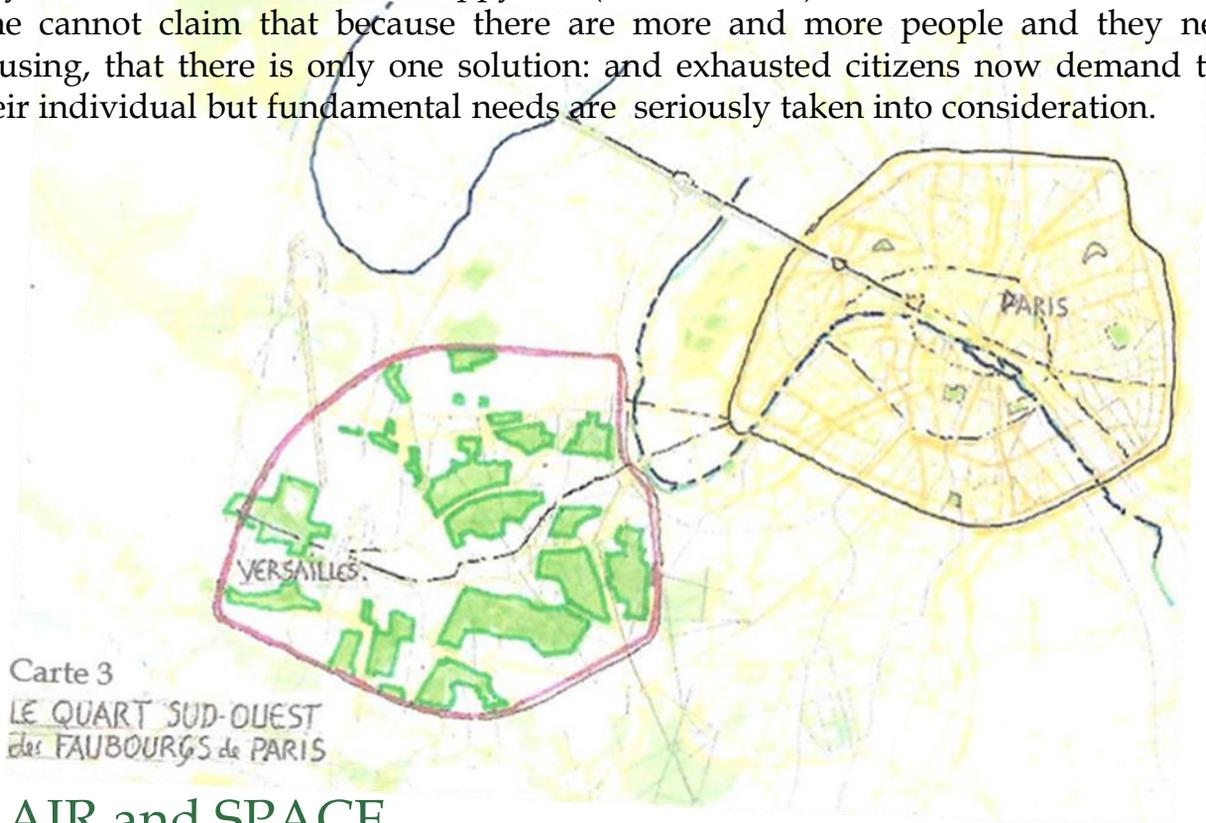
It is also essential to PROTECT OURSELVES from water. Technical achievements - reservoirs, dikes - are no longer adequate. Engineering alone was the characteristic of the 20th century. Nowadays, to follow the appropriate course of action, we have to get back to the basic ecological unit that is the drop of water (map 2). All existing human settlements along rivers, especially Paris and surroundings will only be protected through water retention at the very source of the river, in every little valley, gully, pond, swamp and even through ploughing.

EARTH

No city can live without the countryside: urban agriculture should be encouraged but will only be able to meet a very small portion of the growing demand in large urban conglomerations. The farmlands following the Seine should be made untouchable and classified as Agricultural Reserve (see J. Viard). That should start shaping this GREAT GARDEN of the Seine Basin. All sorts of agricultural productions should be present and should prioritize feeding the population from the closest territories.

Land also includes gardens, vegetable gardens, and the houses they are attached to: a good gardener is able to combine different plants and make them grow in a selective harmony, in a way that preserves the soil. Why shouldn't it be the same with housing? Animal zoos have gotten rid of their old cages: the leaders of the human zoos are confronted with an exponential population growth and should find ways to make the future life a happy one (see D. Morris).

One cannot claim that because there are more and more people and they need housing, that there is only one solution: and exhausted citizens now demand that their individual but fundamental needs are seriously taken into consideration.



AIR and SPACE

The city dweller knows now he cannot live without CLEAN AIR: but clean air is becoming scarce in areas that are excessively densely populated as is the case in Paris. If you look at the map showing the south-western suburbs of Paris you can see that state-owned forests make half of the surface area and that means a privileged and protected environment. Compared with inner Paris (i.e. without the suburbs) and with a similar surface area, 300.000 inhabitants enjoy a healthy environment against 2.2 million who do not (map 3). It is the only area just beyond the Paris ring-road that is so green.

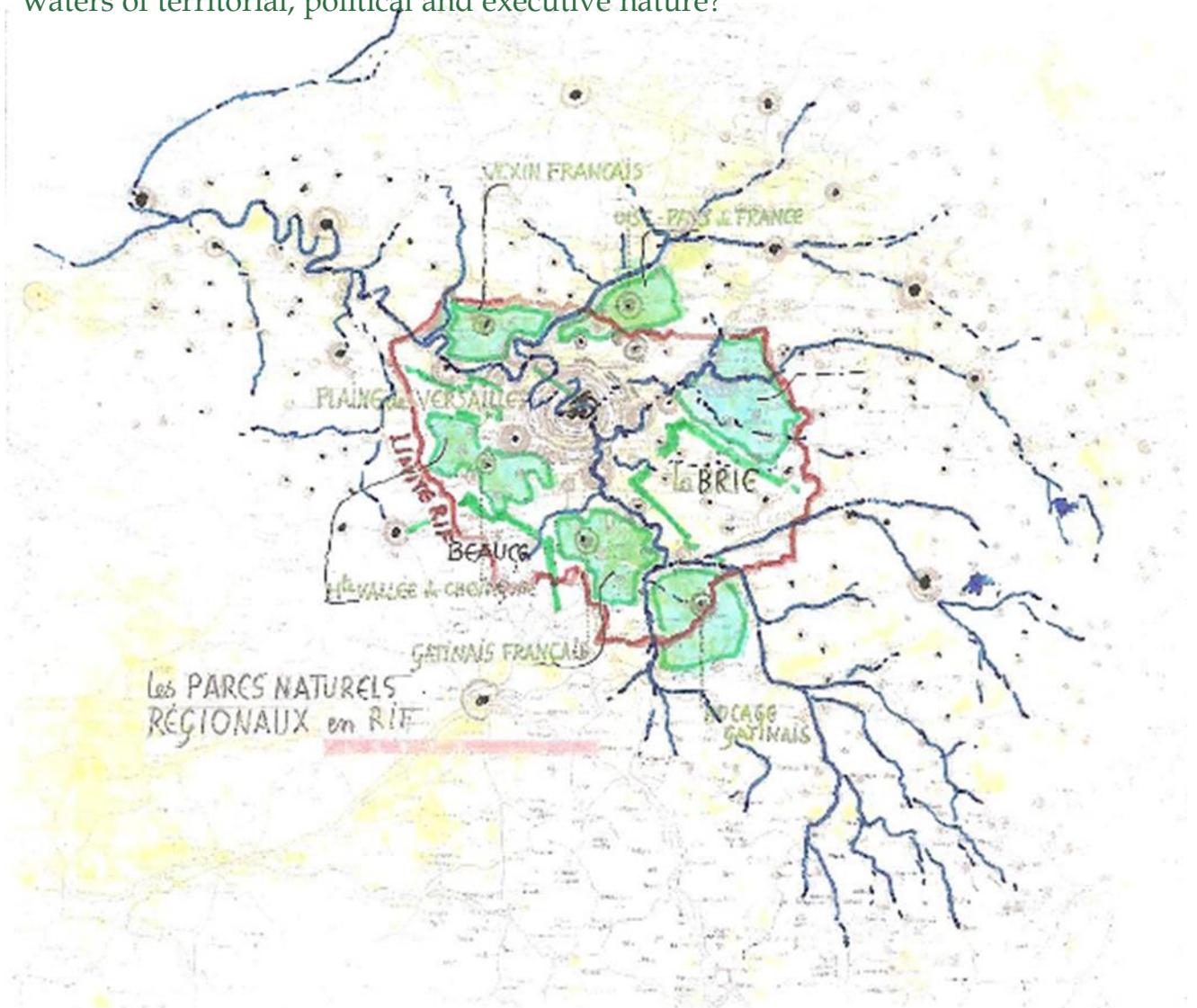
In the remaining suburban ring – we talk here of the Greater Paris – the policy is to promote densification in order to meet the need for expansion. “La ville sur la ville” The city on top of the city/Another layer on the existing city... Nice-sounding words indeed... but it means Paris will still be enclosed in a concentric belt and that is just a short-term development strategy. This policy cannot be followed indefinitely. And we cannot have a third and a fourth belt radiating from the city, it would be self-destructive.

It is an easy option for the authorities but fortunately they will be stopped by the Regional Nature Parks (map 4) that is the actual green belt of the Ile de France Region. They represent the real obstacle against overconcentration.

One day soon, we will have to be bold and make real efficient decisions. That is what every “metropolitan” resident deserves.

The actual meaning of “metropolitan” should be to have the choice to live in a good environment, in the city or in the country.

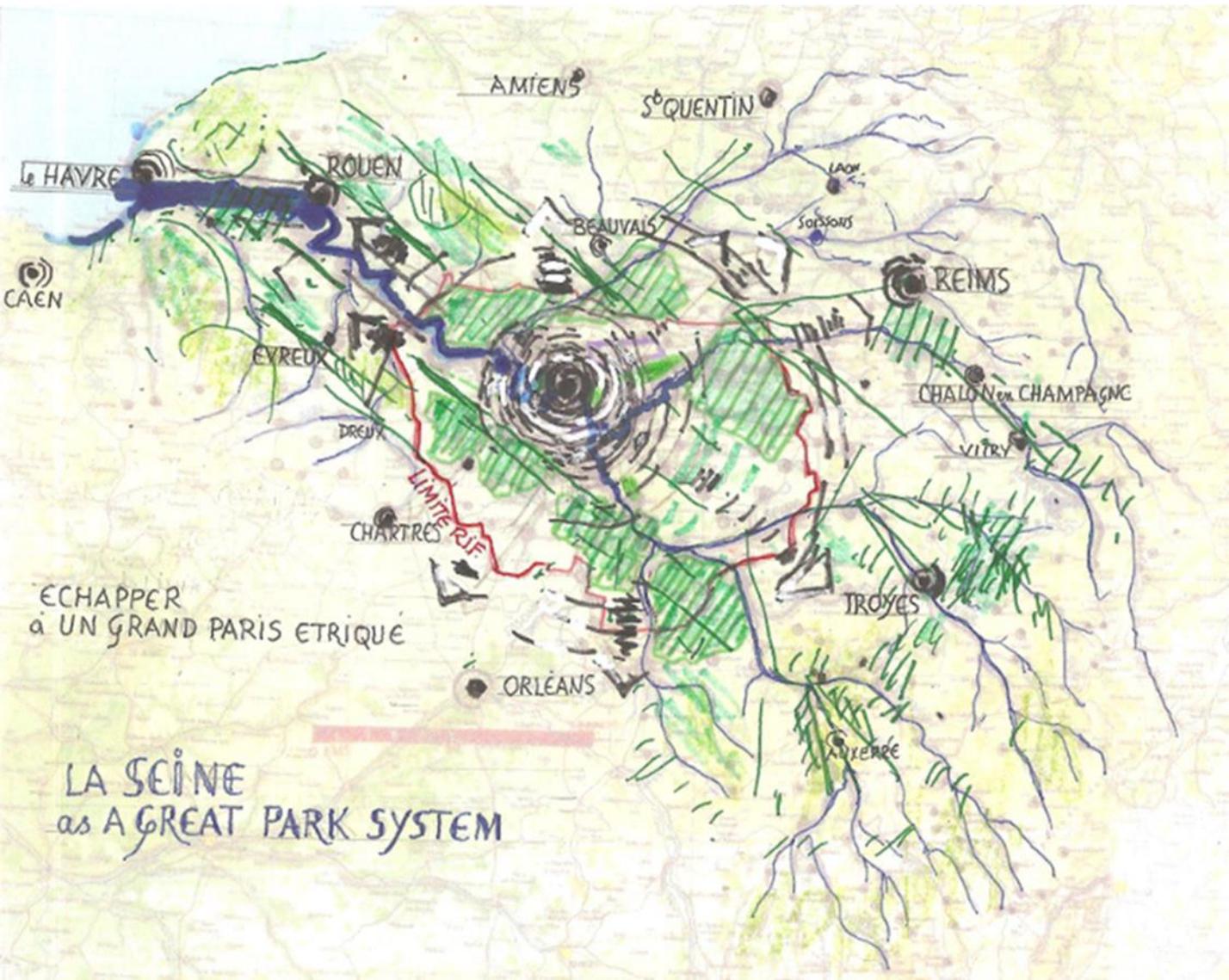
Because of the present developments in new technologies, new mobilities, new ways of life and people’s expectations, this should very well be possible. So why don’t we think about it right now? What is the problem? could it be the murky waters of territorial, political and executive nature?



A GREAT PARK SYSTEM

(carte 5)

We cannot live without nature, without its insects, without its bubble, its personal living room, the way animals live in it. This means we have to rethink and INVERT our PRIORITIES: because we also cannot live without resources.



The Seine Basin as a great park system would make it possible, thanks to the big canal that is the Seine and to Paris with all the economic growth generated from there. The great park would of course include large “lawns”, in this case protected farmland and should prioritize nurturing areas. It would also include forests and a number of thickets. Cities, smaller towns and equipped villages, which are the kiosks and other installations, are already scattered on this landscape. Roads and train tracks, the park’s alleys, partially exist and are adapted to today’s functional necessities, to the quality of the territory, while others still need to be built.

The best aspect of a big park is that it changes with the seasons, it transforms itself in an organic manner meaning it adapts to new needs and temperatures without altering its fundamental character.

You may rightfully think that such a garden needs to be managed by a very good gardener, who’s focus isn’t only mechanics and economics, but also the sensuous enjoyment and the aesthetic value of the place.

So what's next??

There came a garden during the night
He didn't know where to go
He was a little sad and was shyly holding
His roots in his hands
Could you please show me a place
Where I would be allowed to be a garden

These few lines – a passage of the poem ‘The Lost Garden’ by Claude Roy – illustrates the UNEASINESS of our TIME.

It is an allegorical – but also poetic - vision of a WORLD IN NEED, a world expecting something to happen. What we need, if these words are being heard, is to know if the DETERMINATION TO DO SOMETHING REALLY EXIST