

Modern Architecture in Historic Cities

Policy planning and building
in contemporary France

Sebastian Loew



MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN HISTORIC CITIES

France has become the principal destination for people interested in contemporary architecture. Unashamedly modern buildings have evolved, particularly in historic areas, and have been accepted as contributions to the continuing evolution of city areas. No other European country has achieved such successful integration of the modern and historic.

Modern Architecture in Historic Cities explores the factors which contribute to the presence of contemporary architecture in historic areas. The author focuses on central topics, including: the crucial involvement of professional bodies, such as the Architectes des Bâtiments de France, and their relationship with elected representatives; the resources available in historic areas; mechanisms for design control; the ideological role of heritage and contemporary architecture as symbols of culture and progressiveness; and the public sector's input in decision-making and its commitment to both conservation and the promotion of new architecture.

Beginning with an empirical review of particular events which have affected attitudes towards heritage in France, this book highlights the continuity in French thinking and the longstanding role of the French government as patron and leader. Planning, conservation and design legislation are examined, highlighting the range of instruments available to government in order to influence results and enhance the role of the architectural profession.

Modern Architecture in Historic Cities illustrates why France has been so successful in combining conservation and modernity, and points to important lessons for other countries which can be drawn from the French experience.

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Policy, planning and building in
contemporary France

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1

INTRODUCTION

The original motivation for this book came from the observation of the frequent existence of modern buildings in the historic core of urban areas in France. These new buildings are seldom facsimile copies or redevelopments behind retained façades; in most cases they are genuinely modern in that they use the technology, structures, forms and materials of their period and thus give the historic areas an appearance of continuing evolution. This addition of contemporary buildings to French urban areas exemplifies what Lynch (1972: 171) calls 'layering', namely 'the visible accumulation of overlapping traces from successive periods, each trace modifying and being modified by the new additions, to produce something like a collage of time'.

Coming from the British context where the insertion of buildings in conservation areas is a subject of debate in the popular press as well as in professional circles (most recently in Larkham 1996 and in Tiesdell *et al.* 1996), the French situation is intriguing. There appears to be something in the French system which either permits or encourages the presence of contemporary designs in protected historic areas, something special, possibly to do with decision making or processes, and therefore worth investigating. It raises questions about a number of interrelated issues such as the conservation of the historic areas, planning and design control and the relationship between the various professions concerned with the built environment.

Three reasons, at least, justify this exploration: first, at a time of increased European integration and collaboration, it is essential that practitioners in one country understand not just the legislation of others but how this legislation is implemented and who are the participants in the process. Secondly, understanding the practices of another country may help professionals to look again at their own practices, without necessarily copying foreign ones. Authors acknowledge the importance of international comparisons (see for instance Larkham 1996:110) but, for reasons possibly connected with language, France is underrepresented in these comparisons; this is puzzling, particularly considering the geographical proximity of Britain and France, the similarities between the two countries, and their positions in the European Union. Thirdly, for many years and in part fuelled by HRH The Prince of Wales's comments and writing (1989), a debate has taken place in Britain regarding the roles of planners in

design control, and their relationships with architects (see Punter 1993b). An understanding of how the French deal with the issue may inform this debate. An additional reason justifies this work at this particular time: the two main British political parties are showing a growing interest in the design of the built environment. The last Secretary of State for the Environment of the Conservative administration recognized the importance of design issues and launched a number of related initiatives, such as the *Revised Planning Policy Guidance 1* (DOE 1996) and the Urban Design Campaign. Before the May 1997 election the Labour party indicated that in case of forming the next government architecture would play a greater role than it had in the past. Indications are that the elected administration will keep its word; already the heritage ministry has been replaced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the recently ennobled Lord Rogers is known to be in close contact with the Prime Minister. There is evidence that the results of fifteen years of Socialist presidency in France and the impact of the *grands projets* have been studied by the Labour think-tanks (see for instance Rogers and Fisher 1992).

In the last twenty years France has had a deliberate policy in relation to the promotion of modern architecture, resulting in some spectacular and well publicized schemes. Some of these are prominently situated in the middle of highly protected historic environments, such as the Louvre pyramid, the Pompidou Centre, and the new Opera at the Bastille. They are monuments in their own right, self consciously created as such. They correspond to one of the meanings of the word 'monument' suggested by Choay (1992) in her analysis of the role of the built heritage in Western societies. Choay makes a distinction between the deliberately created monument, built in order to commemorate an event, a person or a rite, and the historic monument which is not created as such but becomes one through a phenomenon of historical selection. Choay further remarks that, through the media, some of these new buildings (she gives Pei's Louvre pyramid as an example) become symbols even before they have been built. Thus these examples are exceptions; they are the result of public patronage at the highest level, in locations of very high profile.

More generally, these schemes are significant in the way they reflect a positive attitude towards architectural creation and are used as models which filter down to other levels; they are admired, even by people who do not necessarily like their architectural style. As a result, cities throughout France have new buildings which are the counterpart of the country's traditional national monuments. Not all of them are as well publicized and as well known as the Parisian examples but, as argued by Belmont, they have a further, complementary role:

Nowadays French architecture is recognized throughout the world. The Parisian *grands projets* have largely contributed to this reputation but they should not make us forget the existence of a 'daily architecture' distributed throughout the national territory which has a role just as important.... They

[the other buildings] give structure to the cities and lead the way for the whole of the architectural production.

(Belmont 1990:7)

This reflects a common view on the architectural renewal that has taken place in France in the past twenty years. French authors such as Lucan (1989) try to explain the reasons for this architectural renaissance in terms of political changes and of changes in architectural theory, in the architectural profession and in the commission of buildings. In particular he pinpoints the role of public bodies in achieving this renaissance as patrons and promoters of new architecture, a point made by other authors such as Boles (1987), Contal (1990) and Goulet (1983). Lucan places the moment of change as the mid-1970s and highlights controversial projects of the time, such as the Montparnasse tower and the redevelopment of Les Halles, as marking the end of an era.

This architectural renaissance has aroused the interest of writers beyond the French borders: British and American architectural critics such as Glancey (1990), Rogers and Fisher (1992), Hillman (1992) and Huxtable (1992) have discussed it, often praising the quality of the schemes. Comments on new buildings frequently reflect the fact that they are judged in relation to the contribution they make to their context, in terms of their physical form and through the meanings of that form in that particular place. The connection between new architecture and historic areas is thus made: the new building is the latest 'layer' in the evolution of the place. The following is an example of this kind of comment; it specifically relates the new buildings to their historic context in Paris:

Through the varied treatment of volumes, materials and colours, the city's public buildings thus assert the specificity of their respective roles, and are easily identifiable within the traditional urban context. They bring life to the *quartiers*, and contribute to the aesthetic renewal of this part of the city's marked classical heritage.

(Godefroid 1988:96–7)

CONTEXT AND PRECEDENTS

The link between new architecture and historic areas is one of the preoccupations of a number of authors looking for an explanation for the role and meaning of heritage in contemporary society. Choay (1992) undertakes a theoretical analysis of the evolution of West European ideas about heritage: she dates the birth of the historic monument at the Renaissance and explores from then onwards the way that successive generations have dealt with their built heritage, and how different periods have been interested in different and selective aspects of that heritage. The consideration of cities, districts or ensembles (as opposed to isolated buildings) as monuments is a very recent phenomenon, reflecting a new

approach towards history and towards space, and requiring a new set of rules. Like Lynch and other authors, she sees the city as evolving through time:

[The architects] remind us that over time styles have coexisted, side by side and articulated in the same city or the same building: the history of architecture, from the romanesque to the perpendicular or to the baroque, is legible in parts of the great European religious buildings: the cathedrals of Chartres, Nevers, Aix-en-Provence, Valencia, Toledo. The seduction of a city like Paris is the result of the stylistic diversity of its architecture and its spaces. They must not be frozen by rigid conservation, but continued.

(Choay 1992:13)

Choay concludes by considering how changes in the interpretation of the concept of heritage result in new attitudes towards conservation, enhancement, modernization and the re-use of buildings. Looking at the future, she wonders whether generations to come will continue to use their heritage as an inspiration for creativity or whether they will turn it into a narcissistic reflection of a desired past.

Similarly, Bourdin (1984, 1986) is interested in the importance given to heritage in contemporary Western society, which cannot be explained through either the interplay of economic forces, government intervention or simple nostalgia. This leads him to investigate, through the analysis of the rehabilitation of old neighbourhoods, the meaning of heritage which he considers has been 'reinvented' as part of society's search for authenticity and roots. He sees the dangers of transforming Western civilization into a vast museum and at the same time losing the meaning of heritage. Although he does not mention new buildings specifically, the implication of his analysis is that historic areas need to incorporate them in order to continue their evolution. The work of Hewison (1987) shows similar concerns in the British context, albeit with different emphases: for him the obsession with what he sees as a sanitized, nostalgic and invented heritage endangers creativity. His implicit and pessimistic conclusion is that without new creative inputs, historic areas will be frozen in an image of a non-existent past. An increasing number of writers have a similar preoccupation (see for instance Sudjic 1986 or Moore 1989).

The evolution of the concept of heritage in France is also the subject of the work of Babelon and Chastel (1980). They describe it as developing in six 'moments' or events, culminating with the present 'scientific moment' in which the concept of heritage is widened to encompass environmental concerns (see [Chapter 2](#)). Their analysis introduces links between ideas about heritage and the practical choices made by successive governments in terms of what to protect and how to protect it. For instance, they relate the legislation to protect historic areas (the 1962 Malraux Act) to the tensions resulting from post-war reconstruction, and they show how one consequence of this legislation has been to make heritage accessible to wider sectors of the population. The links between ideas, legislation

and the administrative structures created to implement it open an additional avenue of investigation.

The issue of new buildings in old neighbourhoods is, therefore, part of a wider theoretical debate about the meaning of the built heritage for society, the choices about what is to be conserved, the interpretation of the past and the effect of conservation on creativity. It is a subject of increasing relevance at a time where rapid changes in society and pressures for development affect the way that people think about their environment. The term 'heritage' has been used, misused and debased in the past few years. It cannot be considered a neutral word; nor, as discussed by Larkham (1996:13–21), can it be necessarily equated with conservation, though the two are often confused. The French equivalent, *patrimoine*, is equally controversial: according to Kerorguen (quoted in Untermaier 1985:40), it owes its origin to *pâtre*, *patrie*, *patron*, *patriarche* and *père* (shepherd, homeland, boss, patriarch and father), all words loaded with contentious meanings. In this book, heritage is what one generation has received from previous ones, to care for in order to pass it on. It is also what the current generation values and leaves to future ones, including present additions as well as heirlooms: what these are depends on societal decisions and therefore requires structures to assist in the making of these decisions.

The link between the theory and the practice of conservation within the French context is made initially by Babelon and Chastel (1980). It is also the subject of Kain's work (1981), in which he finds a justification for conservation in the already mentioned 'collage of time' suggested by Lynch: the best environment for human development is one which shows the traces of successive generations. A further issue, the relation between regulations and physical form, is discussed by Evenson (1981). She deals with the evolution of building control in Paris and indicates that, in spite of modifications in matters of detail, the strict design controls that have existed since the early nineteenth century have ensured a formal stability which gives the city its physical identity. Within this stable environment stylistic changes can be incorporated without difficulty and without disrupting the whole. Like other authors, Evenson (1981) refers to the 1960–75 period as a temporary aberration when building regulations were changed entirely, to accommodate new forms of development fashionable at the time. The resulting large redevelopment schemes which took no account of their surroundings were soon rejected by the population, particularly after the redevelopment of Les Halles and the erection of the Montparnasse tower. As a result, the authorities returned to more traditional regulations.

Jegouzo (1986) looks in detail at the legal instruments dealing with heritage protection and their implementation. He highlights the particularly significant fact that, until recently, the legislation concerned with planning and that concerned with heritage protection have followed different paths with different objectives, the former dealing mainly with urban growth and with socio-economic issues, the latter with the protection and enhancement of the cultural, historic and aesthetic heritage. Jegouzo is interested in the relationships between

the different strands of legislation, in their partial integration since 1962 and in the role played by the participants in the implementation of the laws. Frier (1979) concentrates his detailed analysis on the specific and uniquely French regime affecting the control of building design in the surroundings of listed buildings (see [Chapter 3](#)) and emphasizes the complexity of the French system. Neither of these authors is concerned specifically with the insertion of new buildings in historic areas and for them this does not appear to be an issue which needs highlighting although it is mentioned in relation to specific examples. The interest of their work lies in their view of heritage only as a legal entity and in their concern for the management of the law: for them, whether a new building is inserted in a historic area or not is a matter of how the regulations are applied. They give an insight into the complexity of the French legislation and into the multiplicity of participants in its implementation and indicate further avenues worth pursuing such as the split between the planning and conservation legislations and the administrations in charge of them: among these, the role of the Architecte des Bâtiments de France (ABF) stands out as crucial whenever heritage or design is concerned.

Booth (1989) covers issues related to the roles of different actors in the French development control decision making process, and the negotiations between them, explaining how a seemingly very rigid system allows a great deal of flexibility, at least in certain contexts, to those who know how to manipulate it. He concentrates on specific aspects of the French system: he analyses how decisions are taken and by whom, and examines the nature of the transactions that take place between participants to reach those decisions. He tests the effectiveness of the regulatory system, specifically the relationship between the policies and the development control decisions and the effects on the applicant. His examples are taken from the Lyon conurbation and do not deal with historic areas, but they give a different insight into the system from that given by French authors. Punter (1989) also analyses the French system from an outsider's point of view and highlights the importance of the role of the state in urban development as this is a particular aspect which differs from the British system. The role of the public sector as developer does not appear immediately relevant to the insertion of new buildings in historic areas and it tends to be taken for granted by French authors; nevertheless it is an issue which requires further exploration.

Thus, a general survey of the literature concerned with conservation, new buildings and aspects of legislation dealing with both, indicates that the connection between new and old is not a central issue for any of the authors. On the other hand, the specific issue of insertion of new buildings in historic areas is dealt with by texts concerned with aesthetics. Pearce (1989) investigates the practice of conservation in Britain and deals with what he calls 'building in context' which he sees as complex and not easy to resolve. He treats the subject mostly as one of aesthetics but distinguishes it from style. He discusses the relatively recent preoccupation with 'keeping in keeping' which he considers unhealthy, and welcomes new ways of dealing with the insertion of new

buildings in historic cores: this is followed by the analysis of a number of recent British examples from the formal point of view. More general architectural design texts are addressed to the practising architect or planner, showing through examples what are successful ways of dealing with the problem of insertion of new buildings in historic areas. Though authors such as Worskett (1969) and Brolin (1980) do not attempt to be prescriptive or to develop a theory of successful insertion, they do so implicitly and the advice they give reflects the period in which they write: the former confident in the merits of modernist design, the latter more cautious, preferring a 'keeping in keeping' approach (see [Chapter 4](#)). An altogether different approach is taken by Tugnutt and Robinson who try to make the link between theories about heritage and designing practice. They suggest that success relates to the attitude of the designer which they call 'contexture' in contrast with the fashionable contextualism:

'Contexture'...involves weaving together the old and the new to create a satisfying living totality.... When this sense of place is allowed to take precedence, its collective nature will need to be understood and underpinned. Change there must be—there is no question of putting the clock back or of setting a particular moment in aspic as being the 'ideal'.

(Tugnutt and Robinson 1989:101)

Two recent books show that, in Britain at least, there is a continuing preoccupation with the subject of integration of new and old, and a search for ways to produce and judge satisfactory examples. Larkham (1996) summarizes the various approaches surrounding conservation and creativity, contrasting the British picturesque tradition to the arguably more objective approach of urban morphology. Tiesdell *et al.* (1996) cover some similar ground and make the distinction between the respect for the spatial character of an area and that for its architectural character. The legitimacy of design controls is argued very explicitly in additional works by Tugnutt (1991a, b). There is an attempt in most of the texts dealing with the integration between new and old to get away from simple aesthetic judgements, although these exist implicitly if not explicitly in all of them. Their importance lies in the way that they go beyond subjective judgements and try either to establish a method of approaching the problem or to identify those objective elements that can or need to be regulated in order to facilitate better results. At a minimum, the latter include height of buildings, roof line, street alignment and projections on the façade. The literature on architectural design thus rejoins the concerns of that of the planning system.

The same concerns appear in two texts produced under the auspices of the French Ministère de l'Environnement et du Cadre de Vie (1980 a, b). The importance of the first of these lies more in its analysis of the issues involved than in its aesthetic recommendations. The successful insertion of new buildings in historic areas depends fundamentally on the approach to the problem; thus the use of the building and the brief can play a role as important as the design itself.

According to this analysis, the difficulties of integrating new and old are the result of fundamental changes in society, reflected by such things as the increased sizes of urban property parcels, the zoning of activities, the disappearance of regionalism and the changes in urban scale resulting from speculation. The advice is directed to those commissioning new buildings as much as to the designers or the controllers and it reflects this analysis, emphasizing process rather than design solutions (see [Chapter 2](#)). The examples chosen are shown to be successful when they are preceded by a careful analysis. The second text produced by the ministry is the catalogue of an exhibition showing examples of good and not so good practice; as in the previous text, success is not judged simply on the style of the façade but on morphological elements such as the plot sizes. In addition, the book categorizes the buildings shown according to ‘the attitude adopted by the architect towards the future relationship between the new building and its historic built environment’ (Ministère de l’Environnement et du Cadre de Vie 1980b: 9), which goes from indifference to identification.

The insertion of contemporary architecture within urban historic areas and the acceptance and praise that it receives would appear to be a peculiarly French phenomenon. Although various authors mention this phenomenon, none of them attempts to explain it: implicitly there is an acceptance that it occurs and that some kind of system is in place to ensure that this is the case. For an outsider coming from a different environment, this is not so obvious. Popular opinion in Britain may suggest as an explanation the French attitude to culture. The fact that in non-urban areas of France buildings can frequently be found which bear no relation to their surroundings or copy historic styles seems to negate that explanation. The various themes that have emerged from the initial exploration hint at partial and more complex explanations that need further investigation. Someone looking at a similar phenomenon in Britain would assume that the planning and conservation systems had a central role to play which was worth exploring, although, as pointed out by Booth (1989), the mechanistic analysis of the legislation would be of little value: it is the process of applying the legislation, the transactions and relationships, the decisions, that give an insight into a particular system. The transactions central to this book are those connected with the processing of planning applications within historic areas and, more specifically, with the design aspects of the applications. Like some of the authors mentioned above, this study accepts that the professional planner has a legitimate role in the transactions and an effect on the results. The role of the planner in design control is thus a reasonable place to start the investigation in France, bearing in mind the themes emerging from the initial exploration and the fact that, from the outset, the French system appears complex and has a wide range of participants: the ‘planner’ who controls the design of building may be a different person, or even more than one person, according to the circumstances.

The analysis attempts to understand the French system from an outsider’s point of view, asking questions that someone working within the system might not

ask. A review of the French literature indicates that this is indeed the case: the presence of contemporary buildings in historic areas does not appear to be an issue that needs an explanation for the French. In itself, this lack of questioning of a phenomenon which is not frequent elsewhere is intriguing. Furthermore, concentrating on a narrow and specific issue such as this may not allow for generalizations about the whole French planning system, but it can throw light on the methods of operation of such a complex system. From this understanding, further research questions may emerge which could apply to other countries as well as to France.

This exploration started with questions related to general issues: the conservation of historic areas, planning and design control and the relationships between professionals concerned with the built environment. A number of interrelated themes emerged, depending on how the subject was approached. The philosophical or theoretical approach accepts change in historic areas and therefore sees their incorporation of contemporary architecture as part of their continuing evolution. The design approach is interested in methods of successfully inserting new buildings in historic areas and of developing some related body of theory which goes beyond stylistic issues; that the legislation has a role to play in this is hinted at, rather than made explicit. The legalistic approach accepts that laws have a role in ensuring that the right buildings are built, and that the state must ensure that these laws and the way in which they are implemented are effective. Closely related to this is the institutional approach which suggests that it is the interplay of a number of participants combining the legal instruments with other elements which affects the results. The last one is implicit in some of the texts, either in general terms (Booth looking at the functioning of the French development control system) or in relation to a particular issue (Lucan emphasizing the role of the state in commissioning new buildings). It is mainly the last two that are pursued in this book, even though the philosophical and aesthetic approaches cannot be ignored since they are part of the framework within which the legislation is conceived and the planners operate.

METHODOLOGY

The initial observation which triggered this work led to an exploration of various themes and theories. Implicit in this search is the acceptance that the presence of new buildings in historic areas is not an accident but the physical result of a series of transactions which involve a number of participants operating according to sets of rules, their position within institutional frameworks and their own personal behavioural codes or agendas. Furthermore it recognizes the legitimacy of imposing design controls on buildings, and recognizes that the government's intervention, at whatever level, has an effect on the final results. At this stage some questions can be asked in order to structure the research. Who are the relevant participants? What are the rules? What are the agendas? What

instruments are available to the participants in order to mediate in the decision making processes? Where does the power lie?

Thus, initially at least, the role of the planning officers or their French equivalents in the control of design is placed at the centre of the concerns of this book. This relates to a body of research already referred to, which analyses why changes in the built environment occur and who are the main decision makers effecting these changes. Larkham (1996) calls them ‘agents of change’ and divides them into direct agents or initiators (owners and architects) and indirect ones (planners, committee members, the general public). He specifically discusses the role of the planners and how they affect policy decision from the designation of conservation areas to the management of change within them. This approach follows that of other writers concerned with the relationships between participants in the development process, such as Simmie (1981), Short *et al.* (1986) and Reade (1987, 1992).

But it is Punter’s research on aesthetic control in Reading (1985b), which most closely approximates to the aims of this book: it is an empirical study based on the analysis of case studies and participant observation within the operational context of the Borough of Reading, and informed by the British debate on the role of aesthetic control in statutory planning. The organizations in which the various participants operate, their values and the means of communication that they employ are analysed implicitly or explicitly. In particular, the contrast between the perceived importance of aesthetic control and the low priority that it has in practice is shown (1985b:1–9) to affect the operation of the system and the discretion available to the participants in the decision making process. Punter’s model for the selection of ‘key actors’ (p. 106) involves the planning officer, the planning committee, various consultees including amenity groups and conservation societies, the architects and the developers (see [Figure 1.1](#)). A similar choice can be made for France, adjusting it to the different job titles and roles of the French situation. On the control side are the Service d’Urbanisme, the *maire*, the Direction Départementale de l’Équipement and the Architecte des Bâtiments de France. On the production side are the architects and the developers divided between public and private. This list is based on an initial knowledge of the system and therefore incomplete; key consultees, who may or may not be statutory, can be discovered only in the course of the study, when a better knowledge of the system has been acquired.

The first step was an analysis of the rules which govern the decision making process in the granting of planning permission for buildings in historic areas. This involved an understanding of the legislation and of the positions of those in charge of its implementation. An initial review indicated the importance of historical evolution in shaping the legislation. History was therefore an early subject of analysis: it threw light on the present position and suggested other important issues such as well established roles and agendas. Comments made by practitioners and academics on the functioning of the French system and published debates about it gave an insight beyond the purely mechanical aspects

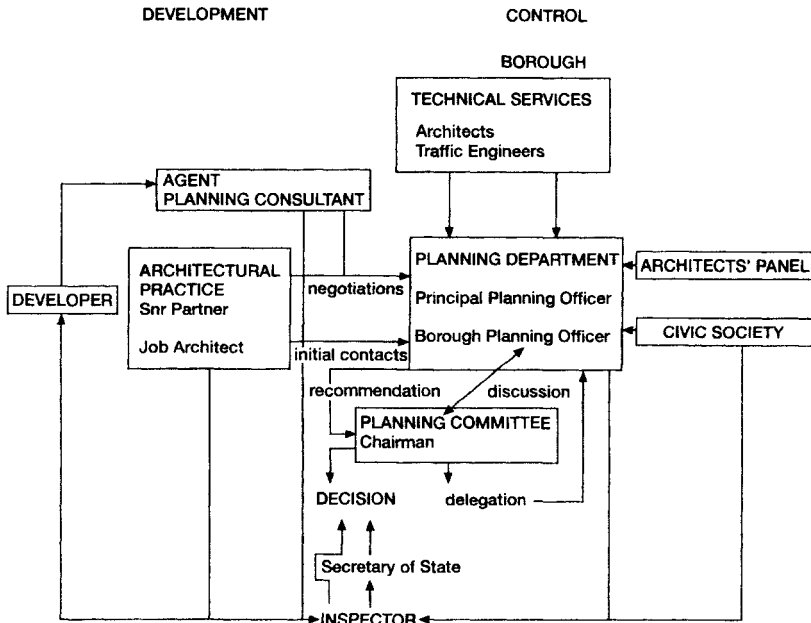


Figure 1.1 Key actors in the development and control processes in Britain

Source: Adapted from Punter 1985b:106

of the legislation. They also helped to identify key players, hidden agendas and problems in the functioning of the system.

While this analysis was iterative and continued throughout the research period, three particularly significant issues emerged. The first was the split between the legislation dealing with planning and that dealing with historic buildings and historic areas, and the merging of the two in very recent times. This meant that two sets of legislation needed to be researched alongside, potentially, two different sets of actors. The second was that there were different types of 'conservation areas'; areas of historic character could be protected in a number of ways by different parts of the legislation. This meant that examples of the various types of areas needed to be analysed. The third important issue was the crucial role of the *Architecte des Bâtiments de France* as decision maker in all matters involving design and the built heritage.

Case studies were seen as a useful vehicle by which to focus the research and to analyse the functioning of the system of design control in historic areas. This approach, also used *inter alia* by Larkham (1996) and Tiesdell *et al.* (1996), is particularly appropriate to illustrate the operation of a system in specific circumstances and to discover the unexpected. The relevant model, Punter's study of Reading, involved the analysis of case files of selected examples, interviews with the key actors and a certain amount of participant observation. A

similar approach was attempted although the characteristics of the French system and the resources available meant that it had to be adapted to different circumstances. For instance, because of the regulatory character of the French planning system, the case files include almost no references to negotiations and no correspondence between applicant and planners, except for the decision letter. Fortunately the system is the subject of several published analyses by lawyers and practitioners, who illustrate their research with numerous examples and confirm that negotiations do take place. The best way of finding out about these was by interviewing those involved in chosen areas. Examples of modern buildings in historic areas had therefore to be selected and, starting with the scarce information on file, the participants could then be identified and interviewed.

From an initial review of the literature it was clear that there were different levels of historic areas within which cases could be chosen: those without any kind of heritage protection, where ordinary planning controls exist on their own; those containing a listed building and affected by the legislation protecting its setting; the traditional French conservation areas, the *Secteurs Sauvegardés*, where a specific legislation applies; and the more recent areas of protection, the *Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural et Urbain* (ZPPAU), also affected by specific legislation. Since practically all historic urban areas have at least one listed building (at a minimum there is a church), the first category could be eliminated, even though the principles of planning control on their own needed to be reviewed to understand all other areas.

A second factor in the selection of examples was an attempt to cover a variety of urban situations, from small town to large city. Limited resources meant that the locations had to be easily accessible from Paris and that, at most, only a handful of cities could be studied. With these conditions in mind, the following cities were chosen:

- 1 Pontoise, a small city within the Paris commuter belt where there is no specific conservation plan and protection relies on that given by the proximity of listed buildings and on general planning policies.
- 2 Lille, a large provincial city, part of a larger administrative structure, the Communauté Urbaine de Lille, where the historic core is covered by a *Secteur Sauvegardé* and where major changes have taken place in the recent past.
- 3 Quimper, a small provincial town which has pioneered the new form of conservation plan mentioned above (ZPPAU) and as such was recommended as worth investigating by contacts in the Ministère de l'Équipement.
- 4 Chartres, also covered by a *Secteur Sauvegardé*, was added mainly because a particular building caused substantial controversy when it was first built and was written about in the professional press.

5 Paris, because the city offers a great variety of situations which are well publicized and recorded. It is an exceptional case but also an exemplary one, as most of France looks at Paris and follows its lead.

This choice of locations ensures that most of the possible types of conservation policies can be covered as well as a range of administrative structures. For each of the cities information about which agencies dealt with planning consent, who were the elected representatives in charge of planning and what additional structures existed, was gathered in order to pursue the next step in the research. In addition, examples from other cities such as Nîmes and Montpellier are included if they help to emphasize a point, but they are not analysed in the same depth.

The initial sources for the case studies were the local planning authorities who were asked to suggest recent examples of buildings within the historic core which they judged to be of quality. The criteria for selection of the buildings were that they be fairly new (completed in the past fifteen years) so that participants in the process could remember their role; that they be considered by the local professionals, the press or the local people to be of quality and to make a contribution to the historic area; that they be examples of modern design in a historic environment; and that information about them be available. There was no stylistic or other design requirement in the selection, except for the elimination of new developments behind retained façades, replicas of adjacent buildings or obvious pastiches; no such building was in fact suggested by the local planning authorities. Neither was there a need for the buildings to be universally praised: discussing one particular example (rejected only because of its location outside urban areas), a member of one of Lille's advisory bodies commented: 'Some love it, some hate it. That is what good architecture is about; it should not leave you indifferent.'

The examples chosen are a vehicle for investigating how the system works in a range of situations with varying political structures and personalities. They are complementary to the analysis of documents and to the interviews with people concerned with general policy. They are an instrument with which to focus interviews with specific participants in the process and to throw additional light on how the system works in ordinary cases that have not necessarily received national or international coverage.

It would be possible to argue that, by requesting examples in a contemporary design and eliminating those in replica or pastiche, the sample was biased and unrepresentative: they could be the exceptions rather than the rule. It is true that no statistical analysis was undertaken to assess what percentage of new buildings in historic areas over the whole of France were of one kind or another; within the limitations of this work, such a survey would not have been feasible. Nevertheless, the author's observation went well beyond the cities chosen: in numerous trips through different parts of France, examples of modern buildings were found in historic centres. Within the cities chosen as examples, hardly any buildings in replica or pastiche were found and officers interviewed did not

suggest that the buildings selected were exceptional in this sense. In order to further illustrate this point, [Chapter 4](#) includes, in addition to the main case studies, a few other examples of modern buildings in the historic cores of the chosen cities, about which little information was obtained. As the research evolved, the lack of acceptance by the gatekeepers of pastiche and replica design confirmed the fact that the examples shown were not exceptional. Additionally, a review of the professional magazines shows an abundance of contemporary buildings throughout French historic centres, from Paris to Nîmes and from Tours to Montpellier, some of which are mentioned in the text to illustrate particular issues. Finally, it could be argued that even if the cases observed represented only a minority of the total number of new buildings in historic areas, how they came into existence and were accepted would still merit investigation.

On the other hand the case studies are not given as a proof that the French always produce buildings that are successfully inserted in their historic surroundings; other, poor examples of insertion can undoubtedly be found. The aesthetic value of the buildings is important only in relation to their acceptance in the city examined. They have been recommended as interesting examples by professionals working in the area, but in a few years' time the selection might be different as it is undoubtedly influenced by the current climate; this is not necessarily a drawback since the examples are intended to reflect the professional opinion of the time. With hindsight it might have been more interesting to choose controversial schemes but none was suggested; the one controversial example from Chartres came to light precisely because of the stir that it caused at the time it was built, even though today it is praised and no longer controversial.

The investigation thus combines an analysis of the information obtained through interviews and triggered by the case studies, including a survey of the Architectes des Bâtiments de France (ABF; see [Appendix 2](#)), with that of the legislative instruments and of secondary sources. These are the building blocks that allow the eventual construction of an argument to explain the presence of modern buildings in the historic areas of France. It differs from the original assumption that planning is central to the results and shows a much more complex pattern of relationships; in particular it highlights the leading role of the public sector as patron and model.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The text is divided into five main parts. The first aspect analysed is the historic development of the legislation concerning the protection of historic areas and the system of development control. Particular events in history have had an important role in people's attitudes towards heritage and the legislation is a reflection of these. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse the way legislation currently in use was arrived at, and the reasons for the changes that have taken place. This is the subject of [Chapter 2](#) which emphasizes the continuity in French thinking on the subject. For this analysis a number of historical references and existing

publications, including reports of conferences, were consulted, and people involved with the more recent evolution of the legislation, particularly in the ministries, were interviewed. The present system of control of development is the subject of [Chapter 3](#): it analyses the instruments and procedures involved in obtaining permission to build in various circumstances, from ordinary (urban) areas with no special controls to areas protected to a lesser or greater degree for historic or architectural reasons. The main sources of information for this chapter are the legal texts and the comments made about them by academics and lawyers; examples from the cities visited are used to illustrate some of the points.

The cities and the case studies are described in [Chapter 4](#). Files and local references were consulted and opinions were sought from practitioners in the cities visited.

[Chapter 5](#) considers the process by which buildings are produced; who commissions them, who designs them. As the role of the public sector is particularly important, the influence and intervention of central and local governments comprise most of the chapter. Interviews with architects and developers and with members of the various bodies that promote quality in architecture complement written information. The particular situations in the various cities being analysed are given as examples whenever relevant.

[Chapter 6](#) examines the effectiveness of the control system in practice. In particular, the various participants involved in implementing the legislation, the 'gatekeepers', are the subject of analysis. The negotiations and interactions between them, and those with the designers and developers analysed in [Chapter 5](#), lead eventually to the results that can be appreciated. Interviews with a number of people with different roles and at different levels of the official hierarchy were undertaken, in order to understand how the system operated in practice. A large number of texts were consulted, including unpublished reports, case files and articles, in order to obtain different points of view.

The concluding chapter attempts to bring all these strands together and suggests that design control is only one element in the process that produces modern buildings in historic areas. It puts forward the possibility that there is an agenda to promote French culture through contemporary architecture. From this conclusion, some speculative comments about the situation in other countries can be derived and suggestions made for drawing lessons from the French experience.

PROBLEMS OF COMPARISON AND LANGUAGE

Several authors have discussed the difficulties of researchers from one country studying the system of another. Booth (1989) for example has pointed out the problems of language, not only from the straightforward translation point of view but also because of conceptual differences. The subject of this book is no exception in that the direct translation of words does not necessarily express the real meaning. Obvious examples are 'planning' which does not properly translate

as *urbanisme* or *aménagement du territoire*; ‘development’ which badly translates as *aménagement* and is certainly not *développement*; or ‘public inquiry’ which is very different from the *enquête publique*. A related problem is that of names of institutions such as *communes*, or their incumbents (*maire*), and that of legal planning designations such as *Secteur Sauvegardé*. Their translations, in the case of the examples given, as commune, mayor and conservation area, are more likely to hinder than help. The author, being bilingual and having been immersed in both systems, has no difficulties in understanding linguistic subtleties but is very conscious of the confusions that can be created by the language. It was therefore decided to leave all of these, italicized, in the original, and to give a glossary in [Appendix 1](#). All French quotations have been translated by the author, unless a published translation was already available.

THE HISTORY OF PLANNING AND HERITAGE PROTECTION IN FRANCE

INTRODUCTION

French planning legislation and the protection of the built heritage followed separate paths throughout history until some twenty-five years ago. Even though planning acts often contained aesthetic and cultural objectives, their main thrust was the management of urban development and growth, and their concerns socio-economic and political (see Jegouzo 1986, Gohier 1986). Avoiding anarchy, maintaining order and keeping a balance between property rights and societal needs were the main preoccupations of French planning. Alongside, a separate legislation evolved, aimed at protecting areas considered exceptional for their historic and/or aesthetic value and concerned with the building of a national spirit, with education and with the elevation of French culture. The separation of the two strands of legislation was reinforced by the fact that they were the responsibility of two distinct ministries, the Ministère de l'Équipement (previously called Ministère de la Construction et de l'Urbanisme) and the Ministère de la Culture (previously the Beaux-Arts, a branch of the Education Ministry) respectively, often competing rather than collaborating with each other (Jegouzo, 1986:81–2).

The turning point was the 1962 Loi Malraux: from then onwards, bridges have linked the two kinds of legislation, without entirely merging them. Certainly the boundaries between the two are more blurred nowadays, but different administrations still have specific responsibilities for planning and for heritage. This chapter follows the historical separation, dealing first with the planning legislation, then with the protection of heritage and finally with their joint evolution in the recent past. Details of the historical evolution of the legislation are given because they aid understanding of the ideas behind the laws and of how the current situation has been arrived at.

HISTORY OF PLANNING LEGISLATION

Legislation concerning planning (*urbanisme*) as such is relatively recent; the concept, though not the word, appears in official documents only after the First