



A Short History of Thinking the Metropole

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The paper reviews histories of metropolitan concepts and perceptions over more than a century and situates present transformations in that context. Large city regions have been thought about and governed in myriad ways over past decades. Political, ideological and intellectual shifts have altered the discourses, analyses and politics of the question of the large city region. A contemporary example is found in the sophisticated work conducted by ten teams in response to the call by the President of France to rise to the challenge of the region centered on Paris - Grand Pari[s]. The enormously diverse approaches adopted, as well as the original reasons for setting off this explosion of thinking and the literature which has followed in its wake, reveal many recent shifts and contradictions as well as continuities and conservatisms, in ways of thinking about this major metropolis. Paris is exceptional as all large city regions are: yet its experience can be compared with others where different politics and histories have combined with recent global changes in economics and intellectual life to stimulate both parallel and distinct approaches. Two examples are the regions centered on São Paulo, Brazil (Grande São Paulo) and on Johannesburg, South Africa (Gauteng City Region). As with Paris these regions are central to the political, cultural and economic life of their respective countries and wider regions. The paper draws particularly on planning, architectural and sociological thought on these three city regions in global context, creating a short history of ways of thinking about metropolises. Implications for present attempts to transform city regions, often built around concepts like competitive city and world city, as well as livable and sustainable city, form the conclusion to the paper.

KEY WORDS: Metropole, city region, transformation.