

# Ansamed

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## FRANCE: 21ST CENTURY PARIS BLOOMS, NOT ONLY LES HALLES

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(ANSAMÉD) - PARIS, MARCH 2 - As of 2016 one will arrive to Paris from the airport or the banlieue with no more traffic or delays, but simply emerging from its belly button. The new Porte de Paris is in the heart of the city, in Les Halles, the area rebuilt in the '70s that has already aged. A grandiose project that is once again redesigning the old 'ventre de Paris', but at present construction sites cover 10% of the capital city. A forge of novelties that is however being contested by more than a few people.

More than 60,000 people have already visited the exhibit with models and pictures of the new Les Halles and, above all, of the 'Canopea', the futuristic and endless transparent roofing that allows the passage of light but offers protection from sun and rain. It is a sort of wavy roof that runs from the church of Saint-Eustache to the fountain of the innocent, covering the current area of the shopping centre that goes four floors below ground. The huge construction site has opened and today the deputy mayor and councillor for architecture and urbanism, Anne Hidalgo, wanted to draw up the situation for the foreign press in the presence of the man that came up with and designed the project, architect Patrick Berger.

Hidalgo explained that "The idea that inspired us in this as in all the other construction sites that are remaking 10% of Paris is that of the mixed city. Council and residential homes, entertainment and transport, kindergartens and public facilities. This has always been the specificity of Paris and it is with these qualities that we draw companies to choose this city to set up in".

Remaking everything after less than 30 years, a harshly contested decision that was strenuously supported by Hidalgo: "the Halles have age, there are fire hazard regulation problems. And then, to speak the truth, the 1970's Les Halles is a complex that never found its true place in the city, despite the 750,000 people that pass through it every day on foot or in the metro. It was a period when citizens were not heard and when sustainable development was not an issue. With this project we are opening a new chapter".

While Hidalgo spoke, objectors who joined up in the Scand'Halles association gathered together outside: "it is an absurd and invasive project, this roof will let wind and rain through, but not the sun. They are telling a lot of lies, it will be another unending neighbourhood that will cost the enormous sum of 1 billion euros, as much as the Municipality usually invests in a single year". Hidalgo objected to everything, starting from the costs: "the budget amounts to 802 million euros, two thirds being covered by the Municipality, the rest by the company that runs Les Halles".

But the spacious bright spaces of the new Halles, where there will be room for a new conservatory and a new library and where architect Berger expects a fantastic scenario for those who are surfacing ("first you see the sky, then Saint-Eustache, then the gardens"), is only part of the revolution that is being carried out in Ville Lumière where socialist Bertrand Delanoë has been in power since 2001. The most ambitious chapter, which however involves shopkeepers and residents of the 'Quai' of the Seine, is that of closing down high speed traffic lanes along the river to return them to walks and

commerce, with an eye to protecting the biodiversity and tradition of Paris' 'promenade'.

However the outlook of even more congested traffic than at present makes the full implementation of the plan rather difficult, albeit suggestive on paper.

What has already started is the urban renewal of the south-east area, from the gare d'Austerlitz up to the third arrondissement, on the rive gauche. Incidentally, the old station will be the starting point of the new City of fashion and design that, running along the railway, will follow, with the Docks en Seine, the example set by London. The inauguration is scheduled for this year. The whole Bercy area, the new railway station, will be rehabilitated with the extension of the tram that runs along the whole ring road and the construction of new residential neighbourhoods set in green areas provided with public facilities. Almost 600,000 square metres of homes, offices and shop will be built in the historic Batignolles neighbourhood while innovation and sustainable development are the key words of the renovation of the Chapelle neighbourhood close to the Villette.(ANSAMÉD).

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