

Urban Planning: A Study of Montpellier



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URBAN PLANNING: A STUDY OF MONTPELLIER

The unit offers a chance to look at the planning and development issues in a large, expanding conurbation within an MEDC. Montpellier is one of the fastest growing cities in France (it grew from 25th largest to 8th French city in the space of about twenty five years). The city claims that this has been done with a clearly defined economic strategy based upon cultural, scientific and sporting prowess. It planners claim to have shunned the notion of suburbs in favour of integrating quarters into the city and as such it is now used as a case study for development within a large European conurbation.

Depending upon time students will be able to examine, urban transport policy, retail and leisure developments and urban residential developments. Students may examine all of these or just a selection depending upon the time available. The unit takes the form more of building up case study material rather than pure data collection. As such students will be investigating a series of key questions.

Use is made of the Montpellier Light Railway system to travel into the centre of the city (cost is about 1 euro return per person). This gives students an opportunity to investigate the retail and leisure development at Odysseum, whilst also allowing rapid transport into the centre (10 minutes). The coach will remain at the Odysseum parking area.

Staff should be aware that as with any city, there are areas where it is undesirable for the students to visit. This unit concentrates on the out of centre developments, developments on the edge of the centre and the central zone. **Areas that might present an 'unacceptable risk' to students are avoided.** However staff should be aware that within the central area groups need to work unsupervised and they should consider this when planning to make use of this unit.

The tourist office offers a number of different tours of Montpellier, a list of which is available from The Eagles Nest. These cost about 7 euros per person and would need to be booked in advance, especially if they are to be conducted in English.

The unit could be investigated on its own, however since it takes over 3 hours to get to Montpellier from The Eagles Nest; it can be incorporated into other units on the coast (e.g. Coastal Management, Sand Dune study).

If more use is wanted to be made of the Mediterranean area, it is of course possible to stay fairly cheaply in the local area (around £15 per person). However, use will be made of a local hotel and staff should consider all the implications of this before embarking on this option.

Many thanks are made to Stephen Smith of King Edward VI School, Chelmsford. Without his advice and work this unit would never have come into existence. Thanks also for his fantastic meal out, at a great restaurant in Montpellier.

Background Information

During the 1940's and 1950's much of Southern France was an economic backwater. The domination of Paris was encapsulated in the notion of 'Paris and the French desert'. Out migration was leading to stagnation within these areas as the periphery migrated to the core. However, since the 1970's France has experienced a '*drift towards the sun*'. The old industrial areas of the North and Lorraine were ill equipped to withstand the recession of the 1970's or the economic boom of the 1980's and 1990's. The growth of the tertiary sector, plus regional planning policies, which led to the development of tourism along the coast-line, resulted in internal migration towards the southern regions. This was further backed by immigrants from Spain, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, many of whom remained in the south.

Montpellier

Since 1980 Montpellier has grown from a provincial town to a leading French city, moving from the 25th to 8th largest city in France. (Census data below)

Population of Montpellier City (recent census data)

	1982	1990	1999	2005
Population	197,231	207, 996	225,392	238,935
% change	+0.43	+0.67	+0.90	+1.0

Any increase on this scale is likely to present problems in planning, but Montpellier has taken a proactive approach towards this. There has been major inward investment in the city which has now established itself as one of the high technology cities in France (IBM, Dell, Infosud France are located here). Two major developments to the east of the city, Antigone and Port Marianne reflect this investment. They are claimed to provide a balance between habitat, environment and economic activity. Within this area housing, offices, a university, business parks and leisure area are interspersed between green areas. The complex at Odysseum is claimed to be the first urban leisure pole in southern Europe. All these factors together have helped to move the urban centre of Montpellier towards the east.

At the same time, strenuous efforts have been taken to revitalise the centre of Montpellier, around the Place de la Comedie. An urban light railway now crosses the city from east to west and the central area has been pedestrianised by taking the roads underground. Most car parks have similarly been located underground to preserve the urban environment. A new shopping area (Le Polygone) is located just off the Place de la Comedie.

On the face of it therefore Montpellier presents a vibrant, modern city, with impressive architecture, contrasting the old with the new. With three universities, and 65,000 students it has a young population with over 60% of the population below the age of 40(in real contrast to the Cevennes).

Age Groups	0 - 19	20 - 39	40 - 59	60 - 74	75+
% population	20.9	39.8	20.9	10.7	7.6

However, there is another face to Montpellier. Away from the modern developments lie older areas developed in the late 19th and early 20th century. A growing population led to urban sprawl, which took place outside of the city walls (e.g. The Gambetta). Here terraced, '2 up – 2 down' housing is packed into narrow and cramped streets, lacking the open space of the Antigone. Even with the influx of high tech jobs, unemployment in Montpellier rose from 16.7% to 22.4% of the active population. A large majority of these are the North Africans who have made Montpellier their home, but cannot locate within the newer developments. Both lack adequate housing provision and high crime rates are now major problems in Montpellier. Social and ethnic polarisation is therefore highly evident.

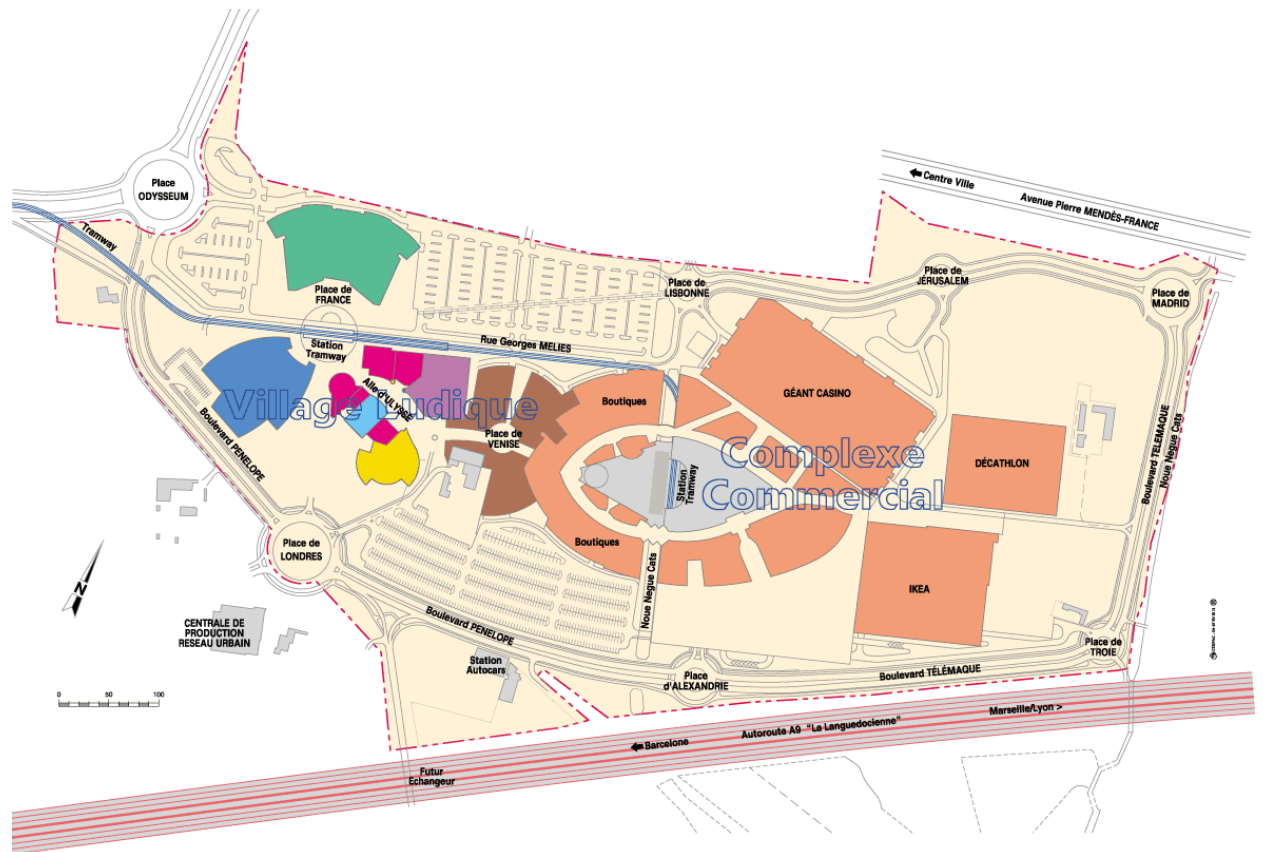
Fieldwork

Four areas are to be investigated:

- The Leisure and retail complex at Odysseum.
- Urban developments at Port Marianne and Antigone
- Inner city transport – light railway and car management
- Inner city regeneration, Place de la Comedie and Polygone

Students will be expected to make notes on each of these areas. A series of sheets are attached to assist with this.

Odysseum “A world of leisure and sensation on the Mediterranean”



Odysseum is designed around the concept of providing a leisure and retail facility in close proximity to places of work and residential areas. This was based upon a survey in France which suggested that given more free time, a majority would like to spend more time relaxing with their children, as well as engaging in cultural activities and shopping for pleasure. It is located:-

- Between the beach and the city centre
- In close proximity to the Lyon-Barcelona Motorway (A9)
- Next to the future TGV station.
- At the current eastern terminus of the Urban Light Railway. This provides a useful ‘Park and ride facility into the city centre.

The complex is opening in two stages:

- The leisure sector which combines both public amenities (ice skating rink, planetarium) alongside private facilities. In this way public funding has been kept to only about 8% of the estimated \$300 million cost. This was felt to be important to avoid increasing local taxation.
- The retail phase bringing large out of centre stores onto the site. This is currently in its building phase.

What facilities are currently available at Odysseum?

Leisure

Retail

What facilities are planned or under construction?

What attempts have been made to create a pleasant environment?

How successful do you feel this scheme will be?

Why?

Montpellier Urban Light Railway (TAM)

In July 1995, Montpellier city leaders looked towards a long-term solution to the growing transport problems in Montpellier. This project would have to be completed within five years. Since public transport was already 17% of all journeys, the new system would have to attract car drivers, helping Montpellier meet new EU guidelines on air quality. Bus lanes were considered to be unsuitable as they were open to abuse by car drivers and existing bus routes were already at or near capacity. A system with its own dedicated alignment was necessary. The choice fell to a new high-capacity tram system which had already proved successful in other European cities.

The initial line opened in July 2000, in a winding course, roughly east – west, from Odysseum to Mosson (a residential area, with a high proportion of social housing). The total length is 15.2km with 28 stops along its route. The route was designed to serve all the major centre's, such as the main hospital, university, exhibition centre, town centre and railway station. 75,000 people live within 5 minutes walk of a tram stop. The service runs from 5am until 1am and carries about 80,000 passengers a day producing 18 million per year and at an average speed of 20km/h. The operator is 'Transport de l'Agglomeration de Montpellier' (TAM), a subsidiary of Transdev, one of the leading world light railway operators. The tramway has been seen as the final piece in a jigsaw of urban regeneration in Montpellier, which has seen the university, hospital and railway station upgraded.

The success of the tram is such that already it has been necessary to increase the trams from two to three units and to purchase another two three car sets (giving a total of 30). There are now plans to create a total of three lines with extensions to the north and east alongside the original line, including a link to the planned Languedoc-Rousillon TGV and to the city's airport. The third line would link Juvignac in the north to Lattes in the south. This is planned to be completed in 2008.

When you travel on the tram, note any details regarding:

- Cost
- Frequency
- Speed and convenience
- Comfort and cleanliness
- Access for disabled, elderly, young children
- Information on tram and station
- Integration with other transport systems
- Route network

Is the tram system a viable alternative to cars and buses, especially for commuters and shoppers?

Port Marianne and Antigone “A new style of Urban Living”

This former military zone was purchased in 1984, to provide a new residential and office development, which would link the centre of Montpellier to the River Lez to the East. The development of this 25 hectare site cost around 30 million euros to construct, providing both fair-rent housing and offices. A new library and Olympic swimming pool were included within the design. Many of the regional administrative functions were also located in this area. The area has however been somewhat controversial and has failed to attract tourists and shoppers away from the Place de la Comedie. The open spaces have been described as disturbing, with something totalitarian and inhuman about them.

This area can either be visited separately or viewed from the tram, depending upon time available.

Comment on:
Architecture

Range of Services

Cleanliness

Evidence of Social Problems

Numbers of people

Traffic management

Your views on this area

Transport Management in Montpellier City Centre

The tram will stop at the 'Place de la Comedie' and students should exit here. Each group should first visit the Tourist Information Centre at the end of the 'Place' and obtain a street map (these are free and the staff speak English!) which will be easier to follow than the map included. This will allow you to follow the route described below:

Place de la Comedie

This area has been recently pedestrianised, by taking the road underground (notice the vents in the pavement).

What advantages are there in pedestrianising this area?

What is this space now used for?

Do you think this was a good idea?

From the Western end of the Place (beside McDonalds), take the following route:

Rue de la Loge – Rue Foch – Place Royale du Peyrou.

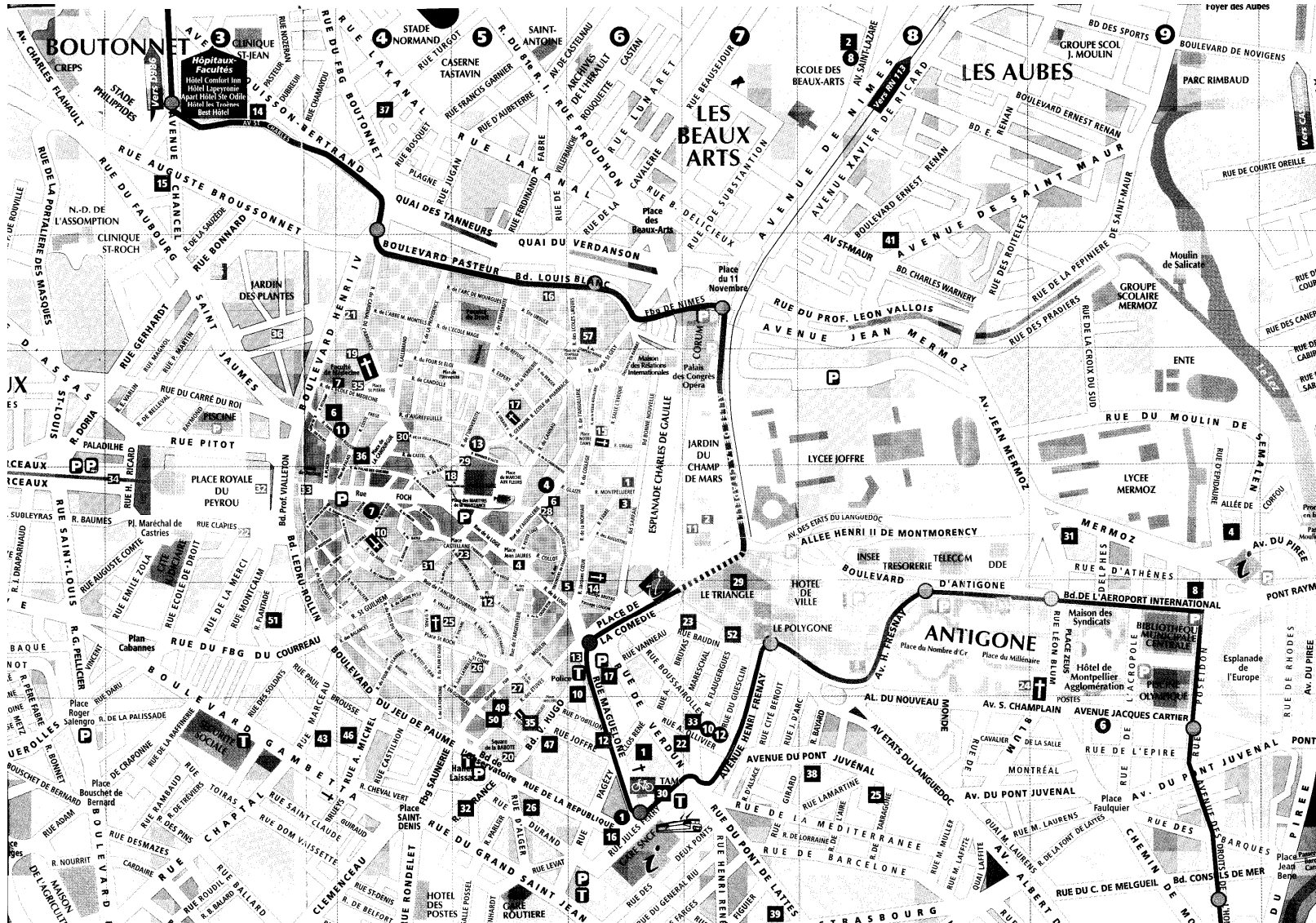
How has potential conflict between pedestrians and vehicles been managed?

Where are the car parks located?

What are the advantages of this policy?

What traffic management strategies can you identify?

Map of Montpellier Centre



From Rue Foch, take a diversion north into the area around the Cathedral

(This is within the older part of Montpellier)

What problems would this urban environment create for motor vehicles?

How have these problems been addressed?

Now divert south of Rue de la Loge into the shopping area

What problems would this urban environment create for motor vehicles?

How have these problems been addressed?

Continue south onto Boulevard Victor Hugo

What happens to traffic as it moves towards the Place de la Comedie?

If this measure had not been taken, how would the Place be different today?

Continue to Le Polygone at the east of the Place de la Comedie

How is traffic managed here?

How is parking organised for this shopping area?

What public transport options exist for people visiting this area?

Le Polygone

This area provides the link between the old town and the new development at Antigone. It provides a useful contrast to similar inner city retail developments such as those seen in Reading or Manchester. There is also an opportunity here for some Retail Therapy!

What services are available in this centre?

How does the size and range of services compare to similar developments in the UK?

What is the retail environment like here?

Will shops in this shopping area be negatively affected by the 'out of centre' retail development taking place at Odysseum?

How busy is this shopping area?

Montpellier has a relatively young population. Is this reflected in the shoppers in this area?

Is there any evidence of the social problems (crime, high unemployment) in this area?