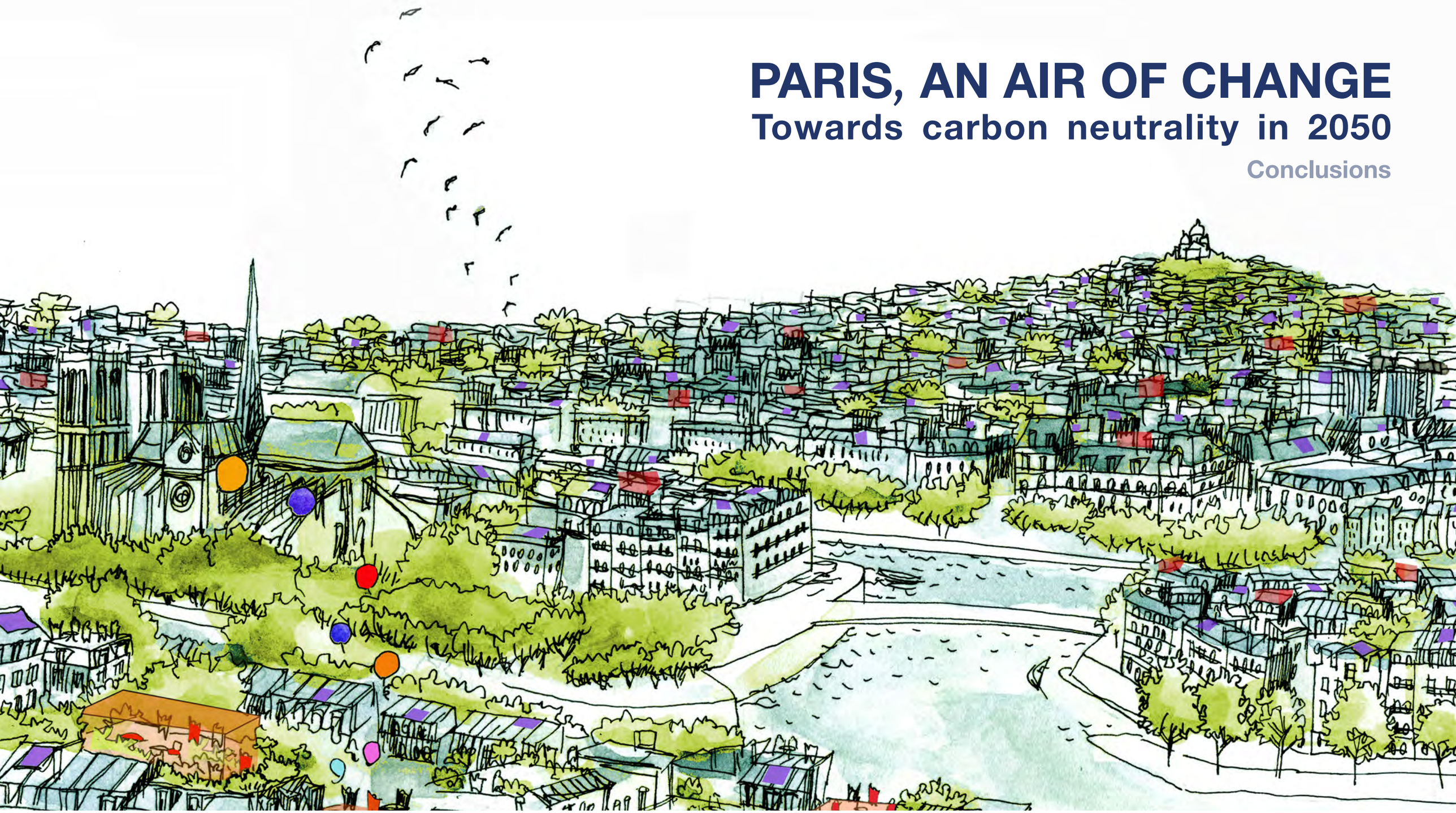
PARIS, AN AIR OF CHANGE

Towards carbon neutrality in 2050

Conclusions



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PARIS, AN AIR OF CHANGE

Paris is leaving the fossil fuel era. This is a landmark undertaking in the history of the city, like the advent of electricity in the past.

The electrification of Paris took place between 1870 and 1900 and transformed the French capital into the City of Light, gave it its underground railway, its lifts and its telecommunications system, made the “Roaring Twenties” possible and ushered in a century of rapid development. The Universal Exhibition of 1881 had an enormous global impact, with 750,000 visitors in a single year witnessing a multitude of innovations heralding a revolution in habits, lifestyles and business models. In 1889, the Eiffel Tower lit up the Paris skyline for the first time – the perfect emblem of this industrial era and this quest for progress.

This shows that it is possible to change from one era to another in less than 40 years, and it is reassuring to know that Paris has already undergone a comparable process of transformation, which allows us to believe that the extent of the changes announced in this report is not so much ambitious as rational and reasonable.

Rational, because the state of climate emergency requires us to work relentlessly and triple our greenhouse gas reduction efforts to attain neutrality by 2050.

Reasonable, because the proposed measures have practical foundations, taking account of the specificities of Parisians and their motivations, as well as their practices and their constraints.

Nevertheless, Paris will still need to carry out a rapid transformation of its buildings, its transport systems, its food and energy supplies and its waste, and these transitions will require simultaneous changes of habits, uses and infrastructures, while raising the massive question of how to finance these changes.

We should bear in mind the sheer scale of the issues at stake: firstly, the adoption of new mobility habits – carsharing, carpooling, cycling, walking and teleworking – in order to halve the car fleet and convert internal combustion-engine-powered vehicles to reduce transport-related emissions by 95%. Then there is the adoption of “flexitarian” diets – not quite as strict as vegetarianism but conforming to a “vegetarian, local and seasonal” approach. Next comes the massive renovation of the housing stock and tertiary buildings. Not forgetting the transfer of logistics flows to the River Seine. And the migration of the energy mix towards 100% renewable sources…

To succeed, we must therefore ensure that this goal of carbon neutrality is given its rightful status: as a central, essential and vital priority.

This goal must be the yardstick against which the major events – the Olympic Games and the Universal Exhibitions that have been announced – must be judged. They must be placed at the service of this project and become vectors for the promotion and adoption of new habits and uses; they must be catalysts for instigating and financing infrastructures, such as the conversion of the Paris ring road.

In addition to these events inherited from the 19th century, Paris must also invent its own landmark institutions to reflect the importance and impact of its carbon neutrality: an International Climate Complex (Cité Internationale du Climat), a Museum of the Fossil Fuel-Civilisation (Musée de la Civilisation Fossile) and Local Climate Centres (Maisons du Climat) – local laboratories in which young people can invent solutions and define how to implement them.

We must invent solutions to today’s most complex problems: how to be carbon neutral while being dependent on tourism and therefore on aviation, in the knowledge that air transport is currently the biggest source of emissions? How to carry out the thermal renovation of buildings with respect for the specificities of Paris’s precious architectural heritage? How to implement a carbon neutrality strategy for Paris without merely displacing the emissions to other parts of the Metropolis, France or other countries?

Above all, the mobilisation must take place on a daily basis, supported by the network of climate ambassadors, Parisians who, for the most part, are already actively engaged and young people for whom we must successfully accomplish the transition. We will need parties and celebration meals to mark car-free days and other carbon-free urban gatherings. We will need calls for projects and specifications that mark the departure from our fossil-based past. We will need eco-conditions, taxes and regulations to further develop this new economy and establish a new frame of reference for our daily lives.

We will need arable land, solar farms and wind farms, certainly in central Paris or on infrastructures converted to serve the cause of transition, but especially outside Paris. And to strike an overall balance and attain neutrality, we will need to plant forests to capture and store the residual carbon that we have been unable to reduce or offset by renewable energy production.

This programme is unlikely to unfold smoothly and without opposition; it would be naive to expect it to attract spontaneous and universal support. Attention must be paid to any objections, outbursts of anger or rage. Answers will need to be found and solutions will need to be improved, but we will need to demonstrate, explain and convince people that the neutrality goals involve us all, and that we must be united by a new political framework and a new civic pact – now and in the long term – to ensure that the trajectory being defined in 2017 can be maintained until 2050, whatever the future might bring.

The municipal majorities for the next five terms of office will doubtless be of differing persuasions. It will be our responsibility, as citizens, to make sure that they all continue these efforts and campaign to provide the best solutions for the targets that must be attained during each term of office.

The foundations of this project must be cultural, and must capture the Parisians’ imagination. Dallas, the oil capital, had its own television series that epitomised the carbon era. Can Paris, as the carbon-neutral capital, launch its own series with similar success? How can Parisian artists form a new “Paris movement” representing their creations and productions while capturing the zeitgeist? Which popular figures will allow Parisians to take ownership of these messages and identify with these struggles and this quest for carbon neutrality?

Paris is basing its hopes for success on its population, its culture, its heritage, its history and its enterprises, but Paris is not alone. Paris is not a parochial village cut off from the rest of the world. **Paris has key allies to help with this transition**: as the host city of COP21 and as president of the C40 global network of cities, Paris can mobilise a very large number of cities in pursuit of these goals and this ambition.

Together, these cities can pool their purchases and orders, they can share their methods and studies and synchronise their decisions – especially the hardest ones to implement. This means that Paris might not be alone in deciding to ban diesel in 2020, it could be joined by the mayors of cities with a combined population of hundreds of millions of inhabitants, thus sending out a decisive signal to manufacturers: tomorrow’s markets are being defined today and they call for cooperation between economic stakeholders, cities and citizens.

The carbon neutrality of Paris is a message of hope because it provides answers to anxiety-inducing questions, it takes up challenges with confidence and determination and it prepares for the future.

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