

A broader vision

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Last June, when president Emmanuel Macron commissioned architect Roland Castro to draw up a report on “guidelines for developing the Greater Paris metropolis”, we must admit that we were among those who judged too hastily this choice. Was the instigator of the radical Banlieues 89 movement to revolutionise the city outskirts really the right person to think about the future developments of the metropolis other than as a black-and-white, centre vs. outskirts dialectic? But reading the report, one is forced to admit that although Castro hasn’t lost its idealistic, sometimes candid, touch (“Simply ask political candidates about their architectural selections, the way they think about the city, before they are elected”), he nonetheless brings to the surface interesting orientations for the development of the metropolis. They include the creation of the profession of “urban screenwriter” or the necessary union of state and private efforts in order to create “the direct opposite of a public-private partnership (PPP)” for the vast housing ensembles that represent important real-estate assets. Castro also reminds us of a few solid basics, the geographic anchorage of his reflection, such as the importance of a water system. “The specific character of each global city stems partly from its geography, the characteristics of its site and its capacity to have improved, embellished and exposed it. The more successful ones have worked out how to benefit from their geography, integrating it as an asset and a memorable element. No global city is without a river or a coastal bay.” The partners of landscape design practice Ter, winners of the French Grand Prix de l’Urbanisme 2018, whose portrait we are presenting in the following pages, are very much among those who understand how to consider a city in light of its geographic substrate. In coming back to geography, we come back to water, to the coastline and the harbours, which are the vital elements of our cities. These harbours and their redevelopment are not only the preserve of rich metropolis: the conversion of old port areas can carry in its wake the redevelopment of entire cities. Such is the subject that we have chosen to explore in the following pages. From the Greater Paris to “Paris on a greater scale”, in the words of Castro: rather than the detached vision of politicians who only visit Potemkin villages, staged for the duration of their visit, the French architect and urban planner may present this territory in the manner of a poet, but without forgetting its reality. A vision on a greater scale by starting at the beginning.