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Helene Mainet, Jean-Charles Edouard

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Quality of Life and Attractiveness Issues in SMSTs. Innovative or Commonplace Policies?

Helene Mainet and Jean-Charles Edouard
Clermont University, Blaise Pascal University, EA 997 CERAMAC, BP 10448,
F-63000 Clermont-Ferrand, France

Introduction

This chapter aims at developing critical perspectives on the role of quality of life in attractiveness discourses and policies of small and medium-sized towns (SMSTs). In changing contexts linked with the economic restructuring process, accurate effects of metropolization, but also a growing residential mobility of population linked with social demand for better amenities and quality of life, SMSTs' local actors face challenges in the implementation of development policies. They are now confronted with different and sometimes ambivalent options: to develop productive and/or residential economies; to retain and attract businesses and/or people; to compete or cooperate with policy-makers in neighbouring towns; to reproduce successful models and/or try to promote innovative actions.

In a context of de-industrialization and global economic challenges, the attractiveness of places is indeed more topical than ever. In the nowadays competitive context between places and cities, SMSTs are sometimes said 'to be doomed to decline because of a lack of critical mass and density in terms of economic and institutional resources' (Selada *et al.*, 2012). However, the development of residential economy and creative class models illustrate the fact that other models of development are possible, based on an understanding of factors that enhance people attraction. As quoted by Bailly and Bourdeau-Lepage, (2010) 'the *homo oeconomicus* is now substituted by the *homo qualitus*, trying to maximize his personal and family well-being'¹. The issue of quality of life deals with different aspects such as urban environment, social amenities, commercial and service equipments and infrastructures from an objective point of view, but also the demand of inhabitants, especially newcomers, for standard and 'urban' equipments, and official discourses and marketing. At the same time, several measures and approaches are emerging in order to help the construction and promotion of local sustainable development programmes, such as Local Agenda 21, 'Healthy Cities' or *Cittaslow* (amongst others). Then, the issue of mobility becomes important, associated with extended commuting distances, which can become a constraint or an opportunity for small towns, depending on how removed they are from bigger urban centres.

In this general context of political and social demand for a better quality of life, linked with the increasing impacts of sustainable development criteria, SMSTs stakeholders seem to have the opportunity to take part in the competition for people, by promoting amenities such as good images, 'natural' environment, affordable property prices, social solidarities, inter-acquaintance, etc. The 'reason for this stems partly from progressive disillusionment with materialistic goals' (Mc Call, 1980) and from the search for a quality of life, better than the countryside or the metropolis can offer, made up by tangible but also intangible assets.

The stakes for SMSTs policy-makers are also closely correlated with new forms of governance and collaboration. It is therefore interesting, to understand the capacity to implement local actions, to take into account the impacts of policies and trends like decentralization, privatization and liberalization, but also the reform of public services (and then the role dedicated to the first levels of the urban hierarchy in their polarizing influence).

¹ Original quotation: 'À l'*homo oeconomicus* semble se substituer l'*homo qualitus*, qui cherche à maximiser son bien-vivre et celui de sa famille'.

At the same time, regional cooperation tools are developed such as inter-municipal integration in France.

It then becomes interesting to question the scope of innovative approaches in the implementation of quality-based actions, even those not directly addressing creative people. Are policies based on the promotion of quality of life in an attempt to attract new inhabitants and businesses really innovative or merely fashionable and reproductive?

There are four main parts to this chapter. After the introduction, the second part reviews literature dealing with the place of quality of life in attractiveness policies. We then present and discuss research data derived from a large set of case studies analyzed in recent works (French PHC Campus France Polonium project, AttracVil project). Some conclusions are finally presented so as to contribute to further reflections.

The Place of Quality of Life in Attractiveness Policies: Theoretical Framework

Productive activities have for long been the focus of urban attractiveness (attraction of economic actors to create employment). The concept is now widely open to residential aspects ('recruitment' of tourists and new inhabitants) and linked to issues of mobility and a higher social demand for quality of life.

The notion of 'place attractiveness', leading local development strategies, is now widely used by policy-makers and researchers, even more so than the traditional notions of location in the urban hierarchy, to define and measure the influence of places. Both terms are different but, however, closely linked when articulated as attraction and influence. Towns have always shown their capacity to attract all kind of resources (very often at the expense of other towns or rural areas). The recent interest in 'attractiveness' can be explained by the fact that mobility and flows of resources, capital and people, are accelerating. In a context of territorial competition, the capacity of attraction is highly strategic (Mainet and Edouard, 2014a).

The criteria for assessing attractiveness are therefore more and more complex and combined. The attractiveness of a territory is, in traditional terms, its capacity to durably attract different forms of resources (human, economic and financial). This notion is nonetheless not that simple. Attractiveness must be analyzed, firstly through an objective focus determining the attraction of a place (in a way similar to gravitational attraction). This capacity allows for the arrival of resources on the territory (Hatem, 2004). Attractiveness is therefore the driver of movements and changes, as well as a factor of settlement. It can be measured by the balance of in-and-out movements of people, capital, jobs, etc. But a more subjective aspect also exists: the appeal or desirability. Drivers of attraction are psycho-sociological and based on individual and collective decisions depending on representations, tastes and interests of various 'actors' (inhabitants, tourists, local stakeholders). Towns and places can be attractive because of obvious and real resources and opportunities, but also because of images, atmospheres and some seductive capacity. Two drivers are and have always been important. The first one is centripetal. Historically, it explains the agglomeration of people and activities in towns. It is nowadays a powerful driver for metropolization processes to the benefit of large cities (with economy of scale and positive externalities). The second one is centrifugal. It explains the sprawl of people and activities from urban centres to suburbs and peripheral areas (or even to rural communes). The process is based on short-distance mobility, but long-distance also, explaining movements from large cities to other places (regional centres, small and medium-sized towns, villages).

The consequences are not only demographical. Mobility entails powerful mechanisms of redistribution of wealth between regions and towns. Places of settlement can benefit from consumption but also equipment-spending for populations or tourists. Territory competition is not only based on productive economy (production of goods) but also on residential economy

(production of services for inhabitants), as analyzed by economists (Davezies, 2008). This explains new demands for quality of life, correlated with sustainable development preferences (Rogerson, 1999) and the attraction of highly-qualified migrants and of the ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002).

As pointed by Niedomysl (2010), ‘the attractiveness of places is currently gaining a high policy salience in policymakers’ efforts to draw mobile capital’. In fact, many studies, either empirical or theoretical, have been conducted in order to estimate or evaluate place attractiveness. There is a frequent confusion between attractiveness and competitiveness as many studies are conducted based on economical perspectives. The focus is often on production factors and spatial planning in order to attract firms, investors or a qualified workforce, but analysing attractiveness is not a simple analysis of installation costs incurred by firms between places (Krugman, 1991). The development of studies on ‘creative cities’ has shown the importance of space amenities and infrastructures in attracting well-educated active people, the so-called ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002). Urban performance depends not only on the city’s endowment of hard infrastructure (‘physical capital’), but also on the availability and quality of knowledge, communication and social infrastructure (‘human and social capital’).

In this changing context, with more commuting and quality-demanding households, criteria of quality of life, well-being and well-living, are more often used by stakeholders as factors of attractiveness (Indlay and Rogerson, 1993). It is important to differentiate these notions. Well-being and well-living are linked with individual and personal aspects of life through elements of living conditions and standards (material and objective criteria) combined with value systems that match the needs, demands and priorities of individuals and families (Mc Call, 1975 and 1980; Veenhoven, 2000; Tobelem-Zanin, 1995). The notion of quality of life is directly linked with material and objective patterns of space environment, even if it integrates a subjective dimension due to inhabitants’ representations (Fleuret, 2006; Rogerson, 1999). ‘Indeed, if the quality of life is geographically distributed, it is also socially differentiated²’ (Borsdorf, 1999). Quality of life therefore refers to living conditions depending on space quality and opportunities for the well-being of inhabitants (such as public spaces, access to services, etc.). Public actors give increasing importance to the qualitative dimension of spaces. Space is not only considered from the angle of functional opportunities, but as a potential for well-being and well-living. It is questioned about its capacity to meet the needs and demands of inhabitants for high-quality surroundings (functionality, social links, emotional links, etc.) suitable for a personal and family (well-being) as well as collective blossoming (togetherness).

Many indicators have been developed in order to classify and rank cities according to such new and more combined criteria, but also to evaluate implemented policies (McCann, 2004; Niedomysl, 2007). The role of sustainable development agendas and the implementation of European Union policies are important in the construction of criteria and indicators (Musson, 2010). Notions or labels are created to qualify those new dimensions of attractiveness, such as ‘Smart cities’, ‘Green cities’, ‘Quality cities’, ‘Healthy Cities’ or ‘Slow cities’, depending on either social, environmental or technical aspects. They can be applied to large cities but also, for some of them, to small towns that tend to take part in the competition between spaces and towns.

From a strictly competitive view point, most of them seem to be disadvantaged, disqualified even, in comparison with bigger cities which have more services and offer more opportunities. But in fact, small and medium-sized towns can take part in the competition; they may have the potential to attract activities (often through specialization processes),

² Original quotation: ‘En effet, si la qualité de vie est géographiquement distribuée, elle est aussi socialement différenciée’.

inhabitants and tourists. The context of higher social demand for quality of life is even good for some of them as they can be promoted as less expensive, less polluted and crowded spaces than metropolises, as places close to nice surroundings and offering a countryside feeling in urban spaces (Bell and Jayne, 2009; Knox and Mayer, 2009, Edouard, 2012).

As pointed by Jayne et al. (2010), the issue of liveability is regarded as important in studies of small cities in the USA, Canada and Australia, particularly ‘in terms of competitive advantage based on ‘quality of life’ indicators that are attractive not only to footloose businesses and tourists but also to ‘downsizing’ urbanites (including the creative class) trading city incomes for a quieter life, better work/ life balance, cheaper rents and inspiring hinterlands’. Many studies have addressed economic growth in small cities, the social implications of the in-migration of ‘creative labour’; the importance of community and sense of place, as well as showing how urban regeneration is conceived and pursued in small cities (Bishop and Han, 2013; Waitt and Gibson, 2006; Selada et al., 2012). Indeed, quality of life opens up opportunities for small cities to follow the Floridian script and to pursue economic growth through cultural-economic activity (Jayne et al., 2010). If Florida sets the optimal size/scale for his 3Ts theory (technology, talent, tolerance) for larger metropolitan areas, his idea that people tend to select places first and then look for job opportunities is intellectually invigorating for small settings.

Even for SMSTs not implementing official policies dedicated to the attraction of cultural economy or high-skilled workers, the liveability issue is now important in terms of their economic development (Van Heur, 2011). Attracting new inhabitants, especially if they are young, middle-class or high-class working households with children, is now a major objective for many local stakeholders. SMSTs are often described as ‘places of well-being’ and ‘human-sized’ towns (Kwiatek-Soltys and Mainet, 2014; Mainet 2011). But beyond good images, the question is to identify whether smallness is conducive to developing experiments for local sustainable and creative policies, or if local actors only reproduce models successfully created and assessed in larger cities.

SMSTs, Places Where the Living Is Easy? Research Data and Discussion

Methods

The research material is largely based on data collected within several research programmes³ dedicated to attractiveness and quality of life in small towns. This chapter presents the results from the French case studies in the Auvergne region (sample zone for the Polonium project). Specific fieldwork was conducted in SMSTs involved in dedicated policies such as Local Agenda 21 and *Cittaslow* membership (outside Auvergne). In the different programmes, the focus was on small towns defined, according to the French classification, as urban units with over 2,000 inhabitants and fewer than 20,000. Sampling was made in order to get a variety of situations depending on demographic size, distance from bigger towns and socio-economic trends (declining and booming towns).

A first method consists of the analysis of official websites of small-town municipalities. Internet sites are undoubtedly among the most important media for place promotion nowadays. The description of towns, pictures used, kind of information, targets groups (investors, tourists and inhabitants) reveal the character and activity of the place and the policy-makers’ orientations. Introductory Internet pages were systematically analyzed for over 80 French small-sized towns.

³ The AttracVil programme was financed by Clermont-Ferrand MSH –USR 3550 in 2011-2012 and dedicated to the issue of SMSTs attractiveness (definition, indicators); the Campus France PHC Polonium was conducted in collaboration with the Pedagogical University of Krakow (Poland) and dealt with issues of quality of life in SMSTs in France and Poland.

To highlight inhabitants' perceptions of quality of life and place amenities, a survey was conducted in twelve small towns in the Auvergne region. A questionnaire was handed out to pupils and completed by parents (data were collected online and with the teachers' help). This method was chosen in order to address recent inhabitants, but with the bias of a relatively low proportion of senior inhabitants (only 1.5% of respondents). A total of 328 questionnaires were returned, which was considered significant enough for an analysis of individuals' perceptions and representations.

Finally, meetings with local policy-makers were organized. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews in the same towns where the questionnaires were delivered, but also in towns previously identified based on the commitments of local actors to sustainable development and quality-based programmes.

Promotion of SMSTs amenities

Environmental, social and heritage aspects are very much used in city branding (table 13.1). The study of websites shows that the living environment (described as 'natural' and 'preserved') and quality of life references are more often quoted than economic aspects (Mainet, 2011). Local amenities are notably promoted.

Words and notions used		Number	%
Total sample		83	100
Of which	Location ('gate of', 'gateway', 'at the heart of')	38	45.8
Of which :	Living environment ('natural' and 'preserved')	20	24.1
	Quality of life	17	20.5
	History, heritage	15	18.1
	Dynamism of local economy	11	13.3

Table 13.1 – Examples of images and words used to describe small towns amenities

Sources: analysis of selected French small towns' websites (2010).

The descriptions are highlighting a relaxed lifestyle, but also a bustling city centre. Short distances to surrounding natural and rural amenity allow people to enjoy the best of both urban and rural living. As noticed by Selada et al. (2010), the promotion is often two-fold: endogenous amenities and territorial embeddedness. The territorial position and place accessibility are referred to in almost one-half of the Internet sites. In a context of globalization and metropolization, such amenities must be taken into account for territories to be attractive as good location; but accessibility, proximity and connectivity to active nearby places are also important for attracting businesses and inhabitants. Local amenities are made of three main dimensions: the natural and built environment, which encompasses the architecture of the place (with photos of monuments of interest or typical architecture), the climate, public spaces and other tangible and natural assets (pictures of surrounding places with river, forest, mountains); social and cultural capital, linked with the community and its

social interactions (*genius loci*, intangible heritage, identity, with pictures of festivals, fiestas, markets); economic activities associated with the business climate. It is noteworthy that the dynamism of local economy receives a low score (13.3%) compared to sheer space identity qualities ('gateway', 'heart of'), with a score of 45.8%. The image is definitely 'residential' rather than 'production-orientated'.

Inhabitants' views on liveability in SMSTs

Good images and the importance of environmental aspects are also noticeable in inhabitants' representations and perceptions (table 13.2). The survey conducted in small towns of the Auvergne region shows their evaluation of quality of life as 'good' and 'excellent', largely linked with the characteristics of the place and outdoor amenities, like the living environment assets. Social aspects are also important and outdistance economic features such as the existence of job opportunities or work proximity.

A- Evaluation of quality of life	Percentage
Excellent	49.0
Good	43.2
Rather good	4.2
Bad	1.2
B- Components of quality of life	Quotations rank
Place amenities (quietness, living environment...)	1
Personal aspects (family life, well-being...)	2
Social aspects (neighbourhood, sense of security...)	3
Job / work proximity	4

Table 13.2 – Perceptions of quality of life by small-town inhabitants

Sources: authors' survey, 2012-2013.

The liveability factor should be mentioned in terms of quality of life components. For small-town inhabitants, local amenities are an important part of the quality of life. The place itself, with its quietness, nice surroundings and shops and services, is a key factor of residential choice (table 13.2). It must indeed be linked with residential mobility and the fact that the place quite often results from choice. Niedomysl (2010) shows how a life-course perspective needs to be integrated in quality of life analyses since not only do migrants' needs, demands and preferences depend on their current life-course phase situation, but their resources and constraints are also likely to correlate with the life-course. The time of residence in a town can strongly influence the answers. In this case, the structure of respondents is quite balanced between newcomers and locals (or people living in town for several years). These data illustrate the fact that quality of life and quality of place can be key relocation factors in growing peri-urbanization and counter-urbanization processes (table 13.3).

	Auvergne Region
Time of residence in town (%)	
From birth/over 20 years	33.9
Between 10 to 19 years	38.5
Between 5 to 9 years	17.5
Less than 5 years	10.1
Previous place of dwelling (% of inhabitants with residential mobility)	
Rural area/village	30.5
SMSTs	29.2
Big city	40.3

Reasons for settling in the town (%)	
Work/job proximity	21.6
Nice surroundings	11.0
Proximity of bigger town	10.4
Nice living environment	9.8
Housing rent prices	9.5
Family	7.3
Childhood place	7.3
Quietness	6.7
Housing	6.4
Marriage	3.4
Services, trades, urban infrastructures	0,3
Other (mainly linked with housing and family)	9.4

Table 13.3 – Residential mobility in French small towns

Sources: authors survey, 2012-2013.

Quality-based strategies of public actors: a set of variation

Quality of life based on local amenities is promoted by policy-makers and appreciated by inhabitants, especially newcomers, as a key factor for residential choice. But beyond images and promotion, the analysis of policies implemented by local stakeholders shows that, at first glance, many actions are not original, and often mimetic, when visibility and differentiation are at stake.

Amongst the most-observed policies are the measures dedicated to promoting city centres, with the upgrading of public spaces (namely Main Square or old town), revitalization and heritage promotion programmes, measures against housing vacancies, local trades and services support, etc. Official programmes exist, supported by national agencies (French schemes like OPAH – programmed operation for the improvement of the housing environment or AVAP – Protection of Architectural, Urban, and Landscape Heritage). Other endeavours focus on the control of urban sprawl on the outskirts of town centres. Master plans are important to open (or not) natural and agricultural spaces to urbanization and housing projects. In Issoire (a small attractive town of 15,000 inhabitants, located 35 km from the regional city of Clermont-Ferrand), sprawl control is a strategy in order to protect landscapes, but also to avoid costs linked with the maintenance of excessive infrastructures and urban networks. Tools of action are quite limited: diversification of the housing market with construction or rehabilitation of public flats and houses, upgrading of the old part of the town to increase its attractiveness for young families, etc. Policies dedicated to cultural life have been developing significantly in small towns since the 1990s (Sibertin-Blanc, 2008; Edouard, 2008). Summer festivities (Friday ‘After Boulevard’ in Issoire from June to September, Art exhibitions in Brioude), festivals (‘La Pamparina’ street music festival in Thiers every July or Street Theatre Festival in Aurillac every August), but also cultural seasons (with specific programmes dedicated to young audience or families). The business part of the policies is also important. Besides classic plans like the creation of commercial or industrial zones, other schemes are developed such as ‘Place aux Jeunes’ in Brioude, which aims at attracting young entrepreneurs (the town supports their settlement) or funding for store-fronts upgrading (in Brioude, with the support of the community of communes and regional agencies).

Other small towns demonstrate more ambitious and holistic policies. Examples can be taken in small towns that implemented Local Agenda 21 or set a *Cittaslow* process. *Cittaslow*, the ‘International network of cities where the living is easy’⁴ is a quite interesting approach,

⁴ ‘Cittaslow–Rete Internazionale delle città del buon vivere’.

dedicated to villages and towns of fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. The initiative was launched in Italy in 1999 and spread worldwide. In June 2015, the association consists of 199 members, mostly in Europe. As stated by the official philosophy of the movement: ‘good living means having the opportunity to enjoy solutions and services that allow citizens to live in their town in an easy and pleasant way’ (<http://www.cittaslow.org/>). Quality of life is central to the *Cittaslow* philosophy, in its various dimensions of tangible and intangible components (natural and built environment, social and community aspects, cultural events, etc.). It has been studied in different national contexts (Mayer and Knox, 2006 and 2009; Grzelak-Kostulska et al., 2011; Mainet and Edouard, 2014b). According to the survey conducted in French *Cittaslow*, the objectives are to base local policies on local amenities and to use the *Cittaslow* charter as a guideline as well as an element of international visibility. The mayor of Segonzac (the first French *Cittaslow* in 2010) says it clearly: ‘small towns are disadvantaged as they face the traps of anarchic development. What is interesting in *Cittaslow* is more the approach than the label. We have to take strategic decisions and *Cittaslow* helps us to have guiding principles and objectives’⁵.

Strategies of differentiation are also important (*Cittaslow* is slowly developing in France with only nine members and the curiosity for the name is still important). This is particularly the case for small towns integrated in the influence zone of larger cities. Local actors tend to promote quality of life assets and amenities with the objective of notoriety (such is the case for Segonzac in the vicinity of Cognac, of Créon in Bordeaux metropolitan area or Grigny in Greater Lyon).

The charter insists on endogenous assets to promote strong-willed policies. As stated in Labastide d’Armagnac, “at a time when decisions are taken at national, European or international levels, it is important to root action at the local level”⁶ (Labastide d’Armagnac leaflet exposing the reasons for membership). Even if the measures themselves are not necessarily ambitious and remarkable, the objective is to emphasize the visibility and the differentiation of the place, its uniqueness and competitive assets, in the same way “Creative cities” develop quality-based actions. Even if creative people are not the main target, the tools used are quite similar. ‘While the towns in *Cittaslow* are pursuing a variety of different goals, what unites them, what they have in common, is a desire to protect the unique and distinctive aspects of their communities’ (Beatley, quoted by Mayer and Knox, 2006).

Discussion

The main findings show that plenty of SMSTs tend to formulate quite ambitious policies addressing place images and promotions, but not many develop as really original or holistic actions. Amongst these, however, interesting examples have been analyzed, in different spatial contexts, showing the importance of local actors’ competence and commitment.

The reasons for implementing (or not) place promotion policies are very interesting to analyze from small-town actors’ view points. Small cities are at a distinct disadvantage when trying to enact sustainability policies due to capacity (staff time and skills, local revenue). They often have limited local government service delivery and planning capacity. In many small places, the limiting factor in terms of any policymaking is capacity. Professional management (both in the form of a city/town manager and the specific dedication of staff time) increased the adoption of policies.

⁵ Original quotation: ‘Les petites communes sont les moins armées face aux pièges d’un développement anarchique. Ce qui nous intéresse, c’est moins le label que la démarche. Nous avons des choix importants à faire. *Cittaslow* va donner un fil conducteur à notre politique d’aménagement’ (Segonzac Mayor, *Le Monde* 03/10/10).

⁶ Original quotation: ‘A l’heure où les décisions se prennent souvent au niveau national ou encore européen et international, il est important d’ancrer l’action au niveau local’.

Furthermore, small towns depend more on citizen or political leadership. Local leadership is a decisive factor in promoting change and new strategic visions (Selada et al., 2010). If proactive, local leaders can be promoters or facilitators of creative ecosystems. The role of local leaders is very important in the decision to apply for programme participation or labelling to such programmes. The role of citizens can also be important in small towns. For example, in the first French *Cittaslovs*, the idea originated from citizens (a resident of Italian origin in Labastide d'Armagnac; people from local tourist information centres in Segonzac and Créon) before being promoted by municipal councils. Local governments that created an official citizen commission to oversee sustainability actions seem to adopt more ambitious policies. The example of Issoire is typical, with a 'Group 21' dealing with inhabitants and actors dialogues and organising field workshops aiming at *in situ* observations of local issues. Such examples remain uncommon, as most local actors tend to inform and involve citizens once the decisions and processes have started and only to the extent that it is important to create conditions for the acceptance and legitimization of the transformation process.

According to policy-makers having started programmes, the main reasons are associated with the promotion and acknowledgment of measures already settled or implemented, often separately. The formalization of a programme (Local Agenda 21, *Cittaslow*, etc.) is a way to give coherence to a holistic policy. Another key reason is linked to the advantage of being part of an outreaching network and sharing experiences and good practices. Small towns need structures to provide technical and management assistance and support (at regional or national levels). For example, in Auvergne, an eco-development network of small and medium-sized towns was created in 2013, with the support of the State for funding and engineering. This network aims at gathering 19 towns of the Massif Central area on planning and development topics and issues (in November 2013, the first meeting was dedicated to the development of downtown areas). Another example is the collaborative organization, 'Platform 21 for sustainable development', created as 'an animation, exchange and mutualisation tool on sustainable development (...) accompanying public and private actors'⁷ (<http://www.plat-forme21.fr/>). Such networks help sharing good practices, but also taking into account negative externalities of attracting people (especially for very attractive small towns), which can be very costly (charges, works) as budgets are often limited and incoming inhabitants can affect housing rent prices, let alone the cohabitation between new and longer-established inhabitants. In that context, medium-sized towns might be expected to benefit more than small towns. As pointed by Bishop and Han (2013), they contain a critical mass of population to attract businesses and services, yet are still small enough to enable strong partnerships and a personable and collaborative business network.

Finally, the studies show the need to take scales into account. SMSTs are constituted across multiple geographical scales. Possibilities always exist for residents, businesses and municipal authorities to engage in multi-scalar strategies through networks that rewrite how the 'local' is constituted and 'rescale' smallness. For example, the availability of jobs rather than amenities appears to have attracted creative people in some circumstances. Bishop and Han (2013) and Niedomysl and Hansen (2010) highlight the debate within various literature on whether investments in amenities bring jobs, or investment in jobs bring talent. Other factors being of equal importance (jobs and affordable housing), they suggested that highly-skilled people may have a preference for a place richer in amenities. The same process is noticeable in France and the issue of geographical scales is important. Our survey shows that job opportunities are important for residential mobility (table 13.3), but also that households plebiscite local amenities as main elements of good quality of life (table 13.2). People tend to draw a quite large area of potential residence, closely linked with job accessibility and

⁷ Original quotation: 'outil d'animation, d'échange et de mutualisation des informations et pratiques sur le développement durable (...) au service des acteurs professionnels et institutionnels du Massif central'.

housing affordability, and then choose the residential place by taking into account local amenities. It is particularly important for small towns in the vicinity of larger cities (with job opportunities), which can be attractive thanks to their natural, built and social characteristics and images.

The issue of scales is also important for policy-makers as they need to cooperate with other institutional actors. In the French context of implementation of inter-municipal grouping, local stakeholders can no longer think and work at the very local scale only, but must develop inter-territoriality actions, taking into account what is done and planned in the surrounding, often associated, municipalities.

Conclusion: Quality of Life and Innovation for SMSTs

The main objective of this chapter was not to analyze policies dedicated to the attraction or retention of creative people or creative businesses, art and culture in SMSTs, but to study actions based on amenities to attract people, often young workers and households with young children, ideally entrepreneurs, in a context of quality of life promotion, with local development objectives. The findings show that the attraction of people and businesses, whether creative or not, is a complex process.

Models of development should be based on the promotion of the place uniqueness and not on reproducibility. As analyzed by Jayne et al. (2010), a great deal is at stake when small cities seek to replicate creative city strategies of larger places. It is difficult for SMSTs to compete with large metropolises in terms of agglomeration economies, but it is possible, even crucial, to develop strategies based on specific assets. In recent years, many policy-makers have followed ‘metropolitan imaginaries’ (Selada et al., 2010) with often disappointing results, as the preconditions and resources of small towns differ considerably from those of larger ones.

Affordability (housing) and liveability stand out as the primary drivers of attraction for SMSTs, supported by specific qualities of community and place, including non-economic dimensions of everyday-life. Policies should be context-sensitive as investment in infrastructure and amenity needs to be contextual and well-adapted to local circumstances. There are suggestions that local and national governments need to pay closer attention to the local context rather than adopt a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach (Bishop and Han, 2013). There is also an opportunity for more qualitative studies to examine the ‘people climate’ that is deemed attractive by (creative) people at different life stages.

Finally, and this is not the mere paradox, if quality of life is an important, if not the main, added-value of SMSTs, considering that their strictly economic competitiveness can be comparatively limited, what is the limit point where growth (being spatial and functional) negatively affects quality of life? To follow Tesson (2010), the question for SMSTs is that being really innovative probably means to build on quality of life, on limited growth and controlled attractiveness. SMSTs could then become models of Quality cities and towns and references for larger cities looking for solutions to improve their conditions for quality of life, and some already do so.

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