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GROUPING AND/OR GROUNDING: A CLOSER LOOK AT CULTURAL QUARTERS AND CREATIVE CLUSTER MANAGEMENT IN NANTES (France)

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Abstract:

This article deals with the genesis of a cultural and creative cluster (CCC) as a collective system of small, and even very small, companies. Drawing on a longitudinal case study of the trajectory of a CCC, we propose a reflection on the management mechanisms in CCCs based on an analysis of management tools and the way in which they operate to encourage Grounding and/or Grouping dynamics.

Our six-year study of the French *Quartier de la Création* in Nantes confirms the prevailing view of a CCC as a dynamic organization. It shows distinct stages, each with its own specific difficulties regarding governance issues and managerial practices. It reveals challenges in shaping the role of the support organization and in identifying the competencies to be developed. The governance mechanisms and the cluster practices of some localized groupings of very small, creative enterprises require a balance in Grouping/Grounding approaches, which have to hybridize to impact cluster dynamics.

Keywords:

cultural and creative cluster, grounding dynamic, grouping dynamic, cluster governance mechanisms, longitudinal case study, cultural quarter

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GROUPING AND/OR GROUNDING: A CLOSER LOOK AT CULTURAL QUARTERS AND CREATIVE CLUSTERING'S MANAGEMENT IN NANTES (France)

Introduction

Cultural and creative clusters (CCCs), as a new organizational form, need to be empirically investigated. When considering the cultural quarter and creative clusters (Chaston and Sadler-Smith, 2012), some specific and significant differences depend on the labour input of creative entrepreneurs and the wide range of businesses such as advertising, architecture, design, software, music, photography, fashion, visual arts, and the performing arts. Creative workers in CCCs are located in idiosyncratic environments and develop tacit knowledge. Moreover, they create and interact in intermediate groups such as professional associations (O'Connor, 2010). They are engaged with user communities (Parmentier and Mangematin, 2014), to develop new products and services, for instance, and with other professional communities in the underground sphere (Cohendet & al, 2010). **The clustering practices of creative workers and small companies raise the question of which associated support and managerial processes to choose in managing their dynamic and innovative capabilities at the cluster level.**

This article deals with the genesis of a cultural and creative cluster as a collective system of small, and even very small, companies. Drawing on a longitudinal case study of the trajectory of a cultural and creative “cluster” called *Quartier de la Création* (Nantes, France), with a specific focus on three different geographical groupings of companies within this quarter (*la Halle Alstom, le Karting* and *Les Olivettes*), we aim to throw new light on the issues of management in such CCCs.

We propose a reflection on the management mechanisms in CCCs (i.e. the modes and practices for mobilizing and organizing collective action (Dandridge and Johannisson, 1996; Cars et al., 2002)) based on an analysis of management tools. **What dynamic/iterative management mechanisms are adapted to the innovative, productive and sustainable grouping of very small cultural and creative companies** : a vertical, top-down construction approach with distance between actors (cluster building), or a horizontal approach with collective strategy development (policy leveraging) (Ebbekink and Lagendijk, 2013)?

We briefly present our theoretical framework by discussing recent developments on the cluster concept (applied to cultural and creative sectors). Next, we present the methodology and the research strategy employed in our in-depth longitudinal case study of a CCC located in France (*Quartier de la Création*, in Nantes¹). We then analyse the trajectory and the challenges faced by its actors over six years. Special attention is paid to identifying the management mechanisms/tools and their evolution. We discuss this longitudinal case and the implications for cluster management. We conclude with a series of suggestions on how to better distinguish between Grouping and Grounding managerial approaches to clustering.

1. Theoretical background to cluster and innovation management

Phrases such as “ideas are in the air” (Marshall, 1920), “un-traded interdependencies” (Storper, 1995), “sticky places” (Markusen, 1996) and “local learning systems” (Maskell *et al.*, 1998; Lorenzen, 1998) remind us that the innovation dynamics of clusters of cultural and creative companies are either misunderstood or approached from a referential framework more suited to industrial activity in large companies. A number of reasons explain why this subject is so elusive. Firstly, the predominance of top-down regional strategies, based on a Porterian approach, favours the belief that it is possible to control economic/innovation

¹ This article is part of a broader research project developed in Nantes (France), between 2009 and 2014 within the framework of a French regional program *Valeurs et Utilités de la Culture*.

processes through strategic intervention and by initiating and directing the innovation process. Secondly, there is a poor understanding of the entrepreneurial process at work within these small companies and how they function in project mode (Menger, 2002, 2005): i.e. a mode which relies on creating and developing business opportunities using multi-sourced independent resources. Thirdly, and as a consequence of the previous reasons, the design and implementation of management mechanisms do not capitalize (or not enough) on the interactive and collective dimension developed by these small companies, or on the way they organize resources around social and business exchanges based on personal relations, understandings and mutual trust (Johannisson, 2003).

Economists and geographers have underlined the beneficial effects (competitive advantage) of geographical proximity in clusters, which favour a common culture. More recent research has shown that, even in the age of the internet, the economy depends on the transmission of complex non-codifiable messages. These rely on understanding and confidence through face-to-face contact and “handshakes” rather than conversations (Leamer and Storper, 2001). Physical proximity is particularly important not only in the case of emergent innovation processes, where the information is not codified and formalized, but also when actors have divergent temporalities and reference spaces (Gilly and Grossetti, 1993: 455). For their part, Gordon and McCann (2000) identified three contexts for theoretically analyzing industrial clusters: the cluster as a single spatial agglomeration (spatial economics perspective); the cluster as a space for industrial relations between collective entities (regional and industrial economics perspective); and the cluster as a space for social relations and social embeddedness (socio-economics perspective).

Some recent studies have shown that geography is not the only determinant of innovation in clusters (Boschma, 2005; Giuliani, 2007). In this context, researchers aim to understand how

knowledge is developed and enhanced by knowledge workers' mobility and interpersonal relations (Rosenthal and Strange, 2004), and how it sustains dynamic capabilities and innovation (Giuliani, 2005), for instance, through networks or knowledge spillovers (Jaffe et al, 1993; Owen-Smith et al., 2004). All these issues have also led to discussions on the management practices needed to develop intra- and extra-cluster relations.

Despite a slight move towards a knowledge-based view of clusters, the economics-based view still dominates. Policy interventions tend to be mainly inspired by formal economic theories (in line with the Porterian view of a cluster). Policymakers are still being persuaded to use a "cluster toolkit" (Bahlmann, 2014; Bahlmann and Huysman, 2008). The issue of cluster governance takes on a rather different aspect when viewed from the knowledge-based perspective (Crévoisier and Jeannerat, 2009) because of the complex challenges it raises. Bahlmann and Huysman (2008) emphasize that "governing knowledge, both in organizations and clusters, involves, at the very least, understanding the rich social dynamics to which the concept of knowledge is subject" (p. 315).

Therefore, following a recent perspective on human and relational geography, we make the hypothesis that beyond economies of agglomeration, cluster governance has to build a real "global sense of place" and a "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 1991, 2005). It should go over and above the mere vertical practices of Grouping (co-location of actors, geographical clustering) within hierarchical plans. Our hypothesis is that the art of cluster governance lies in collaborative and participative practices (Andres and Chapain, 2013) between co-localized and situated actors. Such Grounding practices count both on "placenessness" (the feeling of being in a place that counts and has meaning) and a "grounded connectedness" as coined by Massey (2005).

2. Methodology

Addressing several open questions, which would seem to privilege an “appreciative theory” approach², it appears that the study of clusters is based on different terms depending on the discipline - industrial and innovation economics, new geographical economics, territorial planning, strategic management - and the perspectives used (Forest and Hamdouch, 2009).

Our research strategy was based on the longitudinal case study (Yin, 1984) of different geographical areas within the same emerging cluster, and of the cluster organization and managerial team involved. The methodological challenge (Forest and Hamdouch, 2009) forced us to develop an interdisciplinary approach to help us find and interlink complementary empirical investigation methods (case studies, monographs, network analyses, mappings, etc.), and mobilize data (primary, secondary, qualitative and quantitative) along with different collection techniques (archives, surveys, interviews, press clippings, databases, etc.). Our empirical field included a large range of very small entrepreneurial firms with different activities (video, design, architecture, comics, fashion, etc.) and concerned three different places (*Halle Alstom*, *Karting* and *Les Olivettes*). We mixed different data collection techniques—interviews, longitudinal observations and questionnaires—to collect a broad range of data (see table 1). This data collection aimed to simultaneously characterize the development process of the cluster and the changes in its management and governance structure (here, in the sense of its facilitating structure). We gathered data from different sources: managerial meetings, strategic plans, semi-structured face-to-face interviews (with managers, entrepreneurs, key employees in small firms located within the different parts of the cluster and key managers in the support organizations). Interview materials were

² An expression put forward by Nelson and Winter (1982) to promote a constructivist approach founded on a permanent exchange between the facts, the hypotheses, theory-making and empirical verification.

transcribed and manually coded for describing, comparing and interpreting governance practices and the place-based work of local creative workers.

Insert Table 1 here

3. The case study: the *Quartier de la Création* - major stages of the clustering process

In order to situate the *Quartier de la Création* (noted as QDC in the text) cluster historically, we looked back at some contextual, exogenous factors, notably the macro-economic, political, social and demographic environment of the area, including the periods with significant dates (table 2). Figure A in appendix 1 traces the genesis of the project and the cluster’s evolution, and Figure B shows the different creative places as planned on the island of Nantes.

Insert Table 2 here

The QDC project presented various interconnected objectives expressed more or less explicitly over the years: rehabilitating a declining industrial space; developing a metacentre, acting as marketing for the territory; attracting new consumers (of culture, tourism and novelties); and developing a new specialization in cultural and creative activities.

Over the whole period, the QDC, which has more than one physical anchor, showed a hybrid process combining emergence with deliberate action, liberty/autonomy with dirigisme, and frameworks with flexibility. The major management mechanisms, as detailed below, are characterized, step by step, in three phases from 2003 to 2014: (1) the project genesis phase (its origin as a district) managed by the city and the urban community, (2) the pivotal period

(from district to the cluster as an institution), (3) the cluster as a program of actions managed by the SAMOA³.

(1)2003–2009- the project genesis phase: its origin as a district

During this period, the proto-cluster took shape following reflection on a project for clustering cultural industries. This reflection was carried out by a working group made up of actors from two departments of Nantes city council (the department of culture, and the mayor's office) along with the head of the SAMOA - the company of the redevelopment of the western Atlantic urban area - and the director of the school of fine arts. These actors stepped up and became involved in various activities to ensure the facilitation and the governance of the project. The involvement of the city authorities in the European ECCE project⁴ reinforced this dynamic and bolstered the project, proving that culture and creative activities could be a source of value for the territory.

One of these major actors, the SAMOA, was created in October 2003 in order to lead and manage all urban operations, actions and programmes for development and renewal in the *Ile de Nantes* (Isle of Nantes) district, and to test and support the development of spaces dedicated to creative workers and businesses. In parallel, the City of Nantes and *Nantes Métropole* (the Nantes urban community) established *Nantes création*, a small team (3 employees) dedicated to supporting and backing creative activities in the territory (table 3).

Insert Table 3 here

³ The SAMOA is a semi-public company. In October 2003, the Nantes urban community's elected representatives entrusted the SAMOA (Société d'Aménagement de la Métropole Ouest Atlantique – the company of the redevelopment of the western Atlantic urban area) – with the overall management of the Ile de Nantes urban Project and its operational implementation. In the context of a public development convention, the SAMOA was granted its role as project manager for a 20 year-period.

⁴ ECCE, european center for creative industries. It is committed to supporting the actors from the creative economy as well as the development of creative locations and spaces, in several European cities (Eindhoven, Aachen, Cardiff, Dublin, Stuttgart, Birmingham, and the agency CIDA in Great Britain).

The project therefore embraces a very broad vision, described succinctly in the 2009 press kit in the following way. “The *Quartier de la Création* aims to develop new forms of activity to fuel the emergence of a new means of growth nourished by the encounter between artists, researchers, students, entrepreneurs This new dynamic will boost the international potential of *Nantes Métropole*.” (Extract from the press kit dated 11 May 2009).

(2) 2009–2012- a pivotal period for the *Quartier de la Création*: “an urban as well as an economic project managed by a reinforced team”

This period was marked by a form of institutionalism of the *Quartier de la Création*, highlighted by the decision of *Nantes Métropole* (the Nantes Urban Community) to hand over the task of organizing and managing the quarter and the clustering process to the SAMOA. A reinforced multidisciplinary team was set up and installed in new premises, and enhanced governance was established with new management tools.

Insert Table 4 here

From 2009, the term cluster began to be employed and replaced the idea of district in official documents and political discourse. In May 2012, the head of the QDC said they had to “invent a new creative public policy ..., which owed a lot to trial and error, ... in a favourable context due to the stability of the local government” (the Mayor was re-elected a number of times); “the city developed a three-pronged approach: social cohesion, attractiveness and culture— with some major cultural events and companies such as the *Royal de Luxe*, *Folle Journée festival*, *Machines*, *Les Allumés festival*. It reappropriated the brown field site with the festival *Les Allumés*, ... constructed a long-term strategy with L. Théry (SAMOA’s director) and A. Chemetoff (urban planner), and ... invented an urbanism project.... We built the city with

local actors and partners, and not from a fixed, immutable plan; and there was a spontaneous emergence of entrepreneurs and projects on the *Ile de Nantes*”.

From 2011, the SAMOA was assigned an urban planning task, a territorial coordination task (between the cities of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire) and a facilitation task in the QDC, which is both a place in itself and a link to other creative zones. That year marked a turning point in the choice of governance and the associated management mechanisms, all the more so as the QDC was awarded a €1.5 M public service contract by *Nantes Métropole*. It was asked to define a strategy, an action plan and draw up an annual report on its activity.

(3) 2012–2014- the cluster as a program of actions managed by the SAMOA in close relation with institutional partners

From 2012, *Nantes Métropole* - the Nantes Urban Community - entrusted the SAMOA with implementing the facilitation of the QDC in close relation with the associated partners (such as the Chamber of Commerce and industry, High schools, Universities, research institutes...). A renewed and enlarged team dedicated to the facilitation of the cluster was created, focusing on: (1) facilitation of the mechanisms established for the project to function properly; and (2) implementation of a shared action program along with assistance in setting up projects and searching for relevant resources (table 5).

Insert Table 5 here

In terms of facilitation, a specific management and governance system was put in place based on “a platform ... dedicated, supple and reactive Its main purpose is to aid the strategic steering of the cluster, in its research, its mission, innovation, and economic development, outreach and also its differentiation at an international level” (*source* : public service contract). The areas involved were: urban planning; higher education and research; facilitation

and economic development; cultural, scientific and technical outreach; promotion; and international action.

The dedicated team worked closely with a committee of partners: a strategic orientation council (table 6). The team had help from the following thematic working groups: (1) leading a community of interest where economy, research, training and outreach converge to construct a shared vision of the issues and challenges faced; (2) encouraging, proposing and following up on R&D projects and collaborative projects; (3) proposing an annual work and action plan to the strategic orientation council.

The governance and management mechanisms were sophisticated : they were established “as a shared facilitating platform, to assist with impetus, coordination and promotion, the management of which was to be shared between all stakeholders in the project. This mechanisms functioned as a contribution model according to several guiding principles: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; a list of initiatives does not make a project; a multitude of projects does not make a strategy; and the implementation of a strategy is only as good as those who carry it out. This governance mechanisms in action aimed to encourage all sorts of collective interaction that favoured a creative ecosystem supporting innovation, the development of activity and employment, and the promotion of resources and talents within the territory”⁵.

Insert Table 6 here

⁵ *Source* : presentation of the mechanisms during a meeting of the Management and Promotion group, June 2012.

From 2010, a new urban planning team wanted to develop links between the *Ile de Nantes* and the rest of the metropolitan area, reinforcing the public transport service, re-landscaping the banks of the Loire, and preparing the ground for the arrival of the Hospital on the south west of the island.

The area including the *Quartier de la Création* was awarded the “French Tech” label by the French government in 2014 and is now a showcase for digital start-ups. The companies targeted are more digital than creative. Concern is moving towards the needs of “digital” companies and their style of set-up, such as fablabs and co-working spaces. The challenge is now to unite these different actors, and to create a link between the targeted audience (artists, entrepreneurs, researchers, etc.) and the different sectors (cultural and creative industries, digital activities, etc.).

3. Analysis and implications for management

The longitudinal study confirmed the prevailing view of a cultural and creative cluster as a dynamic organization. The history of the Nantes *Quartier de la Création* indeed showed distinct stages and a “life-cycle”⁶. Each stage met specific challenges in terms of governance and managerial practices. Regarding the role of the support organization and the competencies to be developed, the analysis revealed some instability and some difficulties that hindered this organization in developing its “ability” to support creativity and innovation. There were stumbling blocks related to the cohabiting and stabilizing of different project dimensions and logics (cultural, urban, economic, social, etc.) in the clustering process. Moreover, the management support organization did not succeed in taking into account and engaging both Grouping and Grounding dynamics (1.). This situation contributed to a composite, complex

⁶ The literature identifies five stages: (1) agglomeration; (2) the cluster emerges; (3) the cluster develops; (4) the cluster matures; (5) a transformation towards the birth of new clusters (SRI, taken up by IKED in the “Whitebook on cluster policies”, 2002).

and unstable management system (2.). This system met difficulties concerning creativity and collective intelligence to support Grounding (3).

3.1. Grouping dynamics insufficiently taken into account in the overall conception of the project

The genesis of the cluster revealed some previous “pockets” (Paris, 2012) of innovation, activity dynamics and the existence of interesting creative initiatives between artists and entrepreneurs (for instance in the *Les Olivettes* quarter (see Figure B in appendix 1)), as well as emergent local practices of cooperation among creative entrepreneurs, already very visible in the *Halle Alstom*. Nevertheless, in 2009, during the official inauguration of the QDC, the political actors no longer talked of the cluster as a project: we could have almost talked of a “summons to cluster” with an “idyllic vision which paints the cluster as the “martingale” of innovation” - to quote Hamdouch and Depret (2009)-. The construction of the project was founded on and strengthened by examples from cities abroad (especially discoveries made through *Nantes Métropole*'s participation in the European programs ECCE and ECCE Innovation). It also felt the influence of some trends: a wind of institutional isomorphism seemed to be blowing through these large European cities (often more important than Nantes), with explicit reference to the dominant Porterian model and an economic approach based on competitiveness clusters.

In terms of the strategic and practical orientations of the QDC cluster, the Porterian model was even more prevalent during the certification of clusters by the French Government (this idea had been envisaged by the SAMOA and its QDC team). A number of features showed a willingness to transfer this model of technological and industrial cluster to the cultural and creative activities and sectors of Nantes. But the latter are all characterized by their intangible production, the small size of the enterprises involved, their project mode working methods and rather limited human and financial resources.

It appeared difficult for the QDC team to act as a “flexible, dedicated and creative platform” in so far as the notion of cluster presents an entity which, organizationally, is intricately cross-linked and structured around actors and groups of actors whose institutional profiles are very different, polymorph, dynamic and multi-level (Hamdouch and Depret, 2009). This operational reality of local dynamics does not seem to have been sufficiently taken into account and exploited when the management system was designed.

3.2. A composite management system

Cluster governance poses complex questions that we have tried to analyze through the lens of concrete management structures and mechanisms. Beyond the usual typological proposals (distinguishing between associative governance and territorial governance, etc.), a detailed investigation through management mechanisms allowed us to propose a finer analysis of the observed processes in the evolution of cluster governance, permitting us to distinguish Grouping vs Grounding approaches.

Based on the proposals of Hatchuel and Weil (1992) and Moisdon (1997), the management system was analyzed from three angles: the types of actor, the management philosophy and the formal substrate. We analyzed the way the management tools were constituted and the way in which they operated in the cluster to encourage an innovation dynamic. The formal substrate refers to the tools implemented (meetings, working groups, etc.) and the rules/regulations framing collective action with the aim of encouraging the Grouping or Grounding of actors. The management philosophy comprises the intentions of the different actors during the launch and construction of the tools. It looks to encompass the value systems and the categories of argument put forward in line with the strategy and performance of the cluster and the expected recognition (table 7).

Insert Table 7 here

Types of actor

The different periods see a variety of actors who partake and succeed one another, influencing both the conception and the implementation of the management system. The first period was more influenced by actors adhering to the creative economy project and involved in implementing tools intended for the creative actors. A trace of the influence from actors encountered under the ECCE program framework could also be found. These actors come from the political and institutional spheres (city/metropolitan area). Their approach is based on Grounding, as evidenced by the dynamic seen in the *Les Olivettes* quarter and *Halles Alstom*. The cluster's initial development period was managed in a spontaneous manner by some creatives, the public authority and the political actors (particularly the mayor and his counsellors).

The second period was more specifically coordinated by the public authority, which institutionalized this endogenous dynamic through political mechanisms/instruments and dedicated financing (to support the cluster project and the arrival of the creative and art schools and research centres).

During the first period, the creative and cultural organizations situated in diverse geographical spaces were, for diverse reasons, led to build commercial and non-commercial relationships. They created interdependencies while still preserving their autonomy. We make a distinction between the development at *Halles Alstom* and *Les Olivettes*: the former was both supported by the SAMOA ; the latter was more independent of the public actors' actions. However, we can identify a number of common traits: a communitarian mode of functioning and socio-political regulatory practices based on confidence, convention and clan logic (Assens, 2003: 55).

The formal substrate/the tools

In the first period, in *Halles Alstom* and *Les Olivettes*, the governance was associated with mechanisms and informal social systems which go back to a hybrid form that is both commercial and non-commercial. This governance belongs to a **Grounding approach**. The intervention of *Nantes Création* was ad hoc, offering a framework rather than preformed structured strategy. *Nantes Création* did not want to impose a centralized coordination or a steering strategy. It looked to bring people together, to facilitate and draw out new ideas and proposals to share and implement them with a wider circle of actors. In this first period, as Ehlinger *et al.* (2007: 158) point out, the dynamic relies on “a collective order that emerges progressively from individual, non-programmed interactions without one of the members necessarily occupying a more advantageous position than the others”. The coordination rests on the principle of auto-organization or the mutual adjustment described by Mintzberg (Assens, 2003: 56).

In the second period, which marked the advent of the cluster, a multidisciplinary team was involved in various fields. The model of a Porterian cluster was implicitly drawn on in the choice of QDC structuration, governance and actions, as evidenced by its aims and the different actors involved (the university and other higher education institutes). The other scientific and technical mediation objectives, the spilled-over approach with higher education could be interpreted as a concerted effort to implant gathered resources and core competencies (Grouping).

The emergence of charismatic entrepreneurs was noticeable in two spaces/groupings (*Halles Alstom* and *Les Olivettes*). They were sources of proposals and common initiatives (such as a creative days, cultural events in close relation with citizens). They worked for the collective

by developing relationships between creative entrepreneurs which promoted the skills and knowledge developed. These dynamic specificities seen in the *Halles Alstom* were amplified in *Les Olivettes*, notably with the influence of the digital canteen and its manager, and of a cooperative entrepreneur who motivated and co-facilitated a network of very small companies with co-hosting, ad-hoc proposals and meeting moments which developed inter-individual confidence. Moreover, the needs expressed by these small creative organizations for better managing their competencies and developing their relations with new enterprises were partially taken into account by these two entrepreneurs.

During the third period, a structured governance was implemented to bring together actors from the political, institutional and socio-economic spheres. This period saw the SAMOA come to the fore as the major actor, with its team assigned to the QDC. The QDC favoured a Grouping dynamic, particularly as the SAMOA had numerous brown field sites to develop inside and outside the Isle of Nantes. The SAMOA was also looking for an economic model and reproducible accommodation for the creative and cultural enterprises.

This third period is characterized by a very formalistic evolution in management tools, the construction of codified times and channels for exchange (meetings, thematic groups, official events, speed-dating, etc.). This pro-active approach was highly influenced by the governance methods in competitive and technological clusters (with the creation of councils, strategic orientation committees, etc.) with the objective of developing, assessing and financing new projects. This way of functioning imposed too many constraints on these small creative and cultural enterprises due to their lack of human and financial resources and their lack of time. The management mechanisms devised did not take these contingency factors sufficiently into account. Thus, the extent of local embeddedness of the actors and the histories of the entrepreneurs and their companies along with their small size, the amount of time they had been there and their lack of both human and financial resources provided a number of

interesting dimensions that could have invited the introduction of distinct management mechanisms.

Here are some illustrations to support our arguments:

Concerning the Grounding approach

- The implementation of thematic groups by the QDC proved to be ill-adapted and took up too much time with unproductive meetings. The support structure failed or was unable to take into account the characteristics of these small creative and cultural enterprises and their way of working in project mode. This reality posed specific problems when the entrepreneurs were asked to participate in the working groups proposed by the cluster, or when the QDC invited them to take over facilitation in a rental space or the organization of an event. The level of demand and pressure were inappropriate when working in project mode was underestimated by the cluster's management support team. Moreover, these small and often young companies expected more backing and operational aid along with help in accessing new markets, competencies and resources. Little by little, the entrepreneurs from the cultural and creative industries felt out of place (progressive mistrust, refusal to take part in get-togethers, in meetings and events, etc.).

Concerning the Grouping approach

- The fact that the companies were gathered in an iconic building (*Karting*) gave the actors the impression that they were being used to legitimize the existence of the cluster and help the image of the QDC, as an urban creative and cultural cluster. The development of a property offer designed for creative enterprises and artists (to group them in dedicated spaces such as the Karting area) was not sufficiently supported to take into account the particularities of working in project mode and the resulting practices. The property offer was not well-enough thought out in terms of usage

related to creative and cultural activities, with insufficient facilitation and a lack of services that would effectively encourage dynamic collectives, support open innovation and common projects. The model used was more based on traditional “offers” (business incubator, business accelerator). The initial ambition to build on the property offer to encourage interaction, mutualisation and collective action was therefore not achieved, though this was also for economic reasons (including the costs engendered by the presence or participation of facilitators and organizers or even a café or catering).

- The idea of developing a range of services associated with the property in order to respond to the expectations of these occupants (resource centre, technology platforms, meeting rooms, catering, mail, print room, etc.) had been voiced since 2011, but posed economic problems (how to offer this range of services with “affordable” rents).

3.3. Creativity and collective intelligence to support Grounding

The management mechanisms proposed showed a slight discrepancy with the socio-economic issues to be dealt with: notably the management of innovation processes on a collective scale and in particular the exploration process between creative and cultural actors.

The analysis of the evolution of the QDC cluster highlighted the difficulties encountered by the management support organization in understanding the issue of creativity on an inter-organizational scale with very small firms. Until 2011, the project manager for the Economic Facilitation and Promotion project (the first person hired to carry out the original aims of *Nantes Création*) implemented the idea of developing a space dedicated to creativity, with an appropriate range of services. During this period, his models were the *Cité du Design* in Saint Etienne or the *Cantine Silicon Sentier* in Paris. Benchmarking was carried out in order to establish the new services and uses for this showroom, with a presentation area for creative

projects, a reception area and a work and professional information area (all within a 53 m² space).

From 2011, the new cluster team's approach shifted towards the work carried out on technological clusters (notably based on the report by Borie *et al.* (2007) on cluster evaluation methods and tools applied to technological and industrial clusters, as shown by the structuration of its governance and its facilitation offers.

The progressive move towards looking for more high added-value projects and innovative projects (potential high tech projects) was helped by the recruitment of a researcher/consultant who had broken with the practices of technological competitive clusters (with their tenders for public money). He was a specialist in industrial innovation, but a beginner when it came to cultural and creative industries. The team had trouble giving real technical support to (inter-) organizational creativity.

There was a certain clumsiness in the management tools used to support the organization of networks, and in developing creative potential between these small enterprises as well as in their links with traditional companies. Relying on the basis of occasional events (meetings, events, conferences, pitches or QDC workshops), these mechanisms did not encourage the development of endogenous conditions for creativity. The management philosophy borrowed heavily from the contribution model (influenced by the researcher B. Stiegler). This combined with the aggregation and mobilization of talents (as in Florida, 2002) did not permit the nourishing of a properly equipped methodology.

Our research (in particular on *Halles Alstom*) highlighted the uniqueness of specific resources and assets from certain spaces - the existence of social networks and cooperation (resulting from/in a "throwntogetherness" and a "grounded connectedness", to cite Massey's words) supporting knowledge production - and their non-transferable character. The QDC team did not explore the topics enough in terms of these individual or of communitarian dynamics.

Thus, the role of certain entrepreneurs was neglected, despite them being identified as key actors that were connected and had a strong network of social relations. Influenced by a specific managerial mode, and especially the work of Florida on the presence and influence of creative talents, the team gave preference to input from exogenous actors (consultants), along with imported ready-made actions and tools (from technological incubators).

Conclusions and Implications

Over the years, with the institutional assertion of the QDC -as a creative and cultural cluster -, the cluster developed in different spaces around the metropolitan area of Nantes and addressed a diversity of aims and objectives. In a top-down approach, the logic of its governance and management was complex, as revealed by the change in mechanisms over the six years. Under the influence of ambitious political goals, the QDC support team experimented with some management tools which can be qualified as composite. They tried to link two approaches, i.e. the Grounding approach / and the Grouping approach, without succeeding, however, to draw any lessons for reconsidering their Grouping approach for small creative companies. In its Grounding approach, the support team preferred to use imported “toolboxes,” which were slightly weak in practice. They borrowed (rather than appropriated) approaches from the spheres of technological innovation guidance, territorial planning and event planning. Moreover, the diversity of actors involved brought up major issues related to the design and implementation of more contingent management mechanisms. Clustering is possible in the context of arts but with more specific regards to support a collective governance and to introduce an iterative and participative strategy development. In table 8, we summarize the main lessons learnt ; we formulate some new proposals about the creative cluster policy and particularly the creative cluster’s Grouping dynamic, by encouraging stewardship (Hubbart et al., 2012) and collective intelligence. The concept of stewardship is based on the mobilization of all the knowledge and the available energies, through (1) the

double work of mobilization (with the regular (re)definition of the critical stakes, the information susceptible to inspire and to motivate the largest number of people - creative entrepreneurs, artists, researchers, citizens...- of diverse networks) and of support in the collaboration (organized by platforms where they can work together, develop new relationships and with the encouragement in the exploration of new avenues); (2) a continuous work of renewal of the processes to keep a high capacity to learn and to explore always changeable stakes; (3) the preservation of the capacity to learn, to restructure and to refocus the cluster's perspectives.

Insert Table 8 here

These notions led us to recall some specific problems concerning the management of innovation in cultural and creative clusters (also related to facilitation and steering governance tools). Various studies have raised the importance of micro-practices, tacit knowledge and learning stemming from inter-individual interaction processes, underlining the extent to which economic development can be encouraged by physical contact as well as cultural and social proximity (Maskell *et al.*, 1998; Storper, 1995). In this way, face-to-face contact allows for the transfer and creation of knowledge. However, as pointed out by Johannisson (2003), these arguments in favour of spatially organized economic activities must not lead us to ignore the complexity and the dynamic character of these collective systems of very small creative enterprises, and the existence of real barriers to a top-down strategy for regional economic development. Any transaction not only depends on cost, but also on other motivational objectives (depending on the individual situation), and becomes part of a creative dialogue

aiming to generate diverse opportunities, inspire new projects and encourage the deployment of networking-based resources.

Aside from the cluster's support organization team, "civic entrepreneurs" (Ebbekink & Lagendijk, 2013) or "cluster entrepreneurs" (Wolfe and Nelles, 2010) also played a major role, often neglected by the governing bodies. Their responsibilities included the empowerment dimension, or stewardship evoked by Hubbart et al. (2012): they aimed to encourage the largest amount of people into action by bringing them together (a more inclusive approach). These actors encouraged relational and cognitive synergies, as well as actively contributing to a form of cluster mechanism engineering, albeit one that was less visible, official and more contingent. However, recognition of these actors and their work was a major challenge in the clustering processes. Their work was essential in mobilizing all the available knowledge and energy among creative entrepreneurs and small firms. They participated in: (1) a dual task of mobilization (defining the critical challenges, identifying information likely to inspire, and motivating the greatest possible number of people from diverse networks) and of providing collaboration support ; (2) a continual work of process renewal to maintain a full capacity for understanding and exploring ever-changing challenges; and (3) supporting the capacity to learn, to retool, to restructure and to reframe perspectives.

We can conclude that the governance mechanisms of some localized groupings of very small creative enterprises require a balance in the Grouping/Grounding approach. Governance choices and cluster practices have to be hybrid and based on multi-faceted management mechanisms that are likely to act on cluster dynamics.

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Table 1: Summary of empirical material

| Period | Fieldwork | Data collected | Actors |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2006 to 2009 | 5 interviews with the head of <i>Nantes Création</i> 2 ECCE ⁷ seminars 3 interviews with the director of higher education for the city | Invitations, leaflets, note-taking, interviews, documents created by the city, survey responses | Researcher as a participating observer |
| 2009 | 2 qualitative studies of the 50 companies located in the Halle Alstom area | 47 transcribed interviews | 5 researchers and 2 trainees |
| 2011 | Study of the location of the showroom | Internal documents on the service offer | Second-year master's student |
| 2012 | Study of the companies in the Karting area | Company monographs | 2 researchers, 2 master's students |
| 2011-2014 | Comparative study projects of the creative clusters in the <i>Quartier de la Création</i> ; organization of events | Minutes of meetings, reports, reviews, interviews, road maps, external studies | PhD student candidate in the <i>Quartier de la Création</i> 5 researcher meetings per year |
| 2012-2014 | Qualitative study of the <i>Les Olivettes</i> quarter | 46 transcribed interviews including 4 with local facilitation structures | 3 researchers |

⁷ ECCE, European Center for Creative Industries. It is committed to supporting the actors from the creative economy as well as the development of creative locations and spaces, in several European cities (Eindhoven, Aachen, Cardiff, Dublin, Stuttgart, Birmingham, and the agency CIDA in Great Britain).

Table 2: Major events and dates in the clustering process over twenty years

| Period and significant dates | Characteristics | Findings |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Cultural events and places</i> | | |
| <p>Late 80s – early 2000s 1990: <i>Allumés</i> festival, creation of the <i>Royal de Luxe</i> company 1995: inauguration of the <i>Folle Journée</i> festival 2000: the Lu factory becomes the <i>Lieu Unique</i> (national scene for dance, theatre, music...) 2007: <i>Machines de l’Ile</i> opened 2007: first <i>Biennale Estuaire</i> (artistic and cultural Biennale) 2013: <i>Voyage à Nantes</i> (artistic, cultural and touristic festival)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decline in industrial and naval activities, new municipal team, involvement/choice of culture to “revitalize” the city - A number of festivals - Space for contemporary music programmes - Installation of a national stage - Restauration of the Château des Ducs de Bretagne - Creation of the <i>Chantiers</i> space (with <i>Les Machines de l’Ile</i>, the elephant, the Gallery) - The “<i>Rings of Memory</i>” exhibition | <p>Development of spaces and aeras (some of them are official) ; propose specific artistic and cultural events that favour discovery, artistic activities and reinforcing the cultural identity of the city at a national and international level</p> |
| <i>Urban, economic events and places</i> | | |
| <p>1987: naval shipyards close Since 1999: development of the urban project 2000: creation of an urban committee to launch the rehabilitation process 2003: steering passed on to SAMOA⁸ 2005: involvement in the European ECCE project⁹ Mars 2009: launch of ECCE Innovation project¹⁰ Mai 2009: official inauguration and launch of the <i>Quartier de la Création</i> project¹¹ 2011: the City authorities take over the project</p> | <p><i>Isle of Nantes</i>, the most important European brown field</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redevelopment of the <i>Isle de Nantes</i>—337 hectares - Rehabilitation project given to the urban planner A. Chemetoff - Construction of the court house and the architectural school by famous architects - Transformation of the old market halls to temporarily accommodate creative activities - Welcoming of institutes of higher education and training oriented towards cultural and creative industries | <p>Creating a contemporary city</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness of the various spaces to be rehabilitated and redeveloped on the island of Nantes <p>From 2009, confirmation of the development of an economic cultural and artistic zone in order to open a new development in the Nantes/Saint Nazaire municipality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - balance culture with science - contact and exchange with the European cities within the ECCE project |

⁸ Société d’Aménagement de la Métropole de l’Ouest Atlantique

⁹ ECCE, community project (European project) which supports the creative industries and links a number of European cities (Eindhoven, Aachen, Cardiff, Dublin, Stuttgart, Birmingham, and the CIDA agency in the United Kingdom).

¹⁰ The “ECCE Innovation project aims to promote the innovation potential of cultural and creative industries to access new markets. It encourages the exchange of knowledge and innovative practice in order to develop new forms of commercial and artistic expertise” (invitation for the European launch seminar, 12 March 2009, on the theme of “Art and the enterprise”).

¹¹ Inauguration in the presence of the regional prefect, the president of *Nantes Métropole* - the Nantes urban community -, the president of the *Conseil Régional* (regional council), the president of the *Conseil départemental* (département council), the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the president of the University.

Table 3: Period 1 – the Proto-Cluster initiated with the support of the Nantes City council

| Actors | Governance | Objectives/missions | Achievements |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Nantes City and its Nantes Création operational team 3 employees</p> <p>Art School Director</p> <p>Political Actors</p> | <p>Nantes City Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - its department of economic development and international relations - its department of research, innovation and education <p>Coordination with people involved in research and education programs in the entrepreneurship field</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try out new uses for the brownfield site (Isle of Nantes) - Develop an interdisciplinary Arts Campus - Establish a resources centre dedicated to cultural and creative activities - Advice, support and facilitation for artists and creative entrepreneurs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 50 cultural and creative industries or artists located in the Halle Alstom - Documentary resources made available for creative entrepreneurs - Information sessions for artists facilitated (about venture creation, financial and commercial support...) - Network established for creation circles |

Table 4: Period 2 - the Cluster of Cultural and Creative industries : the institutionalism of the *Quartier de la Création*

| Actors | Governance | Objectives/Missions | Achievements |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Quartier de la Création (QDC)</i> team</p> <p>SAMOA's director</p> <p>Urban Planner</p> | <p>Nantes Metropole (Nantes Urban Community)</p> <p>and the SAMOA</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - invent a new creative policy around social cohesion, culture and attractiveness - set up a reinforced multidisciplinary team - link the creative areas - structure new premises - define new governance tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - official inauguration of the QDC as a specific creative place and an urban area - new urban project approach - information sessions on the urban and cultural project - conferences - develop services and counselling activities for creative entrepreneurs |

Table 5: Period 3 - the CCC as a set of collective and collaborative projects managed by the SAMOA¹² and its QDC team

| Actors | Governance | Objectives/Missions | Achievements |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Quartier de la Création (QDC)</i> team</p> <p>- defined as a resource centre – facilitation platform, impetus, coordination and promotion¹³</p> <p>With a co-working</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The SAMOA with its QDC team - The SAMOA as project manager with - The Chamber of Commerce and Industry - The <i>Conseil Régional</i> - The <i>Conseil Départemental</i> - The City of Nantes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encourage all sorts of collective interactions favouring the development of innovative activities and employment, the promotion of cultural, scientific and technical outreach - develop a European centre of excellence devoted to cultural and creative clusters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural events - meetings, exhibitions, speed-dating show-rooms - territorial marketing events - creative sessions with students, entrepreneurs |

¹² To this end, in 2011, the SAMOA was transformed into a local public company so that it could build on its task of developing the *Quartier de la Création* (QDC).

¹³ A team of 10 to 15 people (with interns)

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>and exhibition space</p> | <p>- Creation of a steering committee, a partners' committee, a strategic orientation committee and thematic working parties</p> | <p>and oriented towards lifestyles and eco-conception/eco-design - conceive a portfolio of services to test and validate the performance of the cluster, with the aim of later deploying them over a wider area</p> | <p>- conferences - some services and counselling activities - "Pitch" meetings ; calls for projects, creative factory, competitions with innovation actors, start-up factory (as an innovative project accelerator concept)</p> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Table 6: Governance and management practices in the third period

| Governance Bodies | Frequency | Actors and missions |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Steering committee | Once or twice / year | Elected representatives of the cluster's partner institutions (<i>Nantes Métropole, Conseil Régional, Conseil Départemental, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, City, University</i>) |
| Partners' committee | 3 times a year | The general managers of partner institutions: orientation, coordination and regulatory bodies, intervening to ensure good cooperation between the public authorities and the funding given to the projects carried out by the cluster management team |
| Strategic orientation committee | Once or twice | 5 groups associating companies, higher education and research actors and outside stakeholders: monitoring, alerts, recommendations for the general orientation of the cluster |
| Thematic groups | 2 to 3 times a year | Meetings of the actors to draw up a strategy and an overall shared vision on a central theme (such as the higher education offer of the QDC, the creation of a research centre, the spill-over activity) to manage a community of interest combining economy, research and training. |

Table 7: Management tools through the three periods

| | Period 1 | Period 2 | Period 3 |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Management mechanisms for ... | A grouping of very small creative enterprises and artists to develop a dedicated centre of excellence for cultural and creative industries | A multi-disciplinary cluster to develop new forms of activity and contribute to the emergence of new means of growth, stemming from encounters between artists, researchers, students, entrepreneurs | A cluster to support a “French tech” label A base for developing intelligent specializations in digital cluster |
| Dominant type of actors | An informal group of directors of institutes and elected officials. | The SAMOA as project manager The enlarged multidisciplinary QDC team | A structured and “participative” governance with institutions - a management director - an innovation project manager (with a technological profile) - a 10-person team /consultants |
| Management Philosophy | An ad hoc, informal approach The models of ECCE Cities | The Porterian model of clusters The aggregation and mobilization of talents (Florida, 2002) The contributive model of Stiegler | The influence of Cohendet model about creative communities |
| Technical substrate | A light team (3 persons) Information meetings, Thematic technical meetings to professionalize the cultural structures A document centre | A database of creative actors An annual event Thematic working groups on entrepreneurship in cultural and creative activities | A dedicated platform (with a small exhibition and co-working space) Restructuring of the tools used in the previous period to introduce creative communities around 5 themes. |
| Areas La Halle Alstom Karting Olivettes | Autonomy; self-organization; the dynamics of Grouping around different occasional projects | Spread out enterprises: some enterprises implanted in shared spaces in different places around the city, including the Karting | Evolution towards the practices of a digital cluster for the institutional areas |

Table 8: Lessons learnt from the creative cluster’s grouping in Nantes: balancing Grouping and Grounding approaches.

| Territorial dynamic capabilities | GROUPING | GROUNDING |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| type of cluster | dominant approach in industrial and technological clusters | relevant practices in urban cultural and creative cluster |
| Policy rationale | Cluster building Top-down policy | Policy leveraging Flat |
| Governance type/structure | Territorial/metropolitan area governance | Collective and inclusive governance |
| Governance management tools | Predesigned management tool kit | Iterative and participative strategy development Ad-hoc and contingent management tools |
| Governance practices | (Official) Leadership - External project legitimization - Under-use of expert committees - Porterian optimization of resources/factors - Stock rationalization - Free/contribution model | Stewardship - Support Collective intelligence - Facilitate Processual rationality for supporting socializing, envisioning, mediating, potentializing. |

APPENDIX 1

Figure A: The cluster's evolution

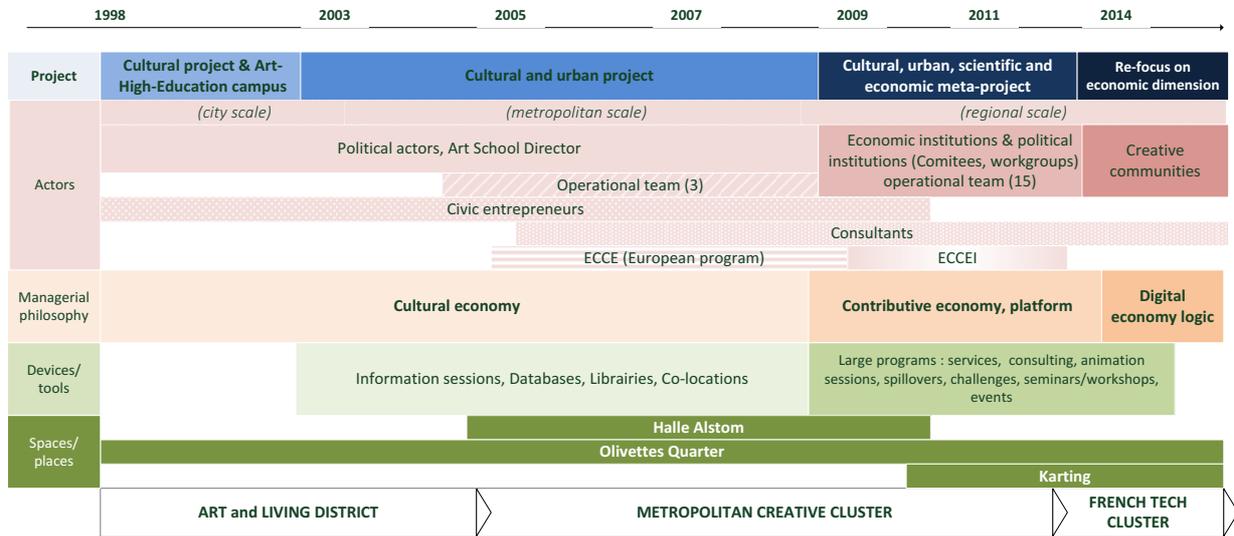


Figure B: The different creative places as planned on the island of Nantes



Samoa, strategic committee, 25 November 2014, p. 14