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RETHINKING CREATIVITY AT NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL ERA.

The case studies of two urban voids redevelopments in France: Ile-de-Nantes and Docks-de-Seine

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ABSTRACT

The former industrial districts are often places of experimentation, addressing questions of territorial innovation and city making. Their geographical position within or on the outskirts of cities shows the dynamics of the future territorial development of cities. The reappropriation of these neighborhoods after the period of deindustrialization and the creative activities offered by local authorities and developers can contribute to the economic and demographic growth of deindustrialized shrinking cities. In the research creativity is defined as a process to recover from social and economic recession which are usually linked to deindustrialization. The main goal is to survey how urban spaces with absence of functional use, *terrain vague*, contribute to explore alternative ways of urban dwelling (sustainable, participatory) as well as the differences observed in the implementation of creative strategies in central districts and peripheral areas.

The research method is descriptive-analytic. The descriptive is used in order to define creativity and relate it to previous studies in *terrain vague*. The analytic is used in order to identify the reasons that led to population decline and the correlations between sustainable urban development, citizen engagement and demographic evolution. The performed analyses included a combination of statistics techniques (diagrams of demographic evolution) and qualitative methods (interviews with local authorities, inhabitants and the teams of architects and urban planners of the projects studied in the research). The outcome revealed that the political, economic and social context plays a major role in the strategies of creativity in a city by promoting several times gentrification, especially in peripheral areas. The final conclusion is that the system of traditional actors in the development of urban projects has to redefine the roles of each one, in order to promote innovation, by establishing the inhabitants as real social actors.

Keywords: Shrinking cities, urban voids, creativity, France.

Track Session: 3. *Terrain vague redevelopments*

1. Introduction

Almost all industrial brownfields have in common the manifestation of abandonment, of a loss of their function, of neglect. These urban voids result from the renewal of forms of production and the global distribution of industrial activities (Fontagné & Lorenzi, 2005). Their industrial heritage is linked to a working class society and a bygone economic model. The most frequent answer to the question of redevelopment of brownfields is to do away with all the traces of the city's industrial economy according to the logic that anything that is no longer useful for production is no longer desirable for the construction of the new image of deindustrialized shrinking cities (Andres & Javin, 2008). The question of the creative urban dwelling of former industrial cities remains today a political and social problem which modifies urban functions (Ecomusée le Creusot-Montceau, 2002). We could also note the conflict between, on the one hand, the economic revitalization of former industrial cities and, on the other hand, the preservation of their industrial past. The main goal of the paper is to question how new creative territorial policies (urban renewal programs, participatory public policies) for the redevelopment of former industrial brownfields, *terrain vague*, in France (Ile-de-Nantes, Docks-de-Seine) can contribute in the revitalization of deindustrialized shrinking cities, as long as the differences observed in their implementation in central districts and peripheral areas.

2. State of the Art

The paper is part of the thematic area of shrinking cities and particularly of the reintegration into the urban tissue of zones with special spatial and social identity, *terrain vague*. Ignasi Solà-Morales in the mid 1990's described *terrain vague* as a contemporary space of project and design that includes the marginal wastelands and vacant lots that are located outside the city's productive spaces, which according to him are oversights in the landscape that are mentally exterior to the physical interior of the city. The preservation of the identity of these specific zones refers to the collective memory (Halbwachs, 1997) and concerns the form and the social groups to which these urban spaces are addressed. The understanding and the interpretation of the wider areas in which the urban voids are included allows the recording of the structural elements of the space (Prost, 2004), which in turn are the main axes of the redevelopment programs.

"The creative city imaginary is an evolutionary concept, reflecting post-industrial and cultural *turns*, resulting in a hybrid of assemblages and definitions: assemblage in terms of both socio-spatial theory, notably in geography, and in the creative construction through *found objects*, where the creative city is seen to draw on a city's cultural assets, *offer* and *creative essence*" (Evans, 2017, p.311). In this context we can identify three axes in the programs of redevelopment of former industrial brownfields, which we used for our research:

- the preservation of the industrial past,
- the sustainable dimension of the redevelopment programs and
- the active citizen engagement in the design processes

2.1 The preservation of the industrial past

The strong territorial specialization of production, which makes demographic dynamics dependent on economic dynamics, characterizes the development and growth of industrial cities in France (Fischer, 1994). The loss of production jobs has reduced the density and diversity of French industrial cities (Poitrenaud, 2006). The urban life of these cities is not guaranteed and at the same time the possibility of exchanges and their attractiveness is reduced as a result of the disruption of the urban tissue (Levy, 1999).

The notion of urban life applies to spaces, such as industrial sites and working-class neighborhoods around factories, where the presence of industry leads to networks and exchange links with the urban tissue outside the industrial sites (Fache, 2006). Two structural elements of the urban tissue of the industrial city are chosen to address the issue of urban life and the role of local urban development in the planning process of industrial cities:

- work, as an element that generates the notion of living and
- district, especially the popular one, which is the basis of the organization of these cities.

In French literature there are few references that show the link between the preservation of industrial heritage and the post-industrial redevelopment of urban voids (Grange & Poulot, 1997; Comby, 2001; Bonneville, 2004). The rehabilitation of industrial buildings can be considered as a process within the framework of urban renewal programs, particularly as it is a measure for city revitalization. The idea of reconversion of industrial buildings developed in France by Bernard Reichen and Philippe Robert, aims at rejecting urban regeneration programs characteristic of the *Trente glorieuses (1946-1975)* (2002). In the same context, the European *Working Heritage project* is looking for good practices in the reconversion of European industrial buildings as well as the requalification of their environment.¹ We observe that industrial buildings reconverted in Europe accommodate a variety of uses: social housing, offices, businesses and artistic and cultural places (cinemas, theaters, libraries). Beyond the safeguarding of buildings and memory, there is a particular interest in sustainable development in terms of overall energy savings (Desmoulins & Robert, 2005) or, more generally, reconversion can be a lever for the revitalization of entire districts and territories (André & Smith, 2006).

2.2 The sustainable dimension of the redevelopment programs

Since 2004, we have observed in France a change in the national policy of regional planning from local production systems towards competitiveness clusters.² This spatial planning trend, which distances the city and industry, is increasing alongside with the demands of building a sustainable city. The conversion of industrial brownfields into tertiary activities is carried out in order to revitalize the economic tissue of deindustrialized shrinking cities (Léo & Philippe, 1997). Industrial cities are choosing to invent their model of sustainable and productive city. Indeed the sustainable city, developed in the literature as the future of city planning, brings very few answers for industrial cities (Letté, 2012). Concerns about eco-businesses have only been emerging since the 2000's (Boiral, 2005).

The desire of local political and economic actors to revitalize the economic tissue can be observed at different scales through departmental or regional initiatives, allowing efforts to be pooled (Caisse des Dépôts, 2015). The development of intercommunalities in France makes it possible to carry out economic revitalization projects even in the context of cities' deindustrialization as was the case of the city of Valenciennes. In the case of Valenciennes, the establishment of Toyota, a Japanese automobile manufacturer, in Onnaing (logistics site) has contributed to the economic revitalization of the city (Business France, 2017). Toyota's success in creating 2800 jobs has enabled: "to consider the transformation of brownfields into activity zones, particularly by resorting to the creation of free urban zones."³ (Luxembourg, 2014, p.825). Valenciennes is therefore considered as a good example of conversion of a former industrial city to a sustainable one which benefits from local and international support.

2.3 The active citizen engagement in the design processes

The discussion about engaging citizens in the procedures of urban planning dates back in the 1960's and has its roots in social movements like May 1968 in France (Lefèvre, 1968). In the context of creative territorial policies it is interesting to study how the collaboration between urban planners and citizens in the processes of urban voids redevelopment contributes to achieving better living conditions for all citizens as a response to social inequities identified in most cities worldwide.

At international level the interest to engage citizens in the processes of urban voids redevelopment starts in 1990's and is linked to preoccupations about environmental protection and urban resilience (Guérard, 2004). We can see in quantitative researches of the era in French industrial cities that there was a significant interest by citizens to participate in community planning as a response to global preoccupations about urban resilience (Rui, 2004). For many French researchers like Hoffman-Martinot

¹ <http://workingheritage.european-heritage.net>.

² <https://competitivite.gouv.fr/la-politique-des-poles/les-poles-de-competitivite/qu-est-ce-qu-un-pole-de-competitivite>.

³ The free urban zones are urban districts with a population of more than 10000 inhabitants characterized by high unemployment rate, in which the French government encourages the installation of new enterprises in order to achieve their economic revitalization, by proposing to the enterprises tax exemptions for a period of 5 years.

and Sorbets the direct participation of groups of citizens in the processes of decision making at neighborhood level helps to integrate in communities marginalized groups (for example immigrants) and thus achieve social cohesion (2003).

We should underline that in English literature, the term *citizen engagement* refers particularly to the experiences and the individual and collective actions of inhabitants aim at promoting, according to some authors, the issue of participatory democracy (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). In contrast, in the French context, we see that the term *citizen engagement* has a sense of the legitimacy of speech, that is to say in the name of who the inhabitants speak and what social weight their speeches have. It should be noted that there is a legitimacy of speech and a different social weight when the inhabitants are represented by an association, as can be seen in various projects of urban void redevelopment in France (for example the sustainable neighborhood Clichy-Batignolles) as well as in the two case studies of the paper (collaboration of the inhabitants with professional associations working on the subject of preservation of industrial heritage).

2.4 The two case studies

Nantes is located in the west of France with an area of about 6500 hectares. Its population in 2017 was about 300000 inhabitants. Nantes, which is known for the redevelopment of former industrial brownfields as Ile-de-Nantes, was chosen as a case study due to the significant population decline that faced after the closure of the local industries in the late 1980's.



Fig. 1 – The park of the shipyards in Ile-de-Nantes. Source: (Toura, 2019)

The second case study Saint-Ouen is a city in the Seine-Saint-Denis department. It is located in the northern suburbs of Paris with an area of about 430 hectares. Its population in 2017 was about 90000 inhabitants. Saint-Ouen, which is known for its industrial activities since 19th century, faced as Nantes a significant population decline in the late 1980's due to the departure of local industries in the periphery of the city. Nowadays, the city is known for the redevelopment of former industrial brownfields as the Docks-de-Seine that started since 2005.



Fig. 2 – The main park of the Docks-de-Seine. Source: (Toura, 2019)

The two case studies chosen show a different vision of the issue of creativity at territorial level as they were not developed at the same period. In the current paper we will compare the creative territorial policies adopted for the two case studies in order to underline that the political, economic and social context plays a major role in the strategies of creativity in a city by promoting several times gentrification, especially in peripheral areas.

3. Methods

The method adopted for the research was the descriptive-analytic, in which the descriptive method is used in order to define creativity at territorial level, identify its main axes in the programs of redevelopment of former industrial brownfields and relate it to previous studies in *terrain vague*. The correlation between sustainable urban development, citizen engagement and demographic evolution was performed through an analytic method. The target group is quite large, as it involves researchers and practitioners in social sciences (architects, urban planners, sociologists, economists, anthropologists), who are specialized in the subject, but it can also interest local authorities and national governments working on creative territorial policies for the redevelopment of urban voids and the revitalization of shrinking cities.

The analysis of the two case studies was performed by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative included the analysis of demographic and economic data taken from the municipalities of Nantes and Saint-Ouen and the French national institute for statistics and economic studies. The qualitative included the analysis of interviews with local authorities, inhabitants and the teams of architects and urban planners that participated in the projects of urban redevelopment of the two case studies. The basic purpose of these interviews was to study the role of each local actor (politicians, professionals, inhabitants) in the implementation of new creative territorial policies, aiming to contribute in the revitalization of deindustrialized shrinking cities.

4. Results

Nantes history is linked to industry especially in the 1950's and 1960's with an emphasis on the food and shipbuilding sectors. The year 1987 marks the end of industrial activity in the city with the closure of

shipyards in the district of Ile-de-Nantes.⁴ In his speech in March 1989 the newly elected mayor of Nantes, Jean-Marc Ayrault, declared: "I am going to give a radiant image to the seventh city of France. Nantes must find its role as a great European metropolis of tomorrow".⁵ In this context, the City Council decided in the early 1990's to include the district of Ile-de-Nantes in the city's urban redevelopment programs (Chemetoff & Kerouanton, 2012).

The interviews that we conducted in the city from 2017 to 2019 showed that the financing of the redevelopment program of Ile-de-Nantes by funds of the European Union, allowed the design teams to experiment with and propose new creative territorial policies for the redevelopment of the district. These policies included the creation of *écoquartiers* (French sustainable neighborhoods), the engagement of citizens in the design processes especially of district's public spaces, the preservation of the local industrial heritage and the economic and social growth of the district after several years of recession.

Three different design teams worked on the redevelopment program of Ile-de-Nantes since 2004 (atelier Alexandre Chemetoff, ateliers Marcel Smets and Anne-Mie Depuydt, ateliers Claire Schorter and Jacqueline Osty), offering a different vision of creativity at territorial level. It is important to underline the strong commitment of Nantes City Council for the district's redevelopment program as long as the political continuity at city level since the beginning of the project in 2004 (all mayors were members of the French socialist party).

The industrial history of the second case study, Saint-Ouen, is linked to the Docks-de-Seine district, where the city's railway station was built in 1856. The two main sectors were those of energy production and waste treatment. The departure of Total (2003) and Alstom (2004) from the Docks district marked the beginning of a city's redevelopment program for central districts, as large zones alongside the river Seine were left *inactive* (D'Orso, 2014). The Mayor of Saint-Ouen, Jacqueline Rouillon in an interview in 2011 during her second term, talked about the Docks project saying that the municipal vision was that: "The Docks will become an exemplary and innovative living district in terms of social cohesion, environmental protection and economic development".⁶ In this context, a ZAC was developed in 2007, aiming at the redevelopment of the district.⁷

The interviews that we conducted in the city from 2017 to 2019 showed that the inscription of Docks in the program of the French Ministry of Environment for the creation of *écoquartiers* in districts for urban redevelopment (*Label écoquartier*), allowed the teams that undertook the design project to experiment with new territorial policies. The city of Saint-Ouen, and particularly the Docks district, are part of the redevelopment program of the greater Paris area (*Grand Paris*), resulting in the creation of competitiveness clusters of metropolitan interest. In the case study of the Docks, the goal of the team that leads the redevelopment program since 2005 (atelier Makan Rafatdjou) is to rehabilitate existing industrial buildings and reintegrate them to the sustainable neighborhood of Docks-de-Seine, to engage citizens in the design processes of district's public spaces, while at the same time the economic growth of the district is achieved through the creation of a large metropolitan energy pole (Apur, 2006).

Unlike the first case study of our research, we observe that in the case study of Docks-de-Seine since the beginning of the project in 2012 only one design team worked on the redevelopment program of the district, while at the same period three different mayors were elected, members of different political parties (communist party, liberal party, socialist party). These, alongside with the inscription of the project in the French national program *Label écoquartier*, had as a result either an imitation of creative territorial policies implemented in other projects of the same type (*écoquartiers*) or conflicts inside the City Council regarding the priorities of the project (economic growth or social cohesion).

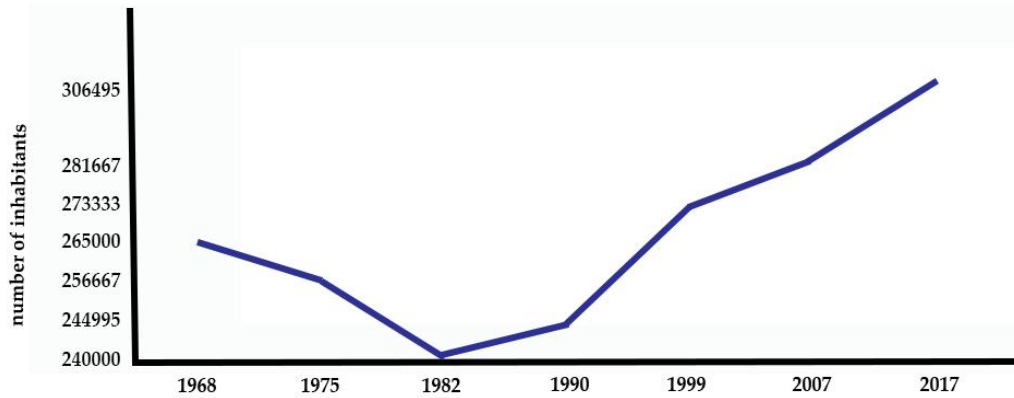
⁴ Plan Local d'urbanisme (PLU)-Local plan of Nantes.

⁵ <https://fresques.ina.fr/auran/fiche-media/Auran000086/jean-marc-ayrault-maire-de-nantes>.

⁶ IDF1 archives (www.idf1.fr).

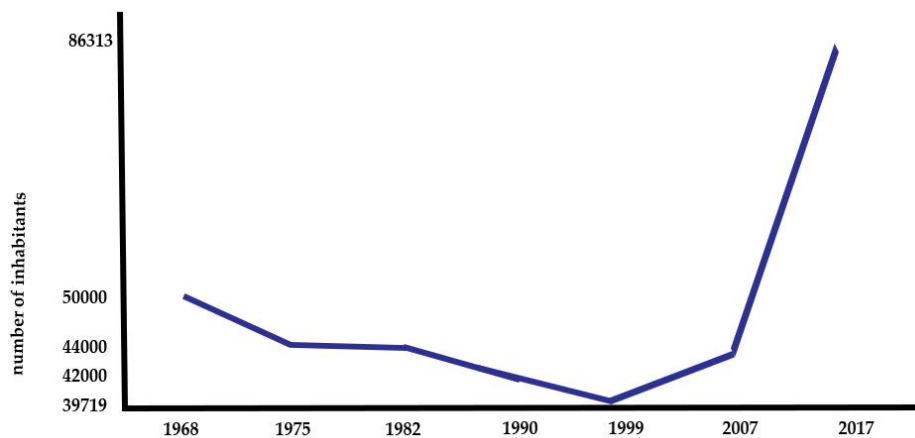
⁷ A concerted development zone (ZAC) is, in France, a public operation for the development of urban space under the terms of the town planning code and instituted by the land orientation law no 67-1253 of December 30, 1967 to replace the priority areas to be urbanized (ZUP).

In our theoretical framework we identified three axes in the programs of redevelopment of former industrial brownfields. Based on this analysis and the field research we observe that in the case study of Ile-de-Nantes the preservation of the industrial past is achieved through the reconversion of industrial buildings and the requalification of their environment as is the case of the former shipyards. On the contrary, in the case study of Docks-de-Seine even though several industrial buildings were reconverted, several were demolished in favor of tertiary activities, which led to a loss of district's former identity. We can see that the transition towards sustainable development was achieved in the case study of Ile-de-Nantes through the construction of research centers, offices and public buildings, resulting also in the increase of city's population.



Graph 1 – Demographic evolution in Nantes between 1968 and 2017. Source: (Toura, 2019)

The same effect, the increase of city's population, had also, in the case study of Docks-de-Seine, the construction of offices, public buildings and the maintenance of industrial activities.



Graph 2 – Demographic evolution in Saint-Ouen between 1968 and 2017. Source: (Toura, 2019)

In both case studies we must underline the risk of gentrification, especially in the second one, as we observe an increase in the property prices based on the socio-economic profile and the high incomes of the new inhabitants.

Table 1 – Number of working positions in Nantes (2009 and 2014)

Categories	2009	2014
Total	165840	178471
Craftsmen, tradesmen, businessmen	6778	8208
Senior managers and professional occupations	39726	46379
Intermediate professions	49798	54931
Employees	48162	47849
Industrial workers	21376	20457

Source: Own creation based on (INSEE, 2014).⁸

Table 2 – Number of working positions in Saint-Ouen (2009 and 2014)

Categories	2009	2014
Total	34466	36060
Craftsmen, tradesmen, businessmen	1912	1969
Senior managers and professional occupations	11353	13489
Intermediate professions	8829	8623
Employees	6801	6807
Industrial workers	5571	5115

Source: Own creation based on (INSEE, 2014).⁹

Local authorities and developers encourage in both case studies the active citizen engagement in the design processes. In the case study of Ile-de-Nantes citizen engagement is based on the commitment of Nantes City Council to experiment with new tools and policies for the city's redevelopment programs, whereas in the case study of Docks-de-Seine citizen engagement is part of the inscription of the project in the French national program *Label écoquartier*.

5. Conclusions

The notion of *terrain vague*, as presented by Solà-Morales, implies more than a simple definition, it holds in it the potential to become another mode of perception and intervention. In the paper we tried to analyze the dynamics behind the creation and consequent application of this multidimensional notion. Our research showed that the political, economic and social context plays a major role in the strategies of creativity in deindustrialized shrinking cities, by promoting several times gentrification, especially in peripheral areas as we have seen in the case study of Docks-de-Seine. At the same time, the decision of local authorities to inscribe projects of urban redevelopment in national strategic plans for the revitalization of urban areas, as is the French *Label écoquartier*, poses restrictions to creative territorial policies at local level and leads to an imitation of practices and tools.

⁸ <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/cog/commune/COM44109-nantes>.

⁹ <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/cog/commune/COM93070-saint-ouen>.

The different redevelopment policies for urban voids in the case study of Nantes (progressive transition from the deindustrialization to sustainable and participatory urban policies, alongside with policies of preservation of the city's industrial past), compared to the ones in the case study of Saint-Ouen (inscription of an urban redevelopment project in a national strategic plan for the revitalization of urban areas) help us to understand the transformations of French deindustrialized cities and the different aspects of their interface, as it is evident that there is a huge socio-economic gap between the central and the peripheral cities' districts. The interviews with the local actors tried to answer the question of how these special, in terms of spatial and social identity, urban areas could be adapted to different needs, by proposing a different vision of the French national strategic plans used for the revitalization of shrinking cities. Citizen engagement could be added as a new dimension of these plans, as the citizens become true social actors who decide about their living and working conditions and don't depend on political decisions usually taken at national level and not at the level of the city.

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