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Preservation of industrial heritage and new approaches in urban planning. Examples of two projects of urban renewal in France: the sustainable neighborhoods Ile-de-Nantes and Docks-de-Seine

Varvara TOURA

Main questions

André Corboz in his article “A good use of historical sites” develops a model of city planning based on the conservation of cultural goods.¹ Considering Corboz model of city planning as a critical alternative to the productive rationality of common urbanization, the paper tries to answer the question of what is the “industrial” in former industrial cities, both in terms of preservation of industrial heritage and with regard to current urban planning policies like sustainable development. The purpose is to question the appearance of new territorial policies of urban renewal in two French former industrial sites, the sites *Ile-de-Nantes* and *Docks-de-Seine*, in which the preservation of industrial heritage is associated with sustainable urban planning programs and citizen engagement.

Industrial heritage and contemporary urban planning policies

The paper is part of the thematic area of memory culture and particularly of the reintegration into the urban tissue of sites with special spatial and social identity. The preservation of the identity of these specific sites refers to the collective memory and concerns the form and the social groups to which these urban spaces are addressed.² The understanding and the interpretation of the wider areas in which the former industrial sites are included allows the recording of the structural elements of the space, which in turn are the main axes of the renewal programs.³ In this context we can identify two axes in the programs of renewal of former industrial sites, which we used for our research:

- the preservation of the historical identity and
- the perspectives for the future development of deindustrialized cities

The preservation of the historical identity

The loss of production jobs has reduced the density and diversity of French industrial cities.⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶ 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 former industrial sites.⁷ 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).⁸ Beyond the safeguarding of buildings and memory, there is a particular interest in sustainable development in terms of overall energy savings or, more generally, reconversion can be a lever for the revitalization of entire districts and territories.⁹

The perspectives for the future development of deindustrialized cities

At international level the interest to engage citizens in the processes of renewal of urban voids (including former industrial sites) starts in 1990's and is linked to preoccupations about environmental protection and urban resilience.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ For many French researchers like Hoffman-Martinot 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 to safeguard and repurpose obsolete sites.¹²

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.¹³ 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 renewal in France. We can mention the two cases studies of the paper in which there is a collaboration of inhabitants' associations with professional associations working on the subject of preservation of industrial heritage.

Methods

The method adopted for the research was the descriptive-analytic, in which the descriptive method is used in order to define memory culture, identify its main axes in the programs of renewal of former industrial sites and relate it to previous studies in deindustrialized cities. The correlation between sustainable urban development, citizen engagement and projection and redevelopment of industrial heritage was performed through an analytic method.

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, urban planners and scholars working on the local industrial heritage 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 territorial policies, aiming to contribute to the active involvement of the local society in the projects of preservation of industrial heritage.

Case studies

Nantes

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 renewal of former industrial sites as *Ile-de-Nantes* (figure 1), was chosen as a case study due to its urban planning policies which combined modern economic policies while preserving the local industrial heritage. These policies primarily were chosen as measures in order to reverse the significant population decline that the city faced after the closure of the local industries in the late 1980's.



FIGURE 1. The park of the shipyards in *Ile-de-Nantes*, ©Varvara Toura, 2019

Saint-Ouen

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 the 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 renewal of former industrial sites as the *Docks-de-Seine* (figure 2) that started since 2005.



FIGURE 2. The main park of the *Docks-de-Seine*, ©Varvara Toura, 2019

The two case studies chosen show a different vision of the issue of preservation of industrial heritage as they were not developed at the same period. In the current paper we will compare the urban planning policies adopted for the two case studies after their deindustrialization era in order to underline that the political, economic and social context plays a major role in the strategies of preservation of the historical identity of former industrial cities.

Results

Preservation of the historical identity

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*. Since the early 1990's we observe a strong commitment of local associations of former industrial workers, scholars (Jean-Louis Kerouanton), politicians (Jean-Marc Ayrault) and the first design team (*atelier Alexandre Chemetoff*) in the preservation of the local industrial heritage, which led to a memory culture through the rehabilitation of former industrial buildings, publications and expositions regarding the working conditions and social life of former industrial workers (figure 3).

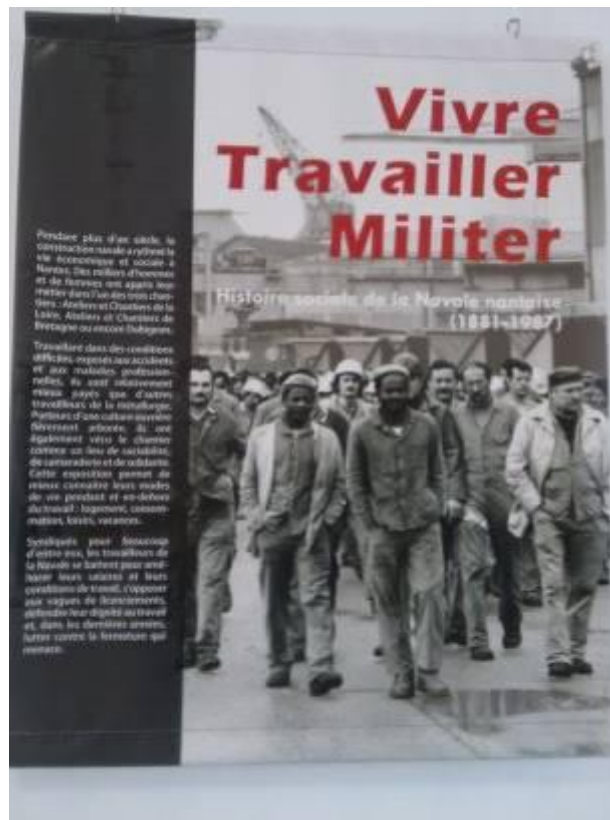


FIGURE 3. The exposition *Vivre-travailler-Militer* organized in *Ile-de-Nantes* in 2019, ©Varvara Toura, 2019

The discussions between scholars, inhabitants, local politicians and the team of Alexander Chemetoff played a key role in the first plans of district's renewal as they integrated in the new plans several neighborhoods where lived the former industrial workers (*le quartier des Fonderies*).

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 renewal program for central districts, as large zones alongside the river *Seine* were left inactive. Since the beginning of the project in 2005 we observe a strong commitment by local enterprises (*Alstom*), inhabitants' associations (*Mon voisin des Docks*), politicians (Jacqueline Rouillon) and historians working at the department of cultural heritage of *Seine-Saint-Denis* in the preservation of the local industrial heritage. Several policies were implemented as the rehabilitation of former industrial buildings and book publications, while at the same time the gardens of the former industrial workers were integrated in the district's renewal plan by *atelier Makan Rafatdjou* (figure 4).



FIGURE 4. The gardens of the former industrial workers in *Docks-de-Seine*, ©Varvara Toura, 2019

Urban planning for deindustrialized cities

The interviews that we conducted in *Nantes* from 2017 to 2019 showed that the financing of the renewal program of *Ile-de-Nantes* by funds of the European Union, allowed the design teams (*atelier Alexandre Chemetoff, ateliers Marcel Smets et Anne-Mie Depuydt, ateliers Claire Schorter et Jacqueline Osty*) to experiment with and propose new creative territorial policies for the renewal 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 and the economic and social growth of the district after several years of recession through the creation of research institutes, eco-friendly industries and industrial museums. This transition towards a new economic development model resulted also in the increase of city's population (figure 5).

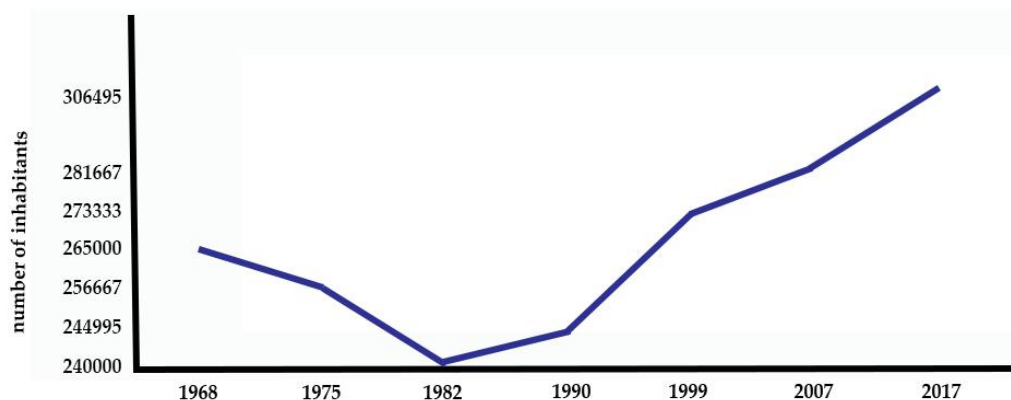


FIGURE 5. Demographic evolution in *Nantes* between 1968 and 2017, ©Varvara Toura, 2019

In the case study of *Saint-Ouen* the inscription of *Docks* in the program of the French Ministry of Environment for the creation of *écoquartiers* in districts for urban renewal (*Label écoquartier*), allowed the team that undertook the design project (*atelier Makan Rafatdjou*) to experiment with new territorial policies. The city of *Saint-Ouen*, and particularly the *Docks* district, are part of the renewal program of the greater Paris area (*Grand Paris*), resulting in the creation of competitiveness clusters of metropolitan interest. These policies included the engagement of 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 an eco-friendly energy pole and private guided visits of the local industrial monuments. Like the first case study the transition towards a new economic development model resulted also in the increase of city's population (figure 6).

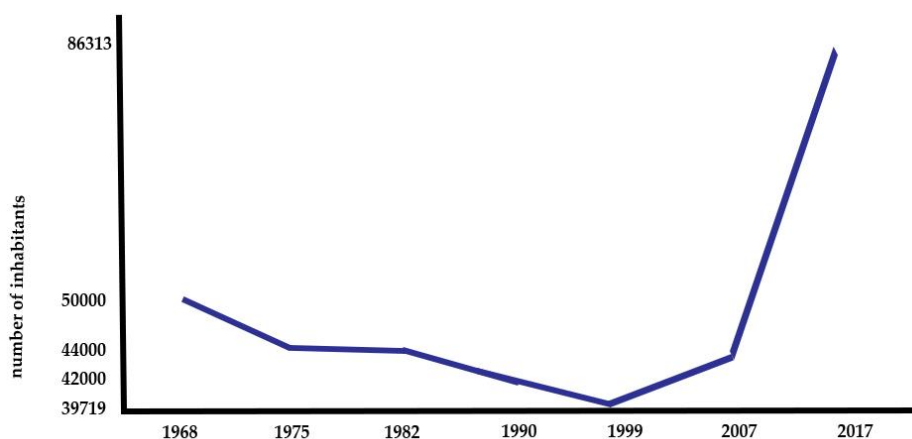


FIGURE 6. Demographic evolution in *Saint-Ouen* between 1968 and 2017, ©Varvara Toura, 2019

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.

Conclusions

The two case studies showed us that the active involvement of the local society in the projects of urban renewal could lead to new models of architecture and city planning that focus on the needs of users while preserving the traces of the industrial past. At the same time we must underline the different renewal policies used in the two case studies- in *Nantes* a progressive transition from the deindustrialization to sustainable and participatory urban policies, alongside with policies of preservation of the city's industrial past while in *Saint-Ouen* there is an inscription of an urban renewal project in a national strategic plan for the revitalization of urban areas- as they help us to understand the transformations of French deindustrialized cities and the different aspects of their interface. The final conclusion of the research is that the goal of urban growth in former industrial cities could be reached by applying a sustainable urban planning model which combines modern economic policies and a reuse of the local industrial heritage.

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