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The transformations of industrial brownfields into sustainable neighborhoods, a stepping-stone towards the sustainable city: the case studies of Ile-de-Nantes and Docks-de-Seine

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The thesis questions the meaning of ‘industrial heritage’ in former industrial cities, both in terms of preservation of industrial heritage and with regard to current urban planning policies such as sustainable development and citizen engagement. The thesis’ subject was chosen by reflecting on existing studies, particularly in France and in French-speaking countries, on the question of redevelopment of former industrial cities and the conversion of industrial brownfields derived from the internal reorganization of cities and the economic dimension of sustainable development (works of geographers and economists such as those of Claude Chaline, Jean Claude Daumas, Corinne Luxembourg and Dalila Messaoudi). At the same time, published reports such as those of TICCIH (The international committee for the conservation of the industrial heritage) at international level and CILAC (Comité international pour la conservation du patrimoine industriel) in France, of Vincent Veschambre and of Maria Gravari-Barbas, address the question of industrial brownfields’ heritage as a vector of local growth. On the other hand, publications in the field of urban studies in the 1980s and particularly after 2000 by geographers, economists and urban planners (I quote the works of Aurélien Boutaud, Jacques Theys, Cyria Emelianoff and Taoufik Souami) on the application of the concept of sustainable development at territorial level raise the question of integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic development, protection of the environment, social equity) in programs for the reconversion of industrial brownfields. However, it should be noted that among the three dimensions, the one that is less addressed is the social dimension of sustainable development (there are references in the works of Camille Gardesse and Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger on the involvement of inhabitants in sustainable urban projects), which in the case of industrial cities echoes their identity as working-class cities. The identity of industrial cities refers to the spatial organization as well as the social ties among the inhabitants. In this context, the thesis aims to answer the question of how industrial identity could be part of the new organization of deindustrialized cities and in particular of the so-called sustainable spatial planning models?

To answer this question I have chosen to analyze the thesis subject by using a top-down model in 4 spatial scales, the intermunicipality, the city, the district and the building in order to study, on the one hand, the policies and mechanisms of the transformation of industrial cities and the reconversion of brownfields (safeguarding of local heritage, economic development, reconstitution of nature within cities, citizen engagement) as well as the actors involved in these procedures (local elected officials, professional associations and inhabitants). I chose the scale of district, an intermediate spatial scale between the scales of city and building, for the study of case studies as it allows the study of the application of territorial policies (either on the preservation of heritage or on sustainable development) at local level, as well as the encounters with the actors involved, in particular inhabitants’ associations, in the programs for the reconversion of industrial brownfields. The aim of these encounters was to study the interplay of actors and the form of citizen engagement.

The two case studies chosen for the thesis are considered as exemplary models in regard to the main questions addressed in the thesis (industrial identity, preservation of industrial heritage, economic development, environmental protection, and citizen engagement). On the one hand we have the reconversion project Ile-de-Nantes, a brownfield within the former industrial city of Nantes in the west of France, a city with a significant industrial heritage. The project functions as a vector of local economic and demographic growth.



Figure 1. Economic development on the site of Ile-de-Nantes through the conversion of industrial remnants into industrial museums and the construction of residential and office buildings. ©Author, 2023.

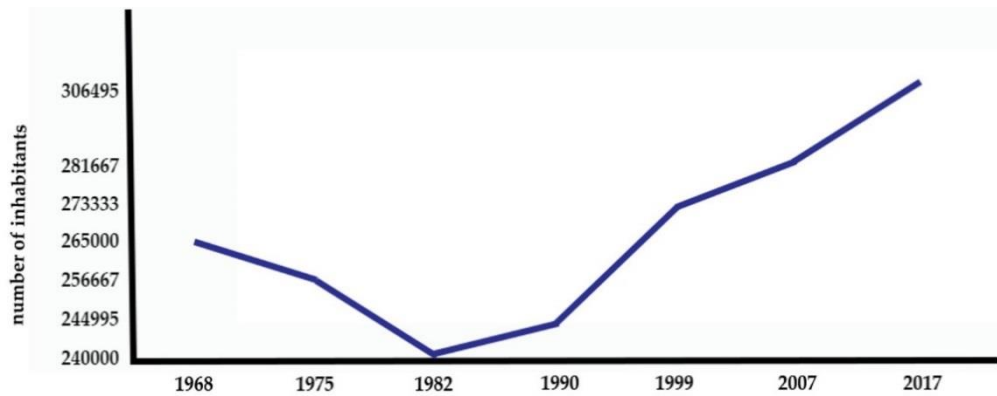


Figure 2. Demographic evolution in Nantes between 1968 and 2017. ©Author, 2023.

On the other hand, we have the reconversion project Docks-de-Seine, a brownfield located in the city of Saint-Ouen in the outskirts of Paris, a city characterized in the last 20 years by its urban transformations (spatial, economic, social), in which industrial activities have never ceased to exist. The project functions (as the first case study in Nantes) as a vector of local economic and demographic growth.



Figure 3. Economic development on the site of Docks-de-Seine through the conversion of industrial remnants into exhibition spaces and the construction of residential and office buildings. ©Author, 2023.

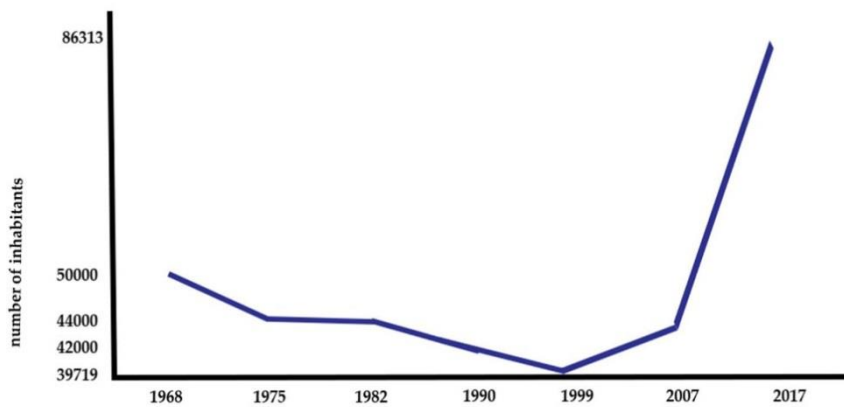


Figure 4. Demographic evolution in Saint-Ouen between 1968 and 2017. ©Author, 2023.

The main objective of the case studies' choice was to examine contemporary territorial policies on the subject of reconversion of industrial brownfields which are located within and on the outskirts of cities, seeking to propose a methodological analysis framework for professionals and scholars (study of the subject of reconversion on different spatial scales, by considering the urban heritage and the economic, environmental, and social dimension of sustainable development). The two case studies show different approaches (methods, policies) on the subject of reconversion of industrial brownfields, which seems to lead to the sustainable development of former industrial cities. However, at the scale of city we should note that the development of Saint-Ouen continues to be based on industrial activities. This means that the safeguarding of the local industrial identity is based on the presence of industries and social housing for low-income populations. On the other hand, in Nantes, the safeguarding of industrial identity is based on the rehabilitation of former industrial buildings and the networks of professional associations and inhabitants who work on the questions of industrial heritage and community life at different scales through the consultation or active engagement of the inhabitants. We can see that even if the objective of the two projects seems to be the same (the sustainable development of cities), the local context (more favorable in Nantes than in Saint-Ouen)

and the evolution of the projects over time (an urban project in three phases in Nantes versus a project whose objectives have been the same since its first phase in Saint-Ouen) differentiate them.

The thesis' inscription in the field of social sciences (urban sociology, geography, political science), helps to introduce new contributions in relation to the existing literature on the questions of the social dimension of reconversion of industrial brownfields and the characteristics of this procedure. The works of French historians such as those of Annie Fourcaut show the working-class character of industrial cities which could be maintained in reconversion programs. For their part, the work of French sociologists such as those of Muriel Tapie-Grime on the social dimension of sustainable development reveal citizen engagement as a key element in the redevelopment of these sites. For my part, I emphasized the role and actions taken by inhabitants in the programs for the reconversion of industrial brownfields, which aim to maintain the working-class character of these places as well as to involve inhabitants in the production of their living environments. The existing literature on the form of reconversion is based primarily on one of its dimensions, for example the environmental dimension (I quote the works of Michel Letté) or the economic dimension such as the works of Lilas Demmou. As for the reconversion of industrial brownfields, it is often linked to the rehabilitation of industrial buildings. The best-known works on this subject are those of Philippe Robert and Bernard Reichen. For my part, I have chosen to broaden the question of the reconversion of industrial brownfields and its characteristics by considering it as a procedure that refers to three spatial scales (city, district, building), which includes policies and practices of heritage protection and urban planning, and which refers both to material (such as buildings and industrial districts) and immaterial heritage (such as the social ties among the inhabitants).

The question of the preservation of local memory, which is often cited by institutional actors as a good practice in regard to the subject of the reconversion of industrial brownfields, has also its contradictions according to the two parameters analyzed in the thesis (preservation of industrial buildings, preservation of social fabric). The concept of industrial heritage is changing with the emergence of Critical Heritage Studies which consider heritage as an evolutionary process that responds to the needs of contemporary societies in terms of sustainable development, economy, or culture. The industrial heritage of the two case studies goes beyond the rehabilitation of certain industrial buildings and also includes the creation of industrial museums, publications, and exhibitions on the places of industrial production and the living conditions of former industrial workers as well as guided tours of industrial monuments. We can see, therefore, that industrial heritage contributes to the economic development of deindustrialized cities with the creation of new jobs and at the same time it offers the possibility of a collaborative economy with the direct engagement of local communities in the development process of their living environments.

The notions of citizen engagement and citizen know-how cited as fundamental subjects for the reappropriation of deindustrialized sites often encounter the question of spatial scale (city, district). In both case studies, I found that citizen engagement refers to the direct involvement of inhabitants in the redevelopment processes of the two sites, often mobilized by inhabitants' associations and activists working on the issues of preservation of industrial heritage and environmental protection (associations of former industrial workers in Nantes and the inhabitants' association *Mon voisin des docks* in Saint-Ouen). In addition, I have observed that urban planners and local elected officials have chosen to engage the inhabitants in the planning processes of small-scale urban projects, those of the district. The scale of city remains even for the two case studies a scale for big-scale urban projects and citizen engagement at this scale refers to the consultation of the inhabitants in the programming phase. I note, therefore, difficulties in generalizing participatory urban planning practices to the scale of city without the agreement of local elected officials and developers who refuse to delegate part of their power during the development of big-scale urban projects. Despite the difficulties and constraints for the generalization of participatory processes at city level, the study of the two projects showed that the two cities could benefit from micro-local experiences, as the inhabitants were involved in urban

projects whose objectives go beyond the scale of district (preservation of industrial heritage, environmental protection). In addition, we must underline that in both case studies, citizen know-how refers to the desire of a certain number of inhabitants, activists, or members of inhabitants' associations, to involve people who do not participate often in participatory urban planning processes (for example immigrants and young workers), as well as creating an associative network to share their experiences beyond the district scale. We can see, therefore, that activism on the scale of the district as well as the experiences of micro-local urban projects, would contribute to the generalization of advanced participatory mechanisms on the scale of city, by including in this type of land use planning people with different profiles (age, ethnic origin, socio-professional category).

To go further on the subject of the reconversion of industrial brownfields and their redevelopment in a sustainable way, the thesis also underlined the risk of gentrification in former industrial cities as their working-class identity changes with the arrival of executives and the rejection towards the cities' periphery of the modest socio-professional categories. Can we continue to talk about industrial identity in the context of gentrified city? Policies such as the creation of social housing, the control of property prices and subsidies for access to housing could reverse this trend. However, we must ask ourselves under what conditions are such achievements possible while maintaining the industrial and working-class character of these cities? It is the local political and social context that plays a major role in making decisions on the content of brownfields' reconversion programs. Not all cities have the means to allow such operations either because they lack funding or because they are in strong decline. Voluntarism and political stability at local level, active associative networks, and favorable financing conditions (public-private partnership, public funds, European Union funds) make these achievements possible and at the same time differentiate them according to issues and orientations determined by different actors. In addition, we should note that a certain number of cities, especially at European level, find the opportunity to finance such operations through the organization of sporting (for example the Olympic Games in London in 2012 where the Olympic village was built on an industrial brownfield on the city's outskirts) or cultural events (for example the program of the European city of culture whose host city is often a deindustrialized one). We could, therefore, speak of the exceptional conditions and means (financing, media coverage) that lead to the realization of this type of operation.

However, we must also note the high cost of such operations, even in the case of large, deindustrialized cities, because the financing of such projects requires significant economic funds, at the risk of disfavoring other municipal actions (health, education, housing). In addition, these territorial policies are concentrated only on a certain number of city's districts, when the ideal would be to include them in municipal action programs that refer to the urban renewal of several poor city sectors. Future research on the subject of brownfield conversion could address the question of how good urban practices in the field of sustainable development would be generalized, especially in the cities of global South. However, we can see that there are 'negative' points that should be considered in the application of sustainable development projects in these cities, which are already subjected to strong social and spatial inequities, such as the rise in real estate prices and the rejection of the working classes towards the cities' outskirts. The aim is to help them develop legal frameworks and technical capacities, in order to formulate and implement their own models of sustainable cities while preserving the traces of their industrial past.

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