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Reshaping the industrial urban landscape: an innovative approach or a means to gentrification?

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Abstract

The paper questions the meaning of preservation of industrial remnants in former industrial cities. Isolated buildings as factories and abandoned infrastructure and equipment dated on the industrial era are often demolished in favor of contemporary buildings which seem to better correspond to contemporary aesthetics. 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 two case studies of the paper are considered as exemplary models of architectural and urban design forms in former industrial cities. On the one hand we have the reconversion project Ile-de-Nantes, a brownfield within the former industrial city of Nantes, a city with a significant industrial heritage. 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 study and comparison of the two case studies revealed the risk of gentrification in former industrial cities as their working-class identity changes due to the arrival of executives and the rejection towards the cities' periphery of the modest socio-professional categories. 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.

Keywords: *industrial heritage; urban regeneration; cultural identity; gentrification; France.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Former industrial cities are characterised after their deindustrialization by the presence on their urban fabric of remnants of their industrial past such as buildings, infrastructure and equipment reflecting industrial activities of previous decades. The question of reintegration of these elements to the urban fabric and the consequent transformation of the former industrial landscape are primarily based on urban regeneration programs and on the social, economic and environmental reactivation of the deindustrialized sites [1]. These programs usually involve the conservation of industrial buildings as a measure of preservation of local history and collective memory of the living and working conditions of former industrial workers [2]. At the same time, we observe in several cases of urban regeneration programs in deindustrialized cities conflicts of interest between the procedures of heritage making and neoliberal urban development practices in architecture and urban design which lead to the demolition of infrastructure and equipment dated on the industrial era and the consequent construction of contemporary buildings by star architects which seem to better correspond to users' needs and contemporary aesthetics [3]. The decision to preserve or not preserve the places of industrial production is not neutral, according to French researcher Vincent Veschambre [4] and it depends on the decisions of the municipalities of deindustrialized cities and

project managers of urban regeneration projects on the ways in which architectural and urban design is supposed to face the consequences of deindustrialization (social and economic decline) [5].

The question of preservation of industrial heritage and its reintegration to the urban fabric is based on the principle of conservation of historical urban forms as well as a reminiscence of the social character of the architectural design of the buildings of these areas, especially of the industrial workers' houses [6]. In France, Robert and Reichen, propose new forms and uses for the old industrial buildings such as industrial museums and houses based on the principles of circular economy (recycle of buildings) and preservation of urban heritage [7]. In Great Britain the urban fabric of former industrial cities that were highly urbanized such as Liverpool and Manchester retained its centralities from the industrial era as a result of the strategic relay points of trade routes [8]. Even though the media highlight the clash between different values and meanings (on one hand the conservation of cities' past that no longer exists and on the other hand the cities' future based on new forms of architecture and economic activities), we must underline that there is a different approach in the content of urban regeneration/renewal programs. This means that decision-makers (local elected officials, developers, urban planners, architects) choose either to restore and reuse old industrial buildings or to demolish them in order to transform the industrial urban landscape [9].

2. HOW TO RESHAPE THE INDUSTRIAL URBAN LANDSCAPE? INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF CRITICAL HERITAGE STUDIES

The concept of industrial heritage is changing with the emergence of Critical Heritage Studies which consider the conservation of industrial heritage as an evolutionary process that responds to the needs of contemporary societies in terms of sustainable development, economy, or culture [10]. This practically means that the appearance of preoccupations since the 1980s at international level about social, economic, and environmental sustainability of cities, creates new challenges for the preservation of industrial heritage as the industrial buildings can be restored and reused in order to have a second life for example as housing units and cultural spaces [11]. We must also underline the fact that many reconversion projects of industrial brownfields contribute to boost social actions and environmental responsibility in architecture and urban design [12] such as the case study of the urban regeneration project Ile-de-Nantes in France.

In this context the principal hypothesis of the paper is to consider that the preservation of architectural and urban design forms in former industrial areas can lead to the reshape of the industrial urban landscape and to the conservation of essential meanings in architecture and urban design as a means against a possible gentrification scenario. Through a critical examination of the procedures of preservation of industrial heritage in programs of urban regeneration in deindustrialized cities, which are often characterized by neoliberal practices, the objective of the paper is to question the policies and tools which seem to contribute to the transformation of deindustrialized territories. At the same time the paper will investigate the ways in which a balance in city planning could be achieved between the construction of new contemporary buildings and the conservation and reuse of industrial buildings. In order to respond to the main hypothesis of the paper we used data (interviews, socio-economic elements) collected from two programs of industrial reconversion in France which highlight the context of preservation of industrial heritage and the risks of gentrification.

3. REUSE, RESHAPE, TRANSFORM THE INDUSTRIAL URBAN LANDSCAPE OF FRENCH DEINDUSTRIALIZED CITIES

The two case studies of the paper are considered as exemplary models of architectural and urban design forms in former industrial cities as they allow the dialogue between buildings, equipment, and infrastructure of different eras (industrial, contemporary). On the one hand we have the

reconversion project Ile-de-Nantes, a brownfield within the former industrial city of Nantes at the west of France, a city with a significant industrial heritage. The project functions as a vector for the development of new architectural forms in public buildings (for example the local courthouse). On the other hand, we have the reconversion project Docks-de-Seine, a brownfield located in the city of Saint-Ouen in the north suburbs 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 for the development of new architectural forms in office buildings (for example the buildings of Alstom). The study and comparison of the two case studies revealed the risk of gentrification in former industrial cities and the swift to different values and meanings in architecture closer to a more productive dimension due to the design of public and commercial buildings by star architects, the limited number of social housing units and the uses of the former industrial buildings. The results of this trend are the arrival of executives in deindustrialized areas and the rejection towards the cities' periphery of the modest socio-professional categories.

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

Table 1. Number of working positions in Nantes, *INSEE and City of Nantes* (2018). It is interesting to compare the numbers of senior managers and intermediate professions to the number of industrial workers, in order to understand the swift to a different economic model.

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

Table 2. Number of working positions in Saint-Ouen, *INSEE and City of Saint-Ouen* (2018). It is interesting to compare the numbers of senior managers and intermediate professions to the number of industrial workers, in order to understand the swift to a different economic model.

3.1 The Ile-de-Nantes project: regeneration based on the local sources.

In 1987 the Bougainville, is the last ship constructed in the shipyards located at the west of the industrial site of Ile-de-Nantes. After a prosperous industrial era, only brownfields remain on this site. The future of the territory was part of the debates during the municipal elections in Nantes in 1989. During the 1990s the team led by Jean-Marc Ayrault launched a period of reflections on the future of the site which embodies both the preservation of its industrial past and the solving of social problems linked to the closure of shipyards, as well as the possibility of reactivation and regeneration of the site. The idea of transformation of the entire territory, uniting its three parts in a

dynamic way, emerges. The desire of the municipal team for an extension of the historic center of Nantes towards the site of Ile-de-Nantes is shown by the proposal of the city to the French government in 1996 to construct on the site the new City Courthouse. To formulate the project the Municipality launched a contract in 1998.

The Atelier de l'Ile-de-Nantes, a team of architects, urban planners and landscape architects led by the architectural studio of Alexandre Chemetoff, was the first to be selected in order to implement the strategy and political ambitions of the municipal team. The first phase of studies, which lasted ten years (2000-2010), resulted in the desire to reconsider the island as a whole and to define an urban regeneration project adapted to the new economic, environmental, and social challenges without denying the local urban history that has shaped its territory. In this context several industrial buildings were preserved especially on the site of the former shipyards and were reused as museums and exposition spaces.

During the ten years of project management by the team of Alexander Chemetoff we can see his vision for the regeneration of the site through small-scale urban projects concerning the site's public spaces and buildings. These include: the Schoelcher footbridge built in 2001, a pedestrian bridge that connects the historical center of Nantes to the site, the Boulevard De Gaulle built in 2007 that connects the north and south part of the site and the Quai des Antilles built in 2007 which echoes the industrial and port memory of Ile-de-Nantes. We should note the will of the Municipality of Nantes and the team of project management to create an urban project whose design is linked to territorial experiments. In fact, the Guide Plan, a design method proposed by the team of Alexander Chemetoff for the urban regeneration project of Ile-de-Nantes based on a reconfiguration of the site's public spaces, provides broad guidelines for the development of the urban regeneration project which allow the preservation of the industrial heritage in the redevelopment of the different site sectors.

The turning point towards more neoliberal practices in architectural and urban design forms is the construction on the site of Ile-de-Nantes in 2008 of the Beaulieu Commercial Center and Nantes School of Architecture in 2009 which will give a new vision for the resilience of the site based on cultural and commercial activities. The later construction of the University hospital center of Nantes on the site of Ile-de-Nantes is based on the same principle which underlines the importance of big infrastructure and equipment in order to achieve urban resilience. Besides this vision towards a productive dimension in architectural and urban design we must underline the risk of gentrification as we have seen previously in the Table 1 which shows a swift towards tertiary activities.

The restoration of the link between the territory and its industrial past through the redevelopment of the quays and banks, which was part of the strategy of the Chemetoff team, is pursued during the project management led by the team Smets and Depuydt (2010-2017). During this phase of the project the banks of the Loire River are transformed into places for walking and leisure. The study of site's landscape relief is also based on other founding elements of the site's urban history, such as the railway infrastructure, which is integrated into the site's regeneration project in order to play a new role.

In this second operational period of the project, we can see the will of the management team and the Municipality of Nantes to continue the redevelopment processes, begun by the previous management team. On the other hand, it should be noted the different policies for the preservation of industrial heritage during this phase of the project which are not based on the rehabilitation of the industrial buildings of the site but on the inscription of traces of the industrial past in a system of parks that unite the various neighbourhoods of the site. In addition, it can be noted that the Transformations Plan, a design method proposed by the team Smets and Depuydt based on the study of the landscape's relief, is an operational document that provides broad guidelines for the development of the project, as was done previously by the Guide Plan of the team Chemetoff. We can therefore see a local urban planning approach (*urbanisme à la nantaise*) that highlights territorial experiments in architectural and urban design which allows a balance in city planning through the construction of new contemporary buildings and the conservation and reuse of industrial buildings.

However, it should be mentioned that the construction of big infrastructure and equipment on the site such as the University Hospital and the City Courthouse, as well as the creation of neighbourhoods that promote commercial and cultural activities, have modified the social character of the project. The shift to different values and meanings in architecture closer to a more productive dimension is evident and has as a result the arrival of executives and entrepreneurs and the increase of rentals and property sale prices.

3.2 The Docks-de-Seine project: regeneration based on a national program for the reactivation of wastelands (*friches*).

The willing of a group of industrialists to create an outer harbour downstream in Saint-Ouen near the Paris Metropolis has contributed to the economic attractiveness of the city and its surroundings with the arrival of internationally renowned companies and many state-owned enterprises. The departure of the industries gradually changed the face of the district of the Docks-de-Seine. At the beginning of 2000 (departure of Total in 2003 and Alstom in 2004), discussions began at municipal level in order to give new functions to the Docks site while preserving its industrial heritage. This objective was interpreted by the Municipality of Saint-Ouen and the project management team as the need to connect the city center of Saint-Ouen to the industrial remnants of the site in order to offer to the Docks new development perspectives. The goal of the Municipality of Saint-Ouen and the developers is to transform the industrial site into a mixed-use sustainable neighbourhood (*écoquartier* in French) an urban planning practice already used in other French cities, with the reuse of former industrial buildings and the maintenance and development of important metropolitan facilities on the site (energy pole of Saint-Ouen). The project management team selected is led by Makan Rafatdjou (architect) and is consisted by urban planning and landscape agencies (Agence Reichen & Robert & Associés, Olga Tarraso, Hélène Saudecerre, Peria & Pena, Coup d'Eclat, Beri, Ter Agency). The development of the urban regeneration project of the Docks-de-Seine began in 2007 with the creation of the ZAC of the Docks (Urban Development Zone).

The realization of the development project is the result of two factors. On the one hand, the creation of the ZAC, result of a reflection carried out by the Municipality of Saint-Ouen for the transformation of its territory. On the other hand, the announcement of Total in March 2003 of the closure of its factory at the east part of the site of the Docks, resulted in the lifting of the Seveso perimeter (industrial sector with a risk of major accidents) and in the first urban planning projects for the site's redevelopment in 2004 as part of the local PADD (Planning and Sustainable Development Framework). According to the PADD the site of the Docks will be part of an urban regeneration program that includes all city's brownfields while at the same time its urban regeneration program is in line with the Municipality's strategy to preserve and demonstrate its industrial fabric through the rehabilitation and reuse of former industrial buildings.

The purchase of 18.8 ha of the site of the Docks by the French real estate group Nexity in March 2004 (initially they belonged to the French enterprise Alstom) shows the differentiation of the project from other sustainable neighbourhoods in France, because in this case we can find a private company among the team of developers of the urban regeneration project. This vision to include private companies in the development of the site is described in the 2008 PLU (Local Urban Planning Plan) as a strategy that aims to attract private investors who in turn will contribute to new forms of architectural and urban design as well as to economic resilience.

The strategy of the Municipality to attract private companies for the funding of the project of the Docks-de-Seine led to a shift from industrial activities to tertiary ones, to the demolition of industrial buildings in order to construct new buildings in the perimeter that belongs to Nexity as well as to a change of the socio-professional status of the city's inhabitants as we have seen in previous part of the paper. The construction of office buildings on the site of the Docks is also linked to the previous construction of office buildings to the nearby Victor Hugo neighbourhood in which former industrial buildings were demolished.

The real estate developer Nexity is looking to develop a policy of co-creation of the territory and collaboration in the processes of urban regeneration. Through its role as a contracting authority, it seizes to guarantee opportunities for the group's real estate development subsidiaries and companies. What we should note from Nexity's speech is its ambition to be directly involved in urban regeneration projects, as is the case of the Docks-de-Seine. In this context, Nexity tries to assume the financing of the whole urban regeneration project (buildings, equipment, infrastructure) and become a contracting authority through the purchase of the industrial land. We should also mention the shift to the values and meanings in the architectural design of social housing in an industrial area as the prices of Nexity's housing are higher compared to the ones of other companies. A tripartite agreement between the Municipality of Saint-Ouen, Séquano Aménagement and Nexity was concluded in 2009, before being revised in 2012, in order to guarantee the project management of the ZAC of the Docks.

The agreement signed between the Municipality of Saint-Ouen, Séquano Aménagement (project's contractor) and Nexity seems to have slowed down the ambitions of Nexity to develop and commercialize the Dhalenne sector and thus profoundly change its working-class character in architectural and urban design forms. However, its involvement in the urban regeneration project of the Docks, following the purchase of land by the Alstom group, attracted several investors interested in tertiary activities and led to the demolition of industrial buildings even though certain buildings such as the Hall Alstom were preserved and restored. These activities change the meaning of urban resilience in industrial areas as the social character of the Docks project (a project for all, especially low-income families, and immigrants) is confronted with a productive dimension in architectural design and with the gentrification processes already observed in Saint-Ouen and in other municipalities of the Ile-de-France region.

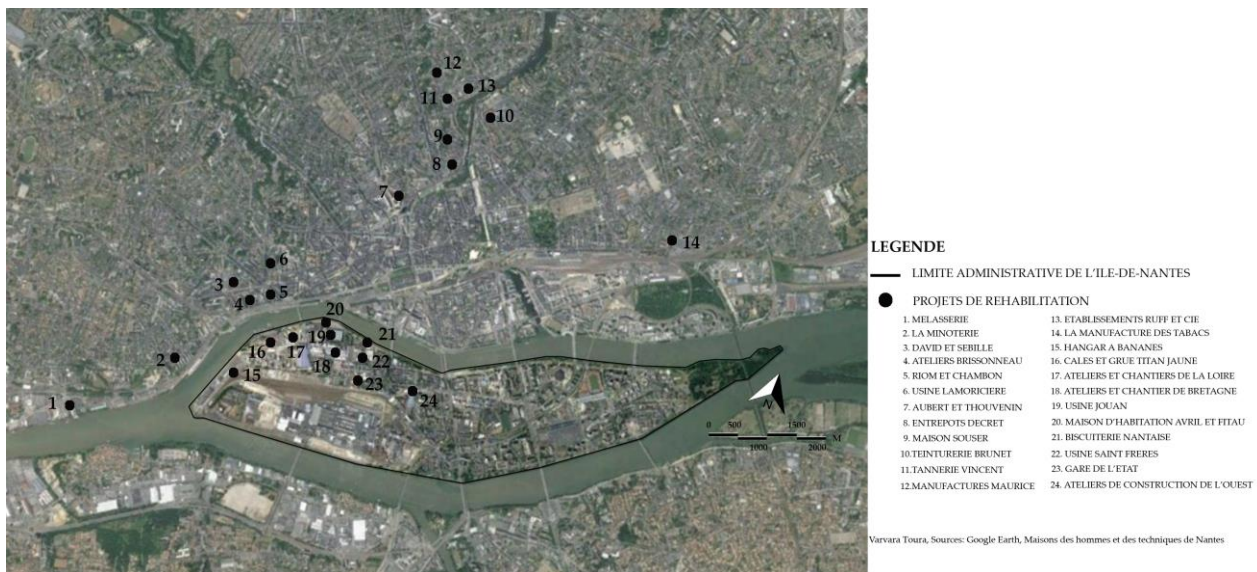


Figure 1. Map of the industrial buildings that were reconverted and reused in Nantes, Ile-de-Nantes sector and city center, Source: Varvara Toura, 2023

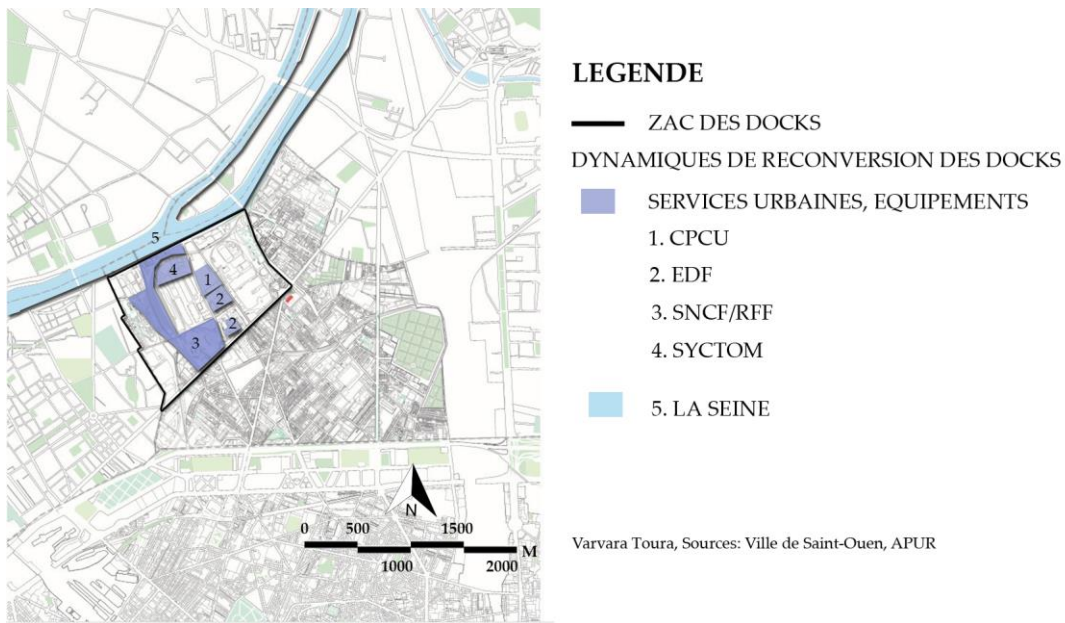


Figure 2. Map representing the industries present on the site of the Docks-de-Seine and the proximity with the river Seine, Source: Varvara Toura, 2023



Figure 3. The transformation of the industrial urban landscape of the Ile-de-Nantes, reconverted industrial buildings, housing units and tertiary activities, Source: Varvara Toura, 2019



Figure 4. The transformation of the industrial urban landscape of the Docks-de-Seine, reconverted industrial buildings, industrial units and tertiary activities, Source: Varvara Toura, 2019

4. CONCLUSION

The issue of preserving the industrial urban heritage, which is often cited by stakeholders as a good practice regarding the subject of urban regeneration of industrial brownfields, has also its contradictions according to the two parameters of preservation of industrial heritage (preservation of the built heritage, preservation of the social fabric). It is evident from the previous analysis of the context of the two regeneration programs that the working-class character of former industrial districts no longer exists with the arrival of executives in these territories. Despite the replacement of industrial activities by tertiary ones, traces of the industrial past are still present on both sites (we can note the rehabilitation of old industrial buildings in the Ile-de-Nantes project and the continuous presence of industrial activities on the site of Docks-de-Seine). The preservation of industrial heritage of the two sites goes beyond the rehabilitation of certain industrial buildings and also includes the creation of industrial museums, publications, and exhibitions regarding the places of industrial production and the living conditions of former industrial workers, as well as guided tours of industrial monuments. Therefore, it can be seen, that the industrial heritage contributes to the urban resilience of the two cities with the preservation of architectural and urban design forms while at the same time it offers the possibility of a collaborative economy with the direct participation of local communities in the planning processes of their living environments.

5. DISCUSSION

To go further on the subject of urban regeneration of industrial brownfields and their development in a resilient and beneficiary way for the local communities, we should underline the link between the location of brownfields (inside or on the outskirts of cities), the architectural and urban design forms of the industrial era (factories, small industrial units, social housing, administration offices) and the policies and obstacles for their reconversion. Brownfield sites on the outskirts of large cities are part of urban expansion dynamics in order to respond to the need for new housing that is less expensive to the real estate prices in central districts. Real estate prices in peripheral neighbourhoods have increased over time and have led to a change in the identity of these neighbourhoods, which are no longer working-class neighbourhoods but rather gentrified places.

Brownfield sites inside cities centers are part of urban regeneration programs which include the reuse and reconversion of industrial infrastructure and the creation of public spaces on these sites. These urban regeneration programs often include the construction of new residential buildings whose real estate prices are the same to those in other central city neighbourhoods. The socio-economic identity of central city districts has changed, as has done that of the peripheral districts, with the arrival of executives, which in turn led to the gentrification of working-class neighbourhoods and the rejection of modest socio-professional categories to the periphery of cities. At the same time many industrial buildings were demolished in order to construct new commercial and office buildings. Can we continue to talk about the industrial urban landscape in the context of the gentrified city? Policies such as the reuse of industrial buildings as social housing, property prices' controls and equal access to housing could reverse this trend. However, we must ask ourselves under what conditions are such policies possible while maintaining the industrial and popular character of these sites?

The local political and social context plays a major role in making decisions about the content of brownfield conversion programs. All cities do not have the means to take such operations, either because they lack funding or because they are in economic decline. Voluntarism and political stability at local level (we should mention that the reconversion programs last for several years and the continuity of local policies is a strong point for their implementation), the active associative network (both architectural associations and inhabitants and activists) and the favourable financing conditions (public-private partnership, public funds, European Union funds in the case of member countries) make these policies possible and at the same time differentiate them according to the challenges and orientations determined by the 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 organisation of sporting (for example the Olympic Games in London in 2012 where the Olympic Village was built on an industrial brownfield on the outskirts of the city) or cultural events (such is the case of the European Capital of Culture in which the host city is often a deindustrialized one and industrial buildings are reconverted and reused for cultural activities). We could, therefore, underline the exceptional conditions and means (financing, media coverage) that lead to the realization of this type of operations.

We should also note the confrontation between the concepts and forms of regeneration in the processes of transformation of the industrial urban landscape. In several cases they are based on low-cost practices such as the reuse of existing buildings. In other cases, especially those of large-scale urban regeneration operations, the cost is high as it usually involves the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of new ones. The financing of such projects requires large amounts of capital, at the risk of disadvantaging other municipal policies (health, education, housing). We can see therefore that a balanced transformation of the industrial urban landscape could be achieved through a multiform regeneration program that involves the construction of small-scale contemporary buildings and the conservation and reuse of industrial buildings.

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