

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT AND HIS DECISION-MAKING POWER IN THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS OF SHRINKING CITIES. LEARNING FROM TWO FRENCH EXPERIENCES.

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Abstract

In France, the phenomenon of shrinkage is particularly visible in old industrial cities and in small cities and villages in rural regions. The impact of this process on lands, buildings, uses and landscape asks local stakeholders to act and architects to adapt his thought of space and project at this new urban condition. Until now, the architect answered commands which integrated in urban policies for revitalizing the territory, transforming the image of the city and attracting new populations and new investors. In this way, some cities developed flagship projects and invited often a “starchitect”. Today, with more knowledge of the process, local stakeholders search new alternatives to transform the urban environment for maintaining inhabitants and improving their wellbeing. The architect has an important role in this new position. This communication will focus on the importance and the influence of the architect in the decision-making power of the project ownership to transform the urban fabric and to propose new forms of collaboration between local stakeholders and inhabitants. Two characteristic projects will be study: the project Îlot-test Franche-Amitié at Saint-Etienne and the urban study Habiter les centres-bourgs proposed by the Parc Naturel Régional of Livradois-Forez.

1. Introduction

1.1. The issues of urban transformations in shrinking cities: between urban policies and architectural and urban interventions.

At the beginning of the XXIth century, being interested in shrinking cities and their urban evolution participates in the improvement debates about the adaptability, the reversibility and the resilience of the city. How to continue to transform the city, growing or shrinking, when the global system is questioned after successive crisis (economic, social, political, environmental, etc.)? How urban planners and architects contribute?

The shrinkage phenomenon transforms the city spatially: lands, buildings and infrastructures, uses and landscapes. A diversity of abandoned spaces appears on the same territory: flats, buildings or plots, public spaces or urban infrastructures (Oswalt, 2005). Wastelands can be industrial, residential, commercial or still agricultural. They are in old (city centre) and suburban fabrics, in neighbourhood of blocks of flats, or in villages centres in rural spaces. It exists a new form of porosity in the city between the abandonment of spaces of big dimensions and spaces of small size, which are multiplying and integrated in the urban fabrics. It is particularly visible in Europe (Vigano, 2012). When the built, the plot and the public place are not occupied and maintained, their process of degradation tends to accelerate. The landscape is quickly transformed and the man has to “live” with these abandoned spaces (Anizon, 2010). The perception of empty can vary according to urban morphology. This distinction is perceptible between European and American cities (figure 1). The spatial impacts of this process accentuate or allow several urban issues (social, environmental, security, hygiene, etc.) to

emerge. For example, abandoned spaces can become impassable, participating in the spatial fracture of the city and the isolation of individuals. Abandoned buildings often become place of squat and traffic; and their fragility can threaten nearby inhabitants and the housing (Oswalt, 2005).



Figure 1. The different perceptions of the vacancy. Detroit (Chalmers district), Liverpool (Anfield district) and Saint-Etienne (Tarentaise-Beaubrun-Severin district) between 2013 and 2014.

Source : google street view / google.maps.com

In front of these numerous urban issues, urban planners and architects have to act. This new urban condition is an opportunity to think the city and urban environment differently. However, the climate (difficult and uncertain) and the constraints, linked to demographic, political, socioeconomic and spatial changes, might complicate the urban intervention. The state of the urban environment, -the quality and the degradation of existing building, plots and grounds-, might affect the choice of orientation of the project and its costs. The instability and the uncertainty of the socioeconomic context have to be integrated, but they can impact on the implementation of the project and its sustainability. The capacity of action is often limited because of the lack of human and financial means of the project ownership (public, private or inhabitants) and the public authorities (ex.: depts, bankrupt). It restricts possibilities of the project management to intervene.

Practitioners have to confront with another difficulty: the capacity to think the project and its process. Current tools and methods were developed to answer urban growth and not to this specific phenomenon of shrinkage. Constraints and problems due to the shrinkage ask to adapt themselves and new tools are necessary (Oswald, n.d; Rienets, 2006; Ryan, 2012). For example, the big scale of the vacancy asks to requestion the land management and its tools especially when owners left or when public authorities are little means. It is an essential aspect for the transformation and the reorganisation of shrinking cities, but it is a real difficulty for local authorities.

Today, urban planners and architects with public stakeholders think together about the future of their cities and alternatives approaches to the classic system. The relation between various stakeholders seems essential to find solutions and to realise projects.

This paper will focus on the role of the architect in the definition of new tools to adapt the shrinking cities and his influence on the decision-making power of local authorities. How does the architect participate into thinking of urban strategies ? How does he make the connection between urban policies, the urban strategy and the architectural intervention? Has he a particular influence? How does he lead the project?

Three hypotheses will be explored:

- The architect would highlight the architectural and urban qualities, the potentialities of the territory which was until now depreciated. Like for “urban design theory for the shrinking city ideal”, he “will, by necessity, have to value and incorporate these attributes” (Ryan, 2012). He would allow to change the look of local stakeholders and inhabitants with his specific analysis and knowledge on the site;
- In front of difficulties to lead the project, the architect would propose new forms of collaboration between local stakeholders and inhabitants to facilitate the realisation of project, in short and long term;

- With his operational approach, the architect is capable to think about new ways and tools to manage lands, but also to test it *in situ*. This approach would help owners and project ownerships for the evolution of the city and to anticipate complex situation. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to develop new options for enriching documents and tools of urban planning.

The architect give an essential support of the project ownership at the between the urban strategy and the urban and architectural interventions.

1.2. Case studies and method

To explore these questions, the context of France is interesting. The first remark is that it exists more and more studies and projects treating of issues of shrinkage, in urban and rural region. The second element is that there is a participation and an investment of public authorities in most cases. This choice is also due to my knowledge of the project practice in France, further to my training of architect and urban planner. This work has allowed myself to initiate a reflexion on the condition of the architect and the development of specific roles in front of current cyclical crisis in the profession.

We will analyse two experiences in cities declared in shrinkage by European researchers and statistical datas when projects were started. We have the urban project, the *Îlot-test Franche-Amitié* at Saint-Etienne, and the study *Habiter les centres-bourgs* (Living in center-villages) proposed by the Parc Naturel Régional of Livradois-Forez.

For the analysis, they exist research documents for understanding the process of shrinkage and to explain urban policies in this context. About the project, the analysis made with documents of project presentation (websites, brochures, etc.) and with interviews of architects, teams of project management and local stakeholders when it was possible. These discussions helped to have information, which is not accessible or visible in the communication of initiatives, by the architect or by the municipality. It does not exist currently scientific documents about projects presented here.

Firstly we shall see the current positioning of the architect in reflections on the shrinkage in the international research and in the practice of the project. Then, we shall observe the role of the architect in the passage between the urban strategy and the architectural intervention. We will try to understand why he takes a more and more important place in the assistance for the project ownership and the community project management. This evolution is particular in the case of shrinking cities. To finish, we will explore this question in the specific case of France.

2. The architect, stakeholder involved in the reflection about the urban shrinkage since the 2000s.

2.1. A noted involvement in the international research.

Works of research and scientific debates about the phenomenon shrinkage are linked in general to the fields of geography, sociology, urban planning or political sciences. Many studies interpret mechanisms of shrinkage, but they analyse urban politics too (Großmann and al., 2013; Cunningham-Sabot and al., 2014) like: the governance, the economic development, the management of urban infrastructures (water network, public road network, etc.) or programs of housing and urban renewal.

Architecture, as urban design, is little visible in the international researches until now, in proposed topics in symposium and research networks. The architect can give however a specific vision of space. It is an element on which the architect is presently called to intervene (Corboz et al., 2009). The relation is different from the one of the geographer, be it in methods of analysis, tools or the way of intervening. Even if the architect is trained to intervene in contexts of growth, he is also in capacity to analyse the urban shrinkage. He leans on concrete data, in particular from his field experiences, for

formulating the project and imagining the future. Another track of the research is the capacity to reflect on the transformation of shrinking cities through the process of project and its analysis. To conclude, the architect is able to bring complementary knowledge in definitions, in descriptions of cases studies, in the way to intervene at the scale of plot or block, or in prospective approaches.

One of the first to take an interest in urban and architectural aspects was the research team of the architect Philipp Oswalt, in the framework of the German program *Shrinking City*. One part of their work was to collect experiences in the world, which dealt with the management of the urban shrinkage, as well in term of urban policies and urban actions by the architects, as initiatives of inhabitants. All the work was mediatized between 2004 and 2006. Further to the study, a web site, a set of books and an exhibition was created. This exhibition was presented in Germany, in Europe and in the United States. A striking event was its installation at the 10th International Biennial of Architecture at Venice in 2006. In the fame of this event, numerous practitioners (architects, landscape-architects, urban designers, urban planners, etc.) were able to discover this work and became aware of the urban phenomenon.

Today, the interest for this topic among young researchers in architecture is also to underline and is beginning to distinguish. This assessment is perceptible with PhD students of the network SCRIN¹, and during training schools organized in 2011, 2012 and 2013 by the European program EU-COST action: TU0803 Cities Regrowing Smaller (Wiechmann, 2009) and the University of Dortmund (Germany). For the last workshop in 2013 entitled *Scenarios 2030 - Possible Intendeds of Shrinking Cities in Europe*, there were 5 architects and 1 landscape-architect among 14 invited students.

In the architectural research in France, the shrinkage in all dimensions still little is object of research, even if some interventions and cases of study are submitted to the debate in specialized French periodicals such as *Ecologik*, *D'A*, *Archiscopie*, *AMC*, *Les cahiers thématiques : architecture, histoire, conception*, or *Urbanisme* and *Traits urbains*. The case of Detroit is become one of the inescapable grounds for these five last years. Research programs, studies and thesis are developing in different laboratories of architecture schools (ex. : Nantes, Versailles, Grenoble). Works are about questions of ambiances, inhabitant initiatives, architectural projects and masterplans or the urban agriculture and the landscape evolution. Even if this context is interesting, Detroit should not to become the support for generalities on the debate and the research on the urban shrinkage. The multiplicity and the diversity of spaces in shrinkage ask to the architect to adapt in every situation.

2.2. A fertile ground for experimental reflections about the architectural and urban project.

For more than ten years, at the international scale, shrinking cities has become new playgrounds for architects, urban planners, artists or inhabitants for exploring and testing alternative urban experiments. It exists a diversity of projects at various scales and we can see that in some specific books as: *Shrinking cities 1, International research* (2005), *Shrinking cities 2, Interventions* (2006), *The unreal estate guide to Detroit* (2012) and *Urban catalyst: the power of temporary use* (2013). Some projects and calls of ideas are open to debate.

One can note that shrinking cities became a veritable fertile ground for numerous architectural projects since the last crisis of 2008. The highlighting of more and more cities in shrinkage² and the images of empty plots indeed had an effect of electric shock in the profession. This event also accelerated an already present process where “many young architects, themselves affected by the crisis in the building sector, have taken on this new role and turned their misery into a professional challenge, exploiting the possibilities of low rents and empty spaces to set up small enterprises or cultural

¹ SCRIN : Shrinking Cities Research International Network

² In the media as in the scientific literature, like Leipzig in Germany or in United States (Detroit, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Cleveland, etc.).

initiatives” (Rienets, 2006). Shrinking cities, like all territories in crisis, the post-disaster reconstruction ask the architect to “include the ability to do more with less”(Aquilino, 2011) and to define the construction neither “as the goal of architectural/urban planning action” but as “the starting point” (oswalt, n.d.). All kind of vacant spaces become the base of the intervention before favouring the artificialisation of new grounds and are questioned: do you need to preserve, to transform, to deconstruct or to recycle? Which reflection to have on plot pattern? etc.

This interest is perceptible through two examples. There is a multiplication of student works in architecture and urban design. The researcher Brent Ryan organized with the MIT different workshops on Buffalo in 2010 and Baltimore in 2011 and 2013. In France, more and more students work for their diploma in architecture about the urban shrinkage. They choose study grounds in France (Thiers), in Germany (Leipzig, Essen), in Japan or in the United States (Detroit, Saint-Louis). By the innovative dimension of propositions, some of the projects are published or awarded. This year, the topic of the European workshop *Oikodemos*³ is about “contemporary living patterns: growth / shrinkage”, with cases of Berlin and Cottbus (Germany).

This trend is also noted for the European competition which is recognized by the profession of architect at the international scale. For the two last sessions, European 12 (2013) and European 13 (2015), the topic is “the adaptable city: inserting the urban rhythms” and it is the occasion to highlight potentials of territories in favour of the urban innovation. The concept of *shrinking city* was presented (Rebois, 2011) in the edition 2013, and there are some selected cities are considered in shrinkage: Vichy and Moulins (France); Wittenberge, Bitterfeld-Wolfen and Gera (Allemagne); or Seraing (Belgique).

All experiences around the world contribute to reflections and debates on the practice of project in territories in crisis and the research in architecture. Some aspects and questions are recurring and we can note for example: the evolution of uses of vacant lands; the reduction of costs to realise the project at different levels (participation of inhabitants; the recycling of materials; the construction site, etc.); the place of architect in the project process.

2.3. *An opportunity to rethink our urban model?*

The urban condition of shrinking cities re-questions our current urban models (Mateo, 2011) and the approach of development by growth. The evolution of the urban form, of the uses and of the landscape is in the heart of debates. Besides ecological issues and the ambition to reduce the human impact on the territory, to think about these questions in context of shrinkage is an opportunity: everything can be newly define. Some cities use it to think the city more “green” from the demolition of the unused and unhealthy built, and the renaturation of spaces, but these approaches are sometimes distorted for purposes of “urban marketing” by municipalities (Baron and al., 2010).

In more theoretical approaches in specific contexts, the architect contributes at the exploration of new urban models in proposing radical urban strategies.

The team of architects, composed of Rem Koolhaas, Oswald Mathias Ungers, Peter Riemann, Hans Kollhoff and Arthur Ovasca, were the first ones to explore new urban models with the case of Berlin, in the 1970s. For them, the demographic decline is an opportunity to identify vacant spaces and to determine spaces which have to be protected and those to be renatured for forming a *city-archipelago*. This theoretical project was re-communicated in 2013 with the research work of Florian Hertweck and Sébastien Marot in the book *The City in the City. Berlin: A Green Archipelago*. It still is current.

Since, more and more cities experiment new forms of urban strategies and urban policies for engaging the mutation of the city. They can be quoted in different plans and programs. In Germany, the city of Halle is exploring the *compact city* (De Gasperin, 2009; Roth, 2011). They are also the tool

³ Oikodemos is a virtual campus to promote the study of dwelling in contemporary Europe. Different european schools and universities of architecture, urban planning and urban design work together. website : <http://www.oikodemos.org>

*International Architecture Exhibition*⁴ which was used twice by authorities to think the transformation of cities and regions in shrinkage. The first experience was the IBA Emscher Park during 1990s in the Ruhr region. An important part of work was the improvement of the environmental frame and the renaturation of brownfields with the creation of cultural and sports facilities. Between 2002 and 2010, the urban shrinkage was at the heart of the *IBA Urban Redevelopment Saxony-Anhalt in East Germany*⁵. Selected cities served as experimental territories to find alternatives in their re-energization and re-organization. Dessau was the exploration territory to try the concept of *urban archipelago* through the project *Urban Cores – Landscape Zones* (Wiechmann et al., 2013). In the United States, the rightsizing of the city is more often experimented and especially for “greening” vacant spaces (Schwarz, 2012). Perspective projects like *Youngstown 2010*⁶ and the *Detroit Future City Strategic Framework Plan*⁷ are two characteristic examples. In Japan, the project of *Fiber City 2050*⁸ for the metropolis of Tokyo proposes a different approach of American cities in focusing on the urban development and the concentration of inhabitants on urban fibers as existing green armatures and railways.

On the short term, these examples offer various ways to adapt the city of human (demography) and urban realities (vacancy). It is an opportunity to think about to have a better urban management, to reduce artificial spaces and to renature grounds, or still to preserve the proximity and the social links between inhabitants which are scattered on the territory. In long-term, it might be a veritable impact of way of life. Nevertheless, these urban strategies still have not much impact in the documents of town planning (Ryan, 2012), or in the architectural and urban projects lead by the local authorities.

3. From urban strategy to urban intervention: a role of assistance for the architect with different stakeholders more and more marked in shrinking cities.

3.1. An evolution of the public commission which re-questions the role of the architect in projects.

Even if the shrinkage are being accepted as a “decisive factor of the evolution to come from territories, societies and activities” by local stakeholders (Baron and al., 2010), alternative urban strategies which integrates this situation (as seen previously - part 2.3.) still are exceptional.

In some cities in Europe, the architect until now answered requests which integrated in urban policies for revitalizing the territory, transforming the image of the city and attracting new populations and new investors (Baron and al., 2010; Cunningham-Sabot, Fol, 2010). The urban strategy was to recapture important brownfields and developed flagship projects (urban projects and public buildings), often linked with the culture (Grésillon, 2011) and with the invitation of a “starchitect”. The Guggenheim museum of Bilbao by Frank Gehry was the first example. The “choice of architectural and design about a cultural policy of international scale” and “a new communication of the project on the outside scene”(Nicolas, 2014) made a deep impression on people and the concept was took again. Thereafter, were built: “la Cité du Design” (agency LIN with Finn Geipel) at Saint-Etienne; the Louvre-Lens museum (SANAA); the University Library of Cottbus (Herzog & De Meuron); the Riverside Museum of Glasgow and the Phaeno Science Center of Wolfsburg by Zaha Hadid, etc. In parallel of these initiatives, there are often projects of urban renewal on the existing urban fabric, treating problems of the housing and the management properties and buildings. Architects are generally in front of commissions asking to maintain, to demolish, to recycle building or to product new constructions.

⁴ Translation of German *Internationale Bauausstellung*, more famous with the acronym IBA.

⁵ The topic was “less is future”. 19 cities participated.

⁶ website: http://www.cityofyoungstownoh.com/about_youngstown/youngstown_2010/

⁷ website : <http://detroitfuturecity.com>

⁸ website: <http://www.fibercity2050.net>

Since the beginning of 2000s, other projects have been emerging outside these important and mediatised urban and architectural projects. With more knowledge of the process and their capacities, local stakeholders searched new urban strategies and alternatives to transform the urban environment for maintaining inhabitants and improving their wellbeing (Baron et al., 2010). It allows architects to have more liberties and to experiment new ways of thinking the process of project. The architect and the team of project management are important stakeholders on the territory and its transformation. The model of urban strategy marked by cultural policies has begun to be criticized as these architectural flagship projects which can be characterised of “*machines célibataires*” (single machine). Olivier Mongin took over this concept of Marcel Duchamps illustrating architectural objects which are not in relation with its environment (Mongin, 2005). There is a “standardisation” of architectural production. In this continuity of these argument, Jean-Louis Violeau remind that “to design a project (of architecture) means to open a space, and no to try systematically to fill it as try to make it these single buildings” (Violeau, 2013, p.19). In shrinking cities, the analysis shows us that flagship projects are currently disconnected of the obsolete urban fabric and they are not accessible to all the population. It is “disembodied, on the scale of “consciousness” collective, by the construction of a “city branding”(Baron et al., 2010, p. 293).

3.2. Actual trend in shrinking cities: more and more architects with a role of assistance.

The current trend in Europe is an evolution of the role of the architect towards the council and the mediation “in interaction with a multitude of partners (State, local authorities, society of planning and developers)”(Bonetti, 2004). We can note this evolution especially in shrinking cities like in Germany or in France. For example, public project-ownerships (ex.: municipalities, regional structures) have little ways to act on their territories. Consequently they will launch calls for ideas to have several possibilities to act. In France, it is very common in rural regions. In this situation, the architect as project manager might become project ownership supporter. The result is not the finalised project but the development of tools for accompanying public authorities and inhabitants in the definition of new urban strategies and urban projects. In this continuity, we have the international competition, *Future Ground*⁹, organized by the Van Alen Institute in collaboration with the municipality of the New Orleans. Three multidisciplinary teams were invited to think about the transformation of landscapes and the reuse vacant lands through the experimentation of flexible designs and policy strategies. It is more frequent to see the architect becoming “project manager supporter”. His assistance is more and more asking from a specific project-ownerships, particularly present in shrinking cities : the community groups composed of inhabitants, non profit organization or association, etc. In United State, it is very visible where the State and local authorities are not any more invested (Detroit, Buffalo, Philadelphia, etc.). These community groups are the project-ownerships but also the project manager. They are themselves who think and realise projects of urban renewal at the scale of their neighbourhood. At Detroit, we have the example of the transformation of Old Redford district by the non-profit organisation Motor City Blight Busters (MCBB) and the One Mile Project in the New Center district.

With constraints of shrinking cities, architects envisage also in the process or project to give a part of project of inhabitants and became “project manager supporter”. One of most significant project is “Urban cores, Landscape zone” at Dessau (Germany). The pluridisciplinary team of project management defined important axes of the urban strategy. The choice was to offer inhabitants (citizen, family, company, group of young people, etc.) the possibility of defining, producing, managing and controlling these spaces freely. The objective was to make inhabitants aware of their responsibilities in

⁹ website: <https://vanalen.org/projects/future-ground/#about>

front of their environment, and also to reduce cost of project on short and long term, to maintain public spaces (Brückner, Stein, 2007; Wiechmann and al., 2013).

We can analyse that the architect and the team of project management have an important role to assist these stakeholders, public as private, to defend this new position and to succeed the urban intervention. It is important to take into account (Ryan, 2012). Exchanges and interactions allow to feed into the knowledge on the common territory and to bring new looks on its future. They accompany also stakeholders and inhabitants in the re-appropriation of their space by thinking about new ways of life, with proposals, which are short-term and long-term, ephemeral, as lasting.

4. The study of the French case: example of two experimental projects.

4.1. The phenomenon of shrinkage in urban context like rural: two potential sources of reflection.

The research work of Emmanuèle Cunningham-Sabot, Sylvie Fol, Hélène Roth, Daniel Florentin and Manuel Wolff in France introduce us with a diversity of shrinking cities. There are more particularly old industrial cities, small cities and villages in rural regions (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2009; Wolff and al., 2013). Even if the question of the shrinkage is not directly highlighted in political speeches, there is generally a good knowledge of spatial realities by practitioners (architect and urban planner) and local stakeholders.

This multiplicity of contexts offers architects and urban planners the possibility to explore all dimensions of shrinkage. Today, these territories know an increasing interest by these professions, be it for brownfields, small vacant plots in city center or the reconquest of public spaces.

We were able to see it previously with works of students, the European competition or the multiplication of call for ideas. Saint-Etienne is one of the cities which explores most of possibilities, between flagship projects (building and urban project) on brownfield and alternatives projects on the existing urban fabric. The public space was also a ground of experimental initiatives in Saint-Etienne. We have for example: the transformation of the site of the cardboard industry in temporary public spaces (since 2010); the competition «Défrichez-là» (2011) to occupied a vacant plot; a competition for urban furniture for the last biennale in 2015.

Concerning policies of the urban renewal, the shrinkage is not always affirmed. We have maybe an exception with the international consultation organized to Saint-Dizier for the transformation and the extension of its historic center (Scoffier, 2011). But there is a research to have solution concerning the unhealthy and vacant habitat in shrinking cities. Since 2003, these cities are very often helped by a financial support of the State to lead their projects, through the Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine¹⁰ (ANRU) in charge of the Programme National pour la Rénovation Urbaine (PNRU). Among 600 neighbourhoods which received of the PNRU, about fifty cases are in shrinking regions (Kacza et al., 2013).

In 2014, the State decided to help villages centres in escheat in rural regions, further to a demographical decline or a weakening of their functions of centrality, sometimes accompanied by the development of peripheral suburban zones¹¹. 300 villages centres was eligible the call of manifestation of interest “Centres-bourgs”, but only 50 were chosen to try this an experimental tool.

The French context is very regulated. How to lead the project when this framework can force or limit the action between specific constraints of the shrinkage and the regulatory system? Both two examples presented then, the urban project *Îlot-test Franche-Amitié* and the study *Habiter les centres-bourgs*,

¹⁰ the website : <http://www.anru.fr/>

¹¹ Presentation of the project on the link : <http://www.territoires.gouv.fr/revitaliser-les-centres-bourgs-un-enjeu-majeur-pour-l-egalite-des-territoires>

we will observe how the project try to surpass these constraints. We will analyse : the role and the place of architect in the process of project and between different stakeholders; the spirit of initiative of architect in the arranging of alternatives solutions for allowing the realisation of project; the awareness of different components of urban fabric (plot, build, uses) to act an urban renewal of quality.

3.2. Assuming the dedensification: Saint-Etienne and the project *Îlot-test Franche-Amitié*

Saint-Etienne lost between 1968 and 2010 around 23 % of its population. The departure of the activities and the inhabitants for the first urban rings and for other regions engendered a vacancy in the city centre and an advanced degradation of the urban fabric. From 1990s, the municipality became aware of its state and have been trying to revitalize (Miot, 2009). Architectural and urban projects punctuate from now on the landscape as the “Cité du Design” or the requalification of the site of the Manufacture-Plaine Achille entrusted to Alexandre Chemetoff’s team.

In parallel, the municipality searched also other approaches for its urban renewal with the priority objective: the improvement of the environment built in the unhealthy neighbourhood. It began an experimental initiative which aimed to acquire plots and building for acting on the urban fabric and for reducing the vacancy by the creation of quality public places¹². The project of the *Square Hauptmann* designed by the local agency YES Architectes (now, A-MAS) was the first experimentation (2000-2002) of this kind. In the continuity, it is interesting to look more specifically at the project *Îlot-test Franche Amitié*, because the approach of plots repurchase was applied on the scale of a block. Realised between 2006 and 2014 by the team of project management composed of Eric Clavier (architect), François Chomienne (landscape-architect) and the BET¹³ Gépral, the site is integrated into the perimeter ANRU program in the Tarentaize-Beaubrun-Séverine neighbourhood. This block was chosen because it was the most degraded of the district and had to serve as model for a process of larger-scale urban renewal¹⁴. The objective of the tender was to de-densify of the heart of the block, to regenerate obsolete buildings and to create public and private places with collective management for maintaining the local population.

One of the major difficulties was to act on the block. The population living in the neighbourhood is essentially poor and owners had few financial means for acting. The municipality had no stranglehold (land) on the site. The choice by local authorities was to acquire plots to intervene and to lead a global action. Before the project begun, the SEDL¹⁵ started to acquire some plots and buildings by anticipation on the future urban renewal. But to continue this process, the solution was to do a “*déclaration d’utilité public*” (DUP - declaration of public utilities) by the creation of a road and 20 garages. This axis had to allow the deconstruction of unhealthy buildings and the connection between the site and the rest of the district. The *Etablissement Public Foncier de l’Ouest Rhône-Alpes* (EPORA) helped the team of project ownership (SEDL and the municipality of Saint-Etienne) to acquire and manage all plots with the obligation to restore some plots to the owners after the arrangements of private open spaces (gardens). It was a complicated assembly work in order to make the project feasible. The project proposed an intervention in the inside of the block, without affecting directly the building situated at the outside.

The team of project management had a real role of assistance with the project ownership composed with local authorities to succeed in an urban project of quality. They were stakeholders of decisions and took part in the operational arrangement of project. They worked and negotiated more than 3 years with the team of project ownership to adapt the project; on one hand to answer budgets and regulatory

¹² Remarks collected with Stéphanie David, architect to the agency A-MAS (20/03/2014) and with Lauranne Ponsonnet, director of the Mission Project Urbain of the municipality of Saint-Etienne (03/06/2014).

¹³ BET is the acronym for “*bureau d’études techniques*”. It can be translated in english by “engineering department”.

¹⁴ Remarks collected with Anne Lebeau and Jean-Paul Chartron, assignment managers of the housing, Municipality of Saint-Etienne(02/07/2014)

¹⁵ Acronym of *Société d’Équipement et de Développement de la Loire*

requirements, and on the other hand to allow the production of a quality public place for transforming the road into pedestrian alley. In the work of the project definition, the qualities of the existing (plot pattern, situation of buildings) helped to define buildings to preserve or to deconstruct, as well as spaces opened to clear (Horticulture et Paysage, 2012).



Figure 2. Explicative maps of the project Îlot-test Franche-Amitié. 1: Two project ownership / 2: Influence of the action of the project manager / 3: Orientations of project / 4: Current state of block
Source : Charline Sowa, 2014

Although the approach had to facilitate a global intervention, the project management team did not intervene on the built, only for the definition of its future: maintenance and renovation or demolition and recycling. The propositions of design are only on the open spaces. The architectural interventions (only buildings) were led by others architects which had to respect specifications. It was still not simple to have a global vision on the urban renewal of the block. Nevertheless, the architect played the role of advisor for projects of renovation or new building was led.

The architect knew how to highlight his capacity to have a global vision on the project, allowing him to be: the interface between the complex project ownership and the spatial realities; an important stakeholder throughout the project : from the definition of the operational frame of the constructive details, with the period of construction site. The thinking of all steps of project process allowed to limit expenses and to remain in the projected budget.



Figure 3: Point of view in the interior of block. Source : Charline Sowa, 2014

3.3. Re-adapting the existing: the Parc Naturel Régional (PNR) of Livradois-Forez and the study on “Habiter les centres-bourgs”

During the XIXth century, the rural region of Livradois-Forez knew an economic development engendering a demographic boom and a densification of urban fabric. Free plots were filled quickly in front of the continual growth of population. It was at this period that villages took their current urban form. Until the 1950s, the centre of small cities and villages in the Livradois-Forez and all Auvergne region were populated. With the evolution of ways of life, practices in rural environment and new demands of population, there was a demographic decline with the departure of population, an escheat of center-villages and the increase of the vacancy (Gaudey and Terra, 2008; Bernard et al., 2014). The housing has become inadequate and the territory weakened.

Until now, reflections and projects on the territory answered approaches one by one, without a long-term vision, according to needs and opportunities (Bernard et al., 2014). This approach was questioned since and abandoned spaces in villages centres are beginning to be envisaged as real of equipped and serviced land-reserves. The compact form of the urban fabric also tends to facilitate exchanges between individuals. To re-adapt villages centres would so offer an alternative to the urban sprawl. With this analysis, the PNR of Livradois-Forez went into an invitation to tender in 2011 for a study about the question of the living in village centre, with the financial support of the DATAR. 6 sites of study (Cunlhat, Châteldon, Courpière, La Monnerie-le-Montel, Saint-Germain-l’Herm, Saint-Dier-d’Auvergne) served as support of reflection which were divided between three teams of project management, mainly consisted of architects, and two school of architecture.

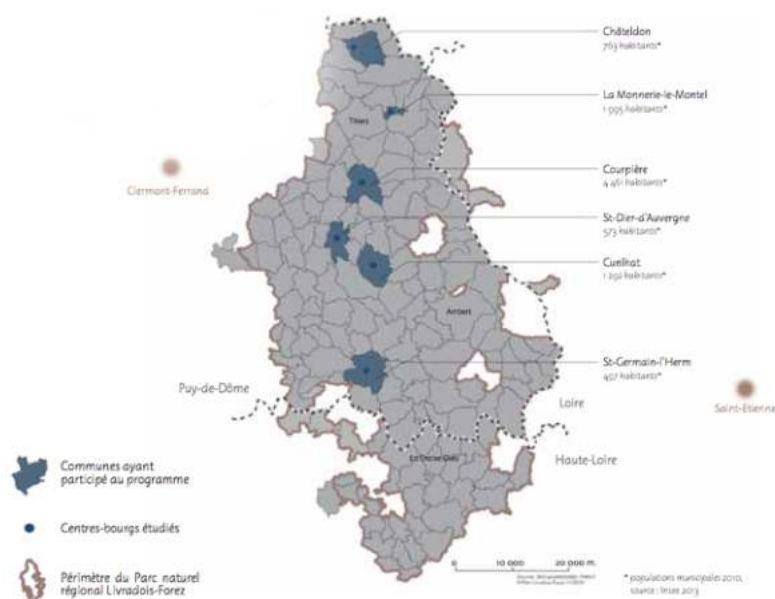


Figure 4. Situation of cities participating to the study in the PNR of Livradois-Forez.

Source: PNR Livradois-Forez, 2014.

Through this study, one of questions was the land management by municipalities and inhabitants. The architect had to propose one or several adapted solutions. The analysis presented that very often, municipalities had no idea of the state of land, little information on plot and its uses. Even if it existed, it was not always updated.

The work of the Collectif ETC on municipalities of Cunlhat and Châteldon was interesting for this dimension. To develop new tools, the team was inspired by tools of agricultural-land management

conceived by the French association *Terre de liens*. It established a protocol of actions to collect information and to develop an operating tool of land management. It was to allow then to define actions on plots which would be adjusted to needs and real practices of space. The objective was to engage a dynamics of the land observation and to integrate the inhabitants into this work. After the mass of data, the team proposed different options about the way to manage plots and especially to execute a land assembly. The first one is to connect inhabitants and to raise awareness among them. The second one is in the longer term, to assist the municipality to take the role of mediator between owners for allowing the emergence of projects with a bigger scale.



Figure 5. Tools of of analysis on Châteldon. Source: Collectif ETC.

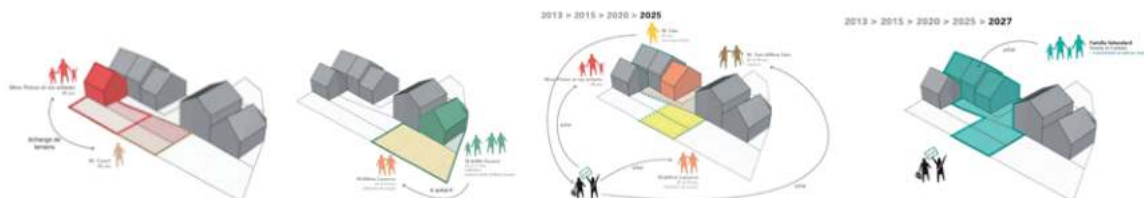


Figure 6. Theoretical reflections for Châteldon to test different possibilities for the land assembly and the land management by public authorities and inhabitants. Source: Collectif ETC.

The architect had an important role in this reflection. Many recommendations were given on the improvement of the offer of the housing and the image of villages and the attractiveness. It was proposed innovative and alternative tools for helping municipalities and inhabitants.

Another dimension is interesting to present: the place of the communication in the appropriation process of the study by different stakeholders (inhabitants like municipalities and the PNR Livradois-Forez). For Cunlhat, Châteldon, Courpière and La Monnerie-le-Montel, there was an important place for a blog which became a veritable space of communication and exchange.

The objective was to test and to retranscribe transposable methods of work in other territories which know the same difficulties that the villages centres of the PNR. But today, there are not continuity with different teams on the territory or applications. But this initiative inspired other territories, in the PNR Livradois-Forez (Ambert, Chabreloche, Olliegues) or in France.

4. Conclusion: which lessons to learn of these French experiences?

Through these examples, we saw that through the process of project, it is looked for to exceed the constraints linked with the shrinkage and in regulations of town planning. They try to propose adapted solutions for the transformation of the urban fabric. Architects and the team of project management was the interface between temporal and spatial scales for local actors and inhabitants.

Whether it is with the work of demolition and recycling in Saint-Etienne or with the reflection on the land assembly for Châteldon, the architects managed to offer another image of these spaces which were pending. They revalue as well the qualities of the plot pattern as the built and they propose a new quality of the housing environment in reply with the new demands.

In both cases, the relation between the various stakeholders was essential for a good understanding of the commission and proposals. In these collaborations, we were able to note some trends. For Saint-Etienne, the project management did the interface with the project ownership in the redefining of the commission. The architect brought his expertise and was a stakeholder in negotiations between the double project ownership and the owners. Secondly, he had a role of advisor to the architects acting on the built that to owners who wished to invest on the project in asking advices on the arrangement of private gardens. In the Livradois-Forez, we were able to see that different local stakeholders were requested at various stages of the project process. The architects valued their capacity to be porter of knowledge on their territory. They then found solutions to help municipalities to manage the land, and in particular with the investment of the inhabitants. This method aimed to allow for the inhabitants to reinvest their village and for the public stakeholders to have a better knowledge of them inhabitants and of the urban environment.

In the Livradois-Forez, the commission was complex in front of land problems. The collective ETC. gave tools to help municipalities to manage the urban fabric (land, built, uses) and to adapt it to the demand. Among other reflections on sites of the call for ideas, the proposition for the village centre of Monnerie-le-Montel proposed keys for reading of issues and a prospective vision to allow to the municipality to organize into a hierarchy their actions according to their capacities in time. A good relation between different levels of stakeholders allows to experiment new tools of project. For Saint-Etienne, they succeed to manage the project by exploring all the regulatory possibilities and by facing the multiplicity of owners.

It would be interesting to develop this analysis on other examples in France, in Europe or in United-States. For the American case, it is possible to see very often approaches in *pro bono* to help community groups to realise their project, from the program to the construction, in co-production or as project management supporter.

To conclude, projects were possible with invested local stakeholders and help of public authorities with specific funds by the ANRU or the DATAR. The position of assistance was integrated in the process of project and it is not annexe. While in the case of the commission of the PNR of Livradois-Forez, proposals might be a potential impact in the decision-making power of the municipality to develop a territorial strategy; in the case of Saint-Etienne, it is to nuance. Even the project was realised and it is a interesting urban project at different levels, the temporality of the process and this expansive cost reduced the ambition to continue this approach at the scale of neighbourhood.

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