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The promotion of creative industries as a tool for urban planning

The case of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* in Paris Region

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Abstract :

The use of cultural amenities as a tool for strategic planning and the incorporation of the symbolic value of culture by capitalist modes of production have been widely studied. At the same time, debates surrounding the emerging concepts of creative economy and industries have fostered economic development strategies promoting clusters of creative activities. The case of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création*, in a Paris suburb, illustrates an hybridization of these two kinds of strategies. As we will explain, the promotion of creative activities (mainly film industries) within the frame of a large urban project should not be seen as an economic strategy but as a planning strategy. Here, supporting creative industries is not this urban project's goal but its tool. It is a means to give value to a brownfield area, before launching a large and expensive urban project requiring private investors.

Introduction

The different processes through which culture is used in urban renewal strategies and the symbolic value that is incorporated into the capitalistic production of urban space have been critically examined before (Zukin, 1991, Zukin, 1995). It has been shown that the promotion of cultural events or cultural amenities, such as museums, aimed to achieve other objectives than cultural policies; these are traditionally meant to support creation and artistic production, preserve a local heritage, broaden access to culture and social inclusion, and encourage artistic practice. Now, in many cases, culture is also presented as an improvement to the living environment, it is used to stimulate the local tourism industry and provide entertainment for new residents. In urban project and development, cultural amenities have become powerful tools to attract investors, stimulate consumption-oriented industries, and reshape the image and reputation of a city. These trends generate a cultural-led urban planning (to name a few

authors: Strom, 2003, Miles, 2005, Mommaas, 2004, Evans, 2003) based on the Bilbao case (Plaza, 2006, Keating and de Frantz, 2004, Vicario and Martinez, 2003, Gomez, 1998).

Culture is now considered as a growing economic sector, providing jobs and wealth. The idea of “creative industries” has given rise to debates and expectations that also imply new orientations in economic development policies (European Commission, 2010), especially in the Paris Region (Grefte and Simonet, 2008). These policies are influenced by principles of regional economy. Marshall was first to examine the role of the territory in economic development in the nineteenth century. Industrial districts gave an advantage to local firms, as geographic proximity promoted a mutual trust and allowed lower transaction costs between clients and suppliers. They also created a climate that fostered interpersonal relationships and helped the transmission of know-how and soft knowledge. This concept was redeveloped to explain the competitiveness of small, specialised firms grouped in the central part of Italy (Becattini 1992). The notion of cluster (Porter 1999) relates to firms functioning both in cooperation and competition, with support coming from institutions helping to anchor them to the territory. These clusters bring together activities and businesses functioning within the same productive sector, as well as institutions concerned with teaching, research and development, and investors. The positive externalities of localisation and information sharing in the cluster contribute to a virtuous circle of innovation through interpersonal relations, thus encouraging these firms’ long-term attachment to the territory. This notion of clusters has been used when describing creative cities, as the production of cultural goods increasingly takes place in localised clusters while the organisation of production of these industries leads to flexible specialisation (Scott, 2010, Storper, Christopherson 1987, Mommas, 2004, Cooke, Lazzaretto 2008). As these local ecosystems are meant to encourage innovation, a decisive factor for economic development, economic development policies attempt to elicit favorable conditions for the emergence and development of clusters. It is particularly the case in creative industries such as video gaming in Paris (Brandellero et al., 2008) and media in several places like London, Birmingham, Munich, Manchester, Sydney or Toronto (Pratt, 2009, Porter, Barber 2007, Karlsson and Picard, 2011).

This article will demonstrate the hybridisation between these two types of strategies in urban development through the study of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* in Plaine Commune (North of Paris). We will show how cultural-led planning can be driven by creative production-oriented strategies as much as cultural consumption ones. We will examine whether the support for the creative industries, separate from cultural policy, is a tool for urban planning to the same extent as (or even instead of) a lever for economic development.

Context

Plaine Commune is an inter-municipal government¹ that consists of nine suburban towns north-east of Paris and includes La Plaine, formerly one of the largest industrial districts in Europe located inside the Paris Ring road. It is one of the last communist bastions of several communist municipalities known as the Paris Red Belt². Since the mid-90s, facing deindustrialisation and its various effects, the communist local authorities have developed a new two-pronged urban strategy. On the one hand, Plaine Commune has implemented an entrepreneurial approach to economic development (Harvey, 1989), exploring and exploiting

its metropolitan advantages (accessibility to urban transit systems, availability of low cost land, proximity to Paris) to promote itself as an alternative business district (Grossard and Vigier, 2008, Lecroart, 2009). In recent years, this area regained economic attractiveness through the development of businesses surrounding the new *Stade de France* (opened in 1998 for the Soccer World Cup). On the other hand, this municipality, after decades of communist leadership pursues its political mandate for social progress. It provides social services to the precarious working class, with an ambitious objective of providing social housing (40% of all new housing). This specific scheme of redevelopment can be defined as a unique model of entrepreneurial municipal communism³, where economic development generates increased fiscal revenues that fund social and housing policies instead of creating local jobs (Raad, 2009). While the local economy is growing fast, becoming more diverse and employing high skills workers, the socioeconomic conditions in this municipality's households are still fairly low and characterised by a high rate of unemployment, low skilled jobs, low incomes and minimum qualifications⁴. Plaine Commune is one of the residential areas in the Paris metropolitan economic system with a high concentration of working class and precarious population. Such an entrepreneurial communist mandate implies contradictions and the local government has had to address the problematic issue of economic development to benefit social inclusion (Béhar, 2008).

The future implementation of the *Grand Paris* metro project⁵ is a new step in the regeneration of this area. The plan is to create a new transport hub in Pleyel (an isolated precinct near La Plaine); it entails the development of a large urban regeneration project shaped by a *Contrat de développement territorial*⁶. As transport hubs must be located at the core of key economic clusters, at the launch of the *Grand Paris* project the former President presented the Pleyel area as a cluster of creative industries, notably movie industries (Sarkozy, 2009). Thus, this new development was first named *Cluster de la création* and then *Territoire de la culture et de la création*. A real albeit tenuous presence of creative industries and scenes may warrant this updated denomination. A crucial question must be raised: how can the Plaine Commune municipality ensure that the *Territoire de culture et de la création* becomes a reality? Can it give rise to the economic growth that must follow the urban redevelopment? How can the instruments of urban planning make the president's announcement come true besides using the image of a creative milieu serving various interests? *A contrario*, how can this support for creative industries be used as a tool for a planning strategy? In this paper, we will demonstrate how the promotion of creative activities (mainly TV and cinema industries) should not be seen as an economic strategy but rather as a planning strategy. After presenting the local creative milieus and their *mise en scène* by various actors, we will explain how the support of creative industries is not an urban project goal but its tool. We will show to what extent the support towards creative industries is a means to symbolically revalorise an area before undertaking a large and expensive urban project requiring private investors. This article uses empirical research data collected between 2011 and 2013. Interviews were conducted with local creative actors, public authority officials, public planners and developers. Two participant observations were conducted: one in an alternative cultural place named 6B, the other in the local planning agency.

1) A weak reality: the rise of creative scenes

The meaning of the name of *Territoire de la culture et de la création* derives from the pre-existing situation. True to the communist tenets, the municipal government sees culture as a tool for social inclusion. As in many cities, Plaine Commune has several major public cultural amenities (cinema, theatres, libraries) and organises cultural events throughout the year (Dubois, Bastien *et al.* 2012). Also, the television and film industries have been located in Plaine Commune since the early 20th century. Like its rival Hollywood, the French movie industry was organised in integrated studios: producers owned studios, shooting equipment and post-production laboratories, and employed all the staff on long term contracts As in Hollywood, but for slightly different reasons, French studios started to outsource and disperse their production after WWII. The need for investment to adapt to new technologies, the aesthetic revolution of the *Nouvelle Vague*, and the underuse of studios eventually led to the reorganisation of the industry. Some companies have had to specialise in equipment rentals, others in studio management or post-production, while the workforce has had to adapt to a more precarious scheme of employment (Verdalle *et al.*, 2008, Storper and Christopherson, 1987, Thomas, 2010, Leriche and Scott, 2008).

The 1980s were the turning point for the film industry. A rising need for shooting locations and, especially, for low cost studios to meet the demand for widespread television broadcasting spurred its boom. In the mid-1980s, the former warehouses *Entrepôts et magasins généraux de Paris* (EMGP) located in La Plaine were turned into shooting studios mainly used for TV programs and advertising. This location presented several advantages for these firms: proximity to downtown Paris, easy road access, low land value, and empty buildings easily convertible into studios. Gradually, other companies located there, working to some extent with the early producers yet seeing the place as a valuable label: being located near the market leaders gave them legitimacy. In 2008 Plaine Commune, with its more than 25 studios, was the number one location for TV shoots in France. Local authorities first supported the audiovisual sector by encouraging networking through the creation and support of professional organizations such as Le Pole⁷. The aim of this organisation is to enhance the collaboration between local actors of the audiovisual industries to support a virtuous movement of clustering and anchoring of creative industries (Verdalle *et al.*, 2008, Thomas, 2010). In 2008 these industries (art, performing art, audiovisual, editing and publishing) employed 3260 peoples in Plaine Commune (Fig.1)

Fig. 1 Jobs in Plaine Commune (Source: Plaine Commune, 2009)

Since, Plaine Commune has seen an emergence of a local creative scene of cultural professionals who live and work within the territory (Plaine Commune, *et al.* 2010). Indeed, thanks to its easy access to downtown Paris and the availability of cheap living and working spaces, creative and cultural professionals are settling in Plaine Commune. Over the last couple of years, the vitality of the local creative scene has been revealed and enhanced with the transformation of 6B, a former 7000m² office building now occupied by creative professionals. At first sight, 6B is just another underground cultural and temporary place, like many venues that flourished in Berlin in the last forty years (Colomb, 2012, Grésillon, 2002),

Montreal (Tremblay and Pilati, 2007) Marseille and Lausanne (Andres and Grésillon, 2013) and in many other French cities (Lextrait, 2001). 6B is located on a peninsula between the Seine River and the Canal Saint Denis, within walking distance to the train station Saint-Denis and at the core of an urban regeneration project still in its early stages. In the beginning, as the building was mostly empty the initial plan was for a housing development. However, a young architect and activist negotiated with the landlord the right to occupy the building at cost (roughly covering utilities and taxes) and thus, since 2010, a non-profit organization has occupied the building with the landlord's consent on a temporary basis. The organization then sublets workspaces at a significantly lower than market price of 10€/m²/month. Offices were turned into workspaces for creative professionals, artists and craftsmen. In its early stage, most of the residents lived in Saint Denis; nowadays, a majority of them come from Paris. Part of the building (1000m²) is kept for communal spaces, which include exhibition halls and screening rooms, a dance studio and a woodworking room. A cafeteria, run by a group of women from the local community, reflects the organisation's intention to make 6B a contributor to the social environment and its willingness to be involved in the local scene.

2) The portrayal of a creative territory: discourses and storytelling

This case offers a paradigmatic example of iterative image building processes, connecting artists and their urban environment. First, as it has been done in many other places, local actors (municipal and departmental governments, developers), capitalising on the glamour of creative milieus, are using the artist to promote a new image of the territory (Zukin, 1982, Vivant and Charmes, 2008, Ley, 2003, Lloyd, 2005). As a result of the involvement of various artists, the once stigmatised Plaine Commune is now portraying itself as a hotbed of creativity. This appears as a tautological discourse to justify the label and project *Territoire de la culture et de la création*. For instance, in 2010, Plaine Commune held an exhibition: "*Plaine Commune, terre de création*" featuring 22 portraits of local artists, mostly hip hop artists, placed in front of various territorial landmarks. The discourses about these artists emphasised the inspirational role of their native territory as well as their own contribution to the territory. Other media, such as local newspapers, presented the artists' choice to settle down in Saint Denis as another facet of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* and reflecting the unique aspects of the community:

The charm of Plaine Commune inspires young artists who choose to live there. They wish to go further in their art and develop another dimension of the cluster: the search for a sweeter life, shared with the living and working community. There is a chemistry, hand in hand, with local organizations and neighborhood residents and no one is left behind"

Marion (in *Journal de Saint Denis*) 2011: 21 (Translated and emphasis added by the authors)

This quotation plays with the image of the artist as a taste advisor; someone who knows which neighborhood has flavor, character and atmosphere, in the same way as the 19th century artists set the taste and aesthetic values of the rising leisure class, even for home decoration (Charpy, 2009). Since 2011, local artists, with the support of the City of Saint Denis, have organised an "open studio" event to promote the local art scene. As discussed by Gravereau on open studio events in Belleville (Paris), such events contribute more to the

discovery of the neighbourhood than to the artists' production (Gravereau, 2008). All these events and discourses contribute to making Plaine Commune seen as a creative place; the objective is to shift the perspective of fear and prejudice regarding this suburb to one of curiosity and the search for creativity.

Another image building discourse emerges; as they build their own legitimacy and reputation some artist-activists strive to project an image of locally rooted professionals through their attitude, discourses and actions grounding their involvement in the city. They also develop a personal view and interpretation of their urban environment, showing the popular and deprived city as an inspiring and poetic place. For instance, some local major figures of the creative scene belong to the Alternative Organisation of Architects, notably the founder of 6B. He is working with the Romani community to improve their conditions of life (like building pit toilets in Romani camps). He appears as a social entrepreneur who is using a discourse on the role of creative professionals in city-making to build his own reputation and legitimacy.

And even the project with the Romanis would not have been possible without 6B, it made me legitimate in the district. People don't see me just as a funny guy anymore. They say: "yeah he's into alternative stuff", except what's coming out of it is solid.

Source: Interview. 6B Founder (Translated by the authors)

As E. Macaire shows, the pluri-activity (as architect and social entrepreneur or mediator in urban consultation) of some young architects allows them to practice their work while their own values are at odds with those of the architect guild. It also gives them the means to shape their own position in the field of architecture by creating a niche market (Macaire, 2009). Whilst 6B was established without any public support, the local authorities welcomed some of their initiatives in view of their impact on the local community. For instance, the summer event *Fabrique à rêves* benefited from public financial support because it contributed to the improvement of community life and urban environment⁸. 6B will also host *L'atelier du territoire de la culture et de la création*, a place for information and public consultation on the *Grand Paris* project launched in the summer of 2013. The question is whether this example reflects an emerging trend in cultural policy; is support provided because of the artists' involvement in the community or because it is rewarding their work as artists and creators? Not all local creative professionals agree with the latter. In fact, some 6B residents have doubts about the motivation and other local creatives worry about becoming gentrification pioneers (Cousin, 2013).

Also, it is a private real estate developer who will implement the urban regeneration project surrounding 6B. As in other situations (Vivant, 2009, Vivant, 2010), the owner and developer first considered the 6B project (i.e. to entrust a tenant with the management of an empty building) as a means to avoid building dereliction and disturbances such as squatting, prostitution and drug dealing⁹. Gradually, the developer understood that 6B could provide services and activities that would benefit the urban project. The presence of artists and creative professionals is now seen as an opportunity for the urban project. The person in charge of the project has shown her interest and an awareness of the role of artists in changing the image of stigmatised or derelict neighbourhoods, and how it can be used to propel an urban regeneration project.

I sometimes go to Amsterdam and it's fascinating to consider, there, the role of the artist in urban development, in wasteland, before planning and redevelopment. They are recognised as pioneers turning the image of derelict areas. I feel we are more and more aware of that in France

Source: Interview. Developer (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

According to her, this is easier because 6B is a structured collective, which acts as a good strategist and politician. Just like “good squatters” (Coutant, 2000), it has good relationships with authorities, the neighbourhood and landlords and proved its reliability. Far from the romantic image of the lonely artist or the anarchist squatter that 6B might have projected, the developer is able to discuss, negotiate and even collaborate with some residents. For instance, on the building's ground floor, 6B residents created a presentation center for the urban project that was funded by the developer. Reciprocally, the developer subsidised the *Fabrique à rêves* through its corporate foundation (Brémond, 2011). The marketing of the residential development even started during the *Fabrique à rêves* 2012 launch within a custom-built commercial space on 6B's ground floor. The real estate developer is keen to emphasise the area's creative aspects, considered a factor in attracting individuals or companies looking to relocate in a territory that is mostly known for insecurity and poverty.

Fig. 3: Hall of 6B. Exhibition explaining the urban project, realised by some 6B residents and funded by the developer (Source: the authors)

3) A prophecy to achieve through planning?

Local authorities and developers are using the presence of artists to showcase the area as a creative place. The question remains though: how can local authorities encourage creative industries and ensure their presence through planning policies and projects? Local governments use a number of incentives to attract new companies and support economic growth. These include developing infrastructures (both transport and telecommunications), moderating business networks or lowering the cost of labour through tax breaks. However, French planning legislation does not allow any specific allocation of real estate to a specific economic sector. The local planning policies can only specify the general category of land use (housing, offices, warehouses, etc.), thus restricting the possibility of clusters of creative industries. It is therefore quite difficult to designate the development of a specific sector through zoning. Moreover, the Economic Development branch of Plaine Commune warns developers that these regulations could threaten current semi-industrial and logistical activities that employ unskilled local labour.

Some have suggested that allocating 20 to 30% of workspaces to creative activities could permit the development of a cluster of creative industries (Préfet de Région Ile de France et al., 2012). 6B is one of the numerous examples of bottom-up projects that offer spaces that suit the needs and financial capacities of creative professionals (Lextrait, 2001). The various strategies used in these projects have resulted in a heightened awareness on the conditions of work in creative activities and on the urgent need for suitable workplaces. The shortage of available workplaces for creative professionals may threaten the survival of independent producers. At the same time, a handful of private developers are experimenting with new

projects ostensibly tailored to the needs of creative professionals, such as co-working spaces. C Développement, a small sized commercial-unit developer, for example, has launched *Commune image*, a flexible, shared workspace designed to meet the needs of audiovisual professionals. Here, the glamour of artist life is not only used to add symbolic value to the real estate development, it also reveals an emerging niche market of workspaces for independent and precarious creative professionals. Projects such as this one put an emphasis on design and management and claim to be suited to the needs of creative professionals in search for space and collaborations. But despite the co-presence of various activities, collaborations are in fact not as developed as they could be, as they take time to build, and must incorporate both a human relations factor and a common artistic taste:

You meet someone the first time, then you try and get to know their work, and you may not necessarily like the work of a specific graphic designer [...] There are these girls who are artists and work a lot with wood, we nearly worked with them on a project, but in the end we took someone else.

Source: Interview. Architect and member of 6B (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

Moreover, some artists cannot co-exist in close quarters: sculptors make noise and dust, disturbing those who need calm and silence to work; the bohemian look of a space may contribute to the making of an artistic identity but can be a problem for start-ups when clients and investors come on site to conduct business. As a result the workspaces within 6B have been reallocated, separating office activities from artistic ones. This example reveals the under-investigated gap between an expectation for the positive effects of proximity (as a means for collaborations and innovations) and the reality of co-working spaces. In addition, while 6B outdoor parties and festive events offer a unique urban experience for visitors, they are threatened by noise nuisance complaints from the nearest residents (Cousin, 2013).

Another strategy is to support projects that will validate the creative cluster image by providing a symbol of local creativity and therefore attracting others. The current flagship of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* opened in 2012: the *Cité du cinéma*, a former electric power station turned into a massive building of offices and studios by the film director Luc Besson and his production company EuropaCorp. EuropaCorp is known as the prime proponent of the project, yet it funded less than 4% of the investment costs (estimated at 160 millions euros). The unusual business model of the project involved, as main investors, the public bank *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (CDC)* and Vinci, one of the national leaders in public works and real estate development. The involvement of these two, a bank and a developer, assured the feasibility of this risky project. However, it took a strong informal lobby on the part of Plaine Commune, including committing other lands for development, to convince them to invest in this risky venture.

They are involved because Plaine Commune created the conditions to make it possible [...] While they do not trust this project, they contribute to its funding because Plaine Commune promised that they will have priority access to other opportunities of land development. As there are many urban projects in the territory, and thus much real estate development, it was not too difficult to convince them.

Source: Interview. Chief Officer, economic development department. Plaine Commune (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

In fact, CDC and Vinci are now developing the adjoining plot into 115 000 m² of offices and housing. L. Besson made use of the urban project and the desire to push forth the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* for his own benefit, and ensured that his ambitious project was possible while limiting his own investment and the amount of risk undertaken¹⁰. Nevertheless, movie studios offer a counter example to the forms of urban integration of creative activities described above. Rather than presenting the image of an urban vitality and vibrancy like that of creative quarters, where the urban atmosphere and the life on the streets inspires, studios look like any industrial zone: gated, secured, with an architecture restricted by technical constraints. Considered by architects as “tool-buildings”¹¹, studios require specific architectural features: soundproofing, lightproofing, round the clock access, security and people flow management. Studio workers are confined to an autonomous enclave supplying every service to its users: catering, transportation to the nearest railway station, a secure environment, 24/7 operations (Thomas, 2010). The scale of the studios’ technical requirements demands large investments. Large-scale companies hold the balance of power over independent studios, marking a new era in the economic structure of the cinema industry.

4) The limits of territorial specialisation

The making of a territory for creative activities is facing major challenges; in this case economic development is not the main issue. The *Territoire de la culture et de la création* is mainly oriented towards film industries which are facing the major challenge of digitisation (Verdalle *et al.*, 2008). Independent businesses are pushed out of the market by the need to invest in the new technology, and changes in the production and post-production processes brought on by digitisation can lead to a drop in the numbers of the workforce as well as relocation of companies to other areas. This poses a double threat to local jobs and local businesses, as post-production activities employ up to half of the workforce in the film industries in Plaine Commune (Fig. 1).

Digitisation means closing down post-production laboratories, an elimination of technicians with their skills and know-how. For the hundred employees in silver-film, digital needs only one. We are going to die soon despite being in a film industry cluster territory.

Source: Interview. Director of a post-production company in Plaine Commune (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

In this context, EuropaCorp’s strategy appears to go against the logic of the disintegration of the film industries. Instead, it must be placed within a context of a reconcentration or reintegration of capital into a handful of large firms to address the funding needed to adapt to technological changes. Yet, EuropaCorp has faced a critical financial situation over the last

two years¹². Its current strategy to address its financial hardship is to relocate the whole chain of production within integrated studios, such that *Cité du cinéma* does not need to develop business partnerships and collaborations with other local professionals. In other words, EuropaCorp does not contribute to the clustering of the local movie industry, but solely to the concentration of activities. As it has been shown for the Internet industry in Sentier, concentration without collaboration and clustering weakens the local economic structure (Dalla Pria and Vicente, 2006). In addition, runaway productions are reinventing the geography of cinema production, weakening the previous local cinema milieu in favor of areas with a cheaper skilled workforce. To attract shootings many regional governments, such as the Ile de France Region, have developed specific policies such as tax incentives or simplified administrative procedures.

The scale of the apparent movie and TV industries clusters presents another challenge. These activities are concentrated in the Paris Region, where they follow a scheme of territorial specialisation (Camors and Soulard, 2010, Camors et al., 2011). Artists, agents, casting agencies and studio headquarters involved in decision-making, creative processes and other valuable activities are still located in Paris and its affluent west side suburb Haut de Seine, as they require less space but nonetheless must have access to informal contacts and networks (Scott, 2010, Verdalle *et al.*, 2008). As an interviewee noted, the proposed *Territoire de la culture et de la création* in Plaine Commune would mostly host low range and technical activities (shooting, post-production...) ¹³, benefiting from its proximity to Paris and its cheap land value. Similarly, the organiser of a movie industry event described how difficult it is to convince professionals in the field to attend in Plaine Commune. In other words, some would argue that labelling Plaine Commune as a cluster of film industries while it hosts neither the whole chain of production nor the most creative part of it is an overstatement.

Fig. 4 The creative clusters in the Paris Region (Source: Camors and Soulard 2010)

Similarly, the notion of creative industries is confusing. The *Accord cadre* (preliminary framework) of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* defines creative industries broadly. For instance, new companies of the “creative economy”, such as data centers and cloud computing and telecommunication operators, are welcome to locate their headquarters there (Préfet de Région Ile de France *et al.*, 2012: 15), whereas none of the major local cultural actors, such as the circus school Academie Fratellini, the major alternative artistic center Mains d’Oeuvre, various public facilities and creative professionals, are not even mentioned. This broad and fuzzy conception of the creative economy generates misunderstanding and expectations. An elected representative explained that he was often faced with a lack of understanding, and many actors did not see the link to specific economic sectors and the cultural economy.

The vocabulary about creative industries is changing. Some representatives were wondering what we were talking about, others did not even notice we were talking about that. From the National government to municipalities, nobody understood what we were talking about, while at the European level, even at the global level, city networks are developing in a context of global competition whereas Paris is losing its position to London.

Source: Interview. Elected representative in charge of economic development, culture and heritage. (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

In many interviews conducted as part of this study, interviewees felt that there are currently no links between the different creative scenes. They felt that in spite of the concentration of people and activities, there are no partnerships; there is currently no cluster.

The link does not exist. People do not work together. They do not need each other. There is no cluster. There is a density, but this is not related to the cultural framework. Everything is strongly compartmentalised. To make the cluster accessible to the residents, there should be a link with what already exists. This link is a project in itself. To date, I do not see it because we are working on a very small individual and handcrafted production level, quite fragile. Nothing suggests we will find this missing link

Source: Interview. City officer in charge of cultural Affairs. (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

In an attempt to create these crucial links, several meetings were organised between actors of various creative scenes, but these left people unsatisfied. Some participants expected to have more funding others wanted to contribute to the definition of the project. For instance, the leader of 6B considers that his initiative can support or participate in the clustering strategy while other creatives fear that they are used as a glamorous figure, without getting any resources or consideration in return.

I'm quite tired of this stuff. Anyways, I'm more and more aware that we don't have any influence and that, at the end, they'll just call me to add a local flavour [...] I fear that most of the investment will be concentrated on the cluster and not on existing organisations that need support.

Source: Interview. Local cultural entrepreneur. (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

It is a fact that jobs in the creative industries require skills and qualifications but the level of education is relatively low in Plaine Commune. This discrepancy is the source of a socio-economic mismatch: jobs created in the creative industries do not benefit the population of Plaine Commune and do not contribute to lowering local unemployment (Plaine Commune, 2007). When companies relocate in Plaine Commune they bring their own employees. In the film industries, project-based productions employ mainly the *intermittents du spectacle* on short-term contracts. Careers in these sectors are uncertain, and the pursuit of a passionate and fulfilling work requires the availability of personal resources (social and economic capitals) to face the financial risk (Menger, 2012) that the locals do not have.

It is terrible but the level of culture and soft skills are crucial. These milieus require more than technical skills, an assimilation of quite a background as well.

Source: Interview. Creative Entrepreneur, former director of Le Pole, consultant about the cluster de la creation. (translated and emphasis added by the authors)

As A. McRobbie explains, creative industries are like clubs where access is permitted to those with VIP passes (McRobbie, 2002). This disconnection between the creative industry's job requirements and local workforce's skillset is considered as the main weakness of the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* (Préfet de Région Ile de France *et al.*, 2012). To face this challenge, while large companies moved to La Plaine, Plaine Commune developed a

unique program (*La Charte emploi territoire*) to encourage the newcoming firms to employ locally. The precinct has actually been redeveloped throughout the last 15 years, as good accessibility and low land value attracted many companies. Between 1999 and 2008, 45,000 jobs were created (or relocated), especially in the private sectors. In the next couple of years, two large national companies totally unrelated to culture or creation (SFR: Telecommunication; SNCF: railways), will establish themselves in La Plaine, bringing 14,000 jobs to the area. However there is also a discrepancy between the type of employment made available in these new companies and the qualification of the local workers. And, in terms of job creation, the impact of the creative industries is still relatively weak compared to other sectors (Fig. 1).

Conclusion

The *Territoire de la culture et de la création* will probably be the first *Contrat de Développement Territorial* (Territorial development contract) approved by all parties involved, to provide an institutional framework through which negotiations can be carried out by Plaine Commune authorities¹⁴. The new and vague denomination of the project denotes the authorities' concern for a more inclusive development. The new planning document presents a broad interpretation of the relationships between territory and creation, particularly in the area of support for creative industries. Indeed, counting on a slight rise in the creative sectors, the Plaine Commune authorities promote the symbolic image of the territory by over-emphasizing their role in economic development. However, considering the local movie industry and creative scenes as a cluster could be argued as excessive: local creative activities are fragile, links between professionals are weak, the chain of creative production is rooted in the Paris metropolitan region rather than the Plaine Commune precinct, and creative jobs represent less than 3% of the local workforce. Rather than describing the territory of creative industries, the name *Territoire de la culture et de la création* acts as a label, as a consensual narrative that generates a positive storytelling of the project and associates various stakeholders in order to achieve the local authorities' objectives in terms of urban development.

Plaine Commune, a former industrial area and communist bastion, seems to be turning into the new Paris business district. Culture and creativity are now used as a narrative to market the place, providing symbolic value to the territory in order to attract new companies and investors. Public officers in charge of economic development and urban planning have explicitly described the *Territoire de la culture et de la création* as a tool for city branding and storytelling. This label can also be seen as a politically correct representation for a large regeneration project and major economic up-turn. However, the balance between the communist social policy and the entrepreneurial approach to economic development is unstable. Plaine Commune also has a policy of keeping housing prices low so as to enable some of its poorer inhabitants to afford the new housing. One consequence of this policy is that any redevelopment can only find financial equilibrium through the sale of land for office buildings that have a much higher market value. Due to a reverse rent gap between the very high land prices and a low real estate market, the urban redevelopment of the Pleyel area cannot even pay for itself. Opening this area with a new railway bridge¹⁵ is a crucial

prerequisite to its redevelopment and Plaine Commune is using its planned major urban transformation as leverage to secure state financing for the bridge construction (Fig. 5).

Fig 5. The need for a new bridge to link Pleyel and La Plaine (Source: the authors)

The use of the creative economy narrative to balance the contradictory pursuit of entrepreneurial communism faces another challenge. While the Communist Party's local hegemony used to be rooted in the strong cohesion of the community's socioeconomic structure, changes in the local economic and social structure may widen the gap. Promoting the city through the glamour of creative narratives, as a branding strategy, may lead the way to gentrification, starting with the arrival of creative professionals who appreciate this central, cheap and authentic location. To date, local specificities (such as the bad reputation of schools, social disturbances, social housing, dirtiness, and social and cultural differences) appear as an impenetrable barrier for upper class gentrification and, thus, gentrification remains marginal or thwarted (Pattaroni *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, according to the rent gap theory (Smith, 1996), although the authorities might deny this, the impoverishment of the inner city could contribute to its vulnerability to gentrification and this population change would threaten the communist leadership.

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Figures list

Fig. 1 Jobs in Plaine Commune (Source: Plaine Commune, 2009)

Fig. 2: 6B: a former office building turned into a creative space, including an auditorium (source: the authors)

Fig. 3: Hall of 6B. Exhibition explaining the urban project, realised by some 6B residents and funded by the developer (source: the authors)

Fig. 4 Creative clusters in the Paris Region (Source: Camors and Soulard 2010)

Fig 5. The need for a new bridge to link Pleyel and La Plaine (Source: the authors)

¹ The French administrative system is characterized by the superimposition of different levels of government (municipalities, departments, regions) and by a very high number of municipal governments. In order to enhance local integration, cohesion and cooperation, a new level of government has been legislated, the inter-municipal government, in which municipal governments accept to work together to improve public services and to define common urban planning and development strategies. For a better understanding of the French local institutions, politics and planning system, readers may refer to: Knapp and Wright 2006, Booth 2009, Booth, Breuillard *et al.* (eds.) 2007).

² In working class suburbs, the *communisme municipal* (municipal communism) was characterised by a strong social, political, urban and cultural cohesion: they were working class neighbourhoods with their own culture and spaces of socialisation, massive industrial activities, political control of local governments and social housing lessors and a strong network of community-based organisations.

³ Entrepreneurial municipal communism is a term coined by the authors.

⁴ The following are data comparing the Plaine Commune territory to the Region in 2006: unemployment 20% (11% at the regional level); working class: 30% (15,6%); median income: 11,133 Euros/year (20,575 Euros/year), taxed household: 54% (72%); without diploma: 30% (16%) (Rannou-Heim *et al.*, 2010; Plaine Commune, 2007).

⁵ The *Grand Paris* project is a state-led planning project for the Paris Metropolitan region launched in 2010. Its first objective is to improve public transportation through the construction of a new metro circling the Greater Paris that would link the main economic centres. Its strategic aim is to link and develop nine to ten economic clusters (each one focusing on one economic sector assumed to be clustering nearby) in order to support innovation and enhance economic development (Préfet de Région Ile de France *et al.*, 2012). To learn more about Paris-Region governance, see: Kantor *et al.*, 2012).

⁶ The *Contrat de Développement Territorial* is a new planning procedure specific to the *Grand Paris* project. This contract between the state and local authorities will organise and plan the urban redevelopment around the new stations.

⁷ <http://www.lepole.org/>

⁸ Source: interview. Officer in charge of cultural Affairs, City of Saint Denis.

⁹ In recent years, the Paris scene for crack dealing and consumption moved to the area around the Gare Saint Denis, near 6B.

¹⁰ Some commentators also noted that Luc Besson hired Sarkozy's former Chief Secretary (Michel, 2012; Plichon, 2013).

¹¹ Interview. Architects in charge of the design of new TV studios in La Plaine.

¹² From July 2007 (stock exchange listing) to May 2012, the value of its share fell from 15.5 to 1.3 euros and its earnings were negative in 2010 and 2011 (Poussiégue, 2013).

¹³ Interview. Creative Entrepreneur, former director of Le Pole, consultant for the *Territoire de la culture et de la création*.

¹⁴ They developed a strategy similar to the negotiations for the building of *Stade de France* twenty years ago, using a state-led project as leverage for local development and public funding.

¹⁵ The cost of this railway bridge between Pleyel and La Plaine has been estimated at roughly 100 to 150 million Euros.