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Charles Ambrosino, Vincent Guillon, Dominique Sagot-Duvaouroux

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## ***Geniuslocireloaded***

The creative renaissance of Nantes and Saint Etienne  
*Charles Ambrosino, Vincent Guillon and Dominique  
Sagot Duvaouroux*

Since the middle of the 2000s, the creative city concept (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002, 2005) has gradually informed debates related to the governance and development of urban areas in France. This has occurred through a discourse which seeks to praise the territorial virtues of culture and creativity. This concept emerged in Anglo-Saxon countries and has since seduced many local decision-makers in France. However, unlike countries such as the United Kingdom or Australia, the creative economy has never led to the development of a clearly identified and specific French national policy. It is true that the creation of *Direction Générale des Médias et des Industries Culturelles* within *Ministère de la Culture* in 2009 demonstrates that the traditional remit of cultural industries (cinema, publishing, music) was extended to a number of activities related to the production of creative content (a pluralist approach of media, the inclusion of the advertising and video game industries etc.). In similar vein, the major study carried out by INSEE<sup>1</sup> (2009) with regards to the composition of France's creative class and the one commissioned by the State and carried out by EY<sup>2</sup> (2013), which prefigured the creation of the France Creative<sup>3</sup> digital platform, contributed to building the first comprehensive overview of cultural and creative industries<sup>4</sup> at the national scale. In particular, they highlighted the importance of their economic weight (5% of jobs in France) as well as their concentration in large metropolises (Chantelot, 2010; Liefougue, 2015) – the recent analysis of the Grand Paris creative ecosystem has not challenged these findings<sup>5</sup>. Incidentally, these studies and the political and institutional constructs they build are based on a rather narrow acceptance of the creative economy when compared to other national contexts (software, fashion, luxury, advertising or heritage are not included) and do not lead to creativity being put on the agenda at the ministerial level. Generally speaking, this chapter suggests that

one needs to look at the local scale to understand the ways in which the creative economy paradigm is being implemented in France.

Culture and creativity are thus central to city strategies, and are seen as resources which are mobilised and used in political, economic or touristic projects. This new trend has benefited from the increasing power of cities in terms of public policy implementation, but also from the post industrialisation of urban economies, in which culture is part of territorial showcasing. Without a doubt, Paris has always been considered one of the most creative cities in the world, in cultural as well as in touristic terms. The city is the number one tourist spot in Europe, boasts one of the best museums quarters in the world and is considered to be a creative city par excellence. However, other cities in France, such as Lyon, Lille, Nantes, St Etienne, Nice or Marseille are worth exploring when it comes to illustrating the French attitude towards the creative city paradigm. Two of these cities, Saint Etienne and Nantes, are taken as examples in this chapter because of their earlier strategies to promote their creative soul as an urban development tool.

INSERT FIGURE 8.1 HERE

Saint-Etienne has attempted to recover from the industrial and demographic crises which deeply affected the city through a project centred on design and on the use of local resources tailored to contemporary needs. Design is perceived as a support of shared territorial values and is deeply anchored in Saint-Etienne's industrial history. This city-scale project generated a wide mobilisation of local elites and cuts across several fields of public action: economic development, culture, tourism, education or urban design. More than just a "*flagship development projects*", *Cité du Design* claims to offer a wide-ranging vision of design, centred on the invention of new lifestyles through objects, images and services. It contributes to putting Saint Etienne on the map of visitors. It also repositions the city in the creative economy, by presenting design as a tool capable of converting creativity and cognitive work into an economic activity.

Since the end of the 1980s, the city of Nantes has sought to place itself on the cultural map by means of a series of original events aimed at offering an alternative city narrative to that of a past dominated by the shipping industry. Thanks to the work carried out by a number of individuals with privileged positions in national and international networks (such as Jean Blaise, the *Royal de Luxe* street performing art company), Nantes is progressively developing its image as a cultural hub through a small number of targeted projects mainly based on presenting art in public areas. Art and music festivals such as *les Follesjournées* and the *Biennale de l' Estuaire* contemporary art festival are just a few of the events punctuating an impressive cultural calendar of which the reputation now extends far beyond the borders of the *Pays de la Loire* region. Capitalising on this reputation and led by a strong, audacious and deeply involved team employed by the local council, Nantes, as an artistic brand, is greeted each year by a growing, enthusiastic, and largely local, audience.

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the way these two former industrial metropolises (Nantes and Saint- Etienne) have managed to nurture and sustain a post-industrial narrative around the creative city doxa, promoting themselves as creative industries centres and/or cultural touristic destinations. During the 1990s, following two different paths, they initiated an urban renaissance process by promoting new form of tourism, culture-led regeneration projects and concomitantly creative industries policies. A comparison between the two cities is illustrative of the French context of the connections between tourism and creative industry sectors. Moreover, it should allow us to analyse how cities without a strongly recognised cultural capacity have designed touristic advantages in the global competitive context following an endogenous path by emphasising their *genius loci*.

### **Creative cities: the “French touch”**

Creative Clusters, cultural quarters, creative cities .<th>.<th>. In recent years, these words appear not only in academic literature but also in the speeches of politicians to describe a development strategy of a territory that relies on creative industries. Examples of cities that have boosted their economy through investments in culture

(Bilbao, Nantes, Liverpool, etc.) are widely reported. The UN has since 2008 been publishing regular reports on the Creative Economy<sup>6</sup>. However, these terms are misleading in that they refer to realities and analysis significantly different. The term "cluster" for example refers to industrial economics and describes a concentration of firms belonging to the same sector in a given territory. That of "creative city" emphasizes the ecosystem that a city can be to stimulate innovation and creativity. Creative clusters and creative cities are nevertheless at the heart of the great changes that the world economy is currently experiencing.

Literature related to these concepts and their translations to territorial policies are heavily influenced by the national context in which they are set. Thus, an Italian school developed around the cultural district concept and built upon works related to the 'Third Italy' (Becattini, 1991), marked by the presence of a dense network of small and medium enterprises specialized in an activity belonging to the same value chain where family links and trust are a cement. The British school is strongly influenced by the performative dimension of the creative economy in the new international economic context. As early as the 1990s, urban policies aimed at positioning the United Kingdom in the field of cultural and creative industries<sup>7</sup>. The Californian school (Scott, 2000) is based on Porter's works related to industrial clusters but also on Jacobs's urbanisation effects in order to analyse the creative city as a complex eco-system.

Debates about creative cities and clusters belatedly appeared amongst French academics and practitioners. It was not until the mid-2000s that these concepts were used as analytical frameworks by researchers (Vivant, 2009; Chantelot, 2010; Vivant and Tremblay, 2010; Ambrosino and Guillon, 2013; Liefoghe, 2015; Saez, 2012; L'Observatoire, 2009 etc.) and as a model for development by some metropolises. France is cultural before being creative. Such resistance can be historically explained by the role of *Ministère de la culture* in the definition of cultural policy instruments and objectives. The appointment of Jack Lang as minister of culture in 1981 did indeed introduce a degree of economic concern in the field of culture, but not in ways that addressed territorial issues: supporting cultural industries, defending the cultural exception and professionalising cultural management. Throughout the 1980s, even the

spirit of decentralisation gave birth to spatially oriented cultural policies aiming at a better dissemination of the national cultural offer (Urfalino, 2004; Saez, 2005).

The mobilisation of artistic creation and expression gained momentum at the beginning of the 1990s in the field of urban social development (Metral, 2000; Chaudoir and Maillard, 2004; Bruston, 2005) and in the promotion of new places inspired by cultural and artistic squats and positioned at the margins of urban centres and subsidised cultural institutions (Raffin, 2007; Lextrait and Kahn, 2005). Above all, this trend reflects a demarcation rationale vis-à-vis the State-initiated policy aiming at the democratisation of an elite and decontextualized culture. At this stage, issues related to urban regeneration and local development remained secondary. Although there appears to be an economisation of culture at the local scale, it is particularly visible in prestigious cultural projects (amenity, events and hosting big names of the art sector) of which the effects are measured in terms of attractiveness, visibility and development of tourism in parts of or entire areas. Montpellier, Rennes and Grenoble are very good examples of the introduction of the economic argument in urban cultural development strategies (Le Galès, 1993; Négrier, 1993; Saez, 1995).

In this sense, national contexts influenced the heteronomy of cultural policies in the 1990s. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the idea of a creative city led to a temptation of dissolving culture as a sector of public policy in a vast notion of local development (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Landry, 2000). In France however, no conceptual apparatus established itself to promote such a decompartmentalisation of cultural policies. The creative city as a reference was mobilised, but was often misused when compared with the initial concept (Bianchini and Landry, 1995) and limited to a labelling effect which could showcase a local yet little contextualised cultural offer. The mere performative dimension of the creative city can thus not in itself explain how a number of French cities have led integrated development strategies that have combined tourism, industrial and urban policies through the instrumentation of specific cultural resources. The examples of Saint-Etienne and Nantes are relevant in showing how the evolutions take place at the local scale, outside of national cultural policies, and how these different concepts developed by academic literature have gradually been mobilised for justifying the chosen strategies or obtaining funding.

They show that these two cities have been able to overcome their constraints and lack of natural or heritage assets in order to design development strategies that are not based on existing tourism or on a new iconic building as was the case in Bilbao, but rather on an image or an atmosphere supported by a narrative rooted in the city's history and which allows it to renew itself.

In this chapter, we adopt an evolutionist approach (Boschma and Martin, 2010) to analyse the way in which these two cities have gradually built their urban design on culture, creativity and tourism. We will attempt at shedding light on the evolution of these territories' evolution by stressing three points: learning, path dependency and small historical events. Like individuals, organisations learn from the past by converting the experience gained from resolving problems (organisational learning) into decisional procedures (routines). These procedures transfer the know-how needed to solve recurring problems from individuals to organisations. For example, over time, the city of Nantes acquired expertise in the field of organising major events in public spaces. The second perspective related to path-dependency means that history is important. Past choices condition future choices and determine a path constraint which is more or less narrow. The tourism strategy of a territory with a strong historic heritage will be heavily influenced by the enhancement of this heritage. A city with an industrial past will paradoxically benefit from a baseline in terms of innovation. The trajectories of territories can also be explained by "small historical events", which are often unpredictable and can substantially influence opportunities for evolution. Project trajectories also bear the impression of particular figureheads. They therefore have a non-reproducible and idiosyncratic dimension.

### **Saint-Étienne: design is the new "urban mantra"**

Over the past thirty years, the city of Saint-Etienne has undergone deep economic, social and urban change. The major icons that shaped its industrial history (Manufrance, GIAT, the metal and cycling industries, mining, weapon production, narrow weaving, trimmings etc.) and part of its working class identity have now disappeared or have considerably weakened. The city's population dropped from

220,000 inhabitants in 1975 to 173,000 in 2015. Neither the numerous financial support programmes targeted at struggling companies nor policies (encouraged by the State) aimed at acquiring and redeveloping brownfield sites were successful in reversing the decline of the local production system and the resulting demographic fall. The fact that the State played a major role in planning until the early 1990s acted as a brake on the involvement of local elites in political and cultural policies and in the design of collective strategies to solve the crisis (Béal, Dormois and Pinson, 2008). These local elites prioritise vertical relations with the State, rather than an involvement in stakeholder coalitions built around development projects such as the ones that appeared at that time in many lagging industrial cities (Harding, 1997). The election of Mayor Michel Thiollière in 1994 initiated a new cycle of local strategies oriented towards residential attractiveness, quality of life and the image of the city. But the cornerstone of this change of approach was laid two years before, when Thiollière was still in charge of urban planning as an elected member of the local council. In 1992, the city commissioned the famous architect Ricardo Bofill for an urban design project aiming at giving the city centre a new attractiveness, as had been done in Montpellier, Glasgow, Bilbao and Genoa for example. In such a context, cultural policy was able to be based on the city's local development strategy and design became a defining element of a territorial narrative which underpins collective action (Guillon, 2011). The closer linkage between the creative economy and tourism through design is the result of this cooperative process whereby local stakeholders adjust to the conditions imposed by globalisation and the end of an industrial cycle.

### ***The emergence of distinctiveness: Saint-Etienne and design***

An arena of collective action in the field of design emerged in Saint Etienne at the end of the 1980s under the impetus of Jacques Bonnevel, the then head of *Ecolerégionale des beaux-arts*. In particular, a postgraduate degree in design and research was set up in this higher education institution. This pioneering initiative led by a school of art was developed with a spirit of collaboration with the local industries. Experiments led in this context benefited from nation-wide support and advertising through *Azimuts*, the design journal published by the school. This raised awareness amongst local

stakeholders with regards to these issues and gave Saint-Etienne the opportunity to position itself as a “city of design” from the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, the new modern art museum, which was supported by one of the biggest local companies, the Casino group, started a design collection which was unique in the country, taking advantage of the fact that it was still possible to acquire works at a relatively low price. This young institution was essentially interested in industrial design, in other words in objects produced mechanically and in series for the mass market. This design collection aimed at becoming a marker of local history characterised by the creation of manufactured objects. Several collaborations were initiated on this basis between the museum of modern art, *Ecole des beaux-arts* and the engineering school in order to train students in innovation by design.

Following the study carried out by Catalan architect Ricardo Bofill, the Mayor called on town planner Jean-Pierre Charbonneau to support him in the implementation of his urban planning and regeneration policy. His desire to improve the quality of a high number of public spaces was constrained by the city’s limited financial resources. It was in this unfavourable context that Jean-Pierre Charbonneau encouraged him to rely on the dynamism and reputation of the city’s higher education institutions in the fields of art, architecture and design. An original tool was developed to make this possible: *les ateliers espaces publics*, in which the city council offered graduates opportunities to work on urban regeneration projects. These workshops were cross-disciplinary and brought together designers, architects and artists from Saint-Etienne who collaborated with the city council’s technical, planning and public space department. The aim was to bring uses back to small sites with a high social value (squares, tramway lines, footpaths, school entrances etc.) and to enhance them through cheap and swiftly implemented designs. Interventions dealt with street furniture, signage as well as built or landscaped elements. This work was the basis of the linkage between urban and cultural policy in Saint-Etienne. According to Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, the objective was to “give birth to a sort of style which would be the signature of a Saint-Etienne school of public space”. Over 130 sites were subject to the designs of *Ateliers espace public*. The staging of the renewal of the city (*renouveau stéphanois*<sup>8</sup>) was made possible by the organisation in 2005 of the major

event called *Transurbaines*. The national daily newspaper referred to this as “Saint Etienne during moulting”<sup>9</sup>. The city’s physical transformation process became a spectacle magnified and aestheticized through multiple artistic and staged interventions in public space. This event attracted many visitors and was considered as a springboard for the city’s bid for the 2013 capital of culture label which was in the end won by Marseille.

### ***From the biennale du Design to a new territorial narrative***

Under the initiative of the director of *Ecole des beaux-arts*, the *biennale du design de Saint-Etienne* was launched in 1998. It rapidly gained support from the mayor who was keen to see the city organise an international event reflecting the territory and its repositioning. The *biennale* showcased initiatives and collections which emerged around design from the early 1990s. The first edition was rather tentative but the biennale soon became a major event: it aimed at providing an exhibition of progress in the fields of object and urban design. It also sought to integrate a wide spectrum of innovations by design centred on users (services, public, technologies etc.). The *biennale* had several aims: the strengthening of local skills in design, supporting the local production system, urban marketing and promoting Saint-Etienne as a destination for tourists. It was the first step in bringing tourism and cultural industries closer and this link has grown ever since. The local industrial base, characterised by a high concentration of small and medium sized enterprises and industries, was involved from the start and their awareness and profile raised. The event’s popularity and the presentation of extra-territorial experiments promoted design as a good and service that increases companies’ competitiveness. Moreover, the success of the event contributes to rooting it in several of the city-region’s cultural spaces.

Design is perceived as an expression of shared territorial values that are deeply rooted in Saint-Etienne’s industrial and manufacturing history and community (Varenne, 2006). Heritage institutions contribute to producing an identity narrative about the “culture of the object and of innovation” that would reflect a sort of *genius loci* via its political interpretation. The wish to make history an operating force of the territorial strategies’ development has proved to be effective. The representation of

Saint Etienne as a pioneering site in the field of design – not to say its cradle – gained momentum in the discourse of local stakeholders. This situation led to a reconciliation between the city’s industrial past and its future, its potential for reimagining, as well as between the inherited expertise and the potential for a revived creative metropolis to be built. Two heritage projects are symbolic of the development of this narrative. Urban policy makers eventually accepted them after a long period of disinterest: the reopening of the museum of art and industry and the completion of Saint Pierre church designed by Le Corbusier. At the beginning of the 2000s, the renovation of the museum of art and industry, led by architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, put this heritage institution back on the centre of the stage. Until then it had been considered as the unwanted witness of a past the city was attempting to put behind itself. A new place therefore appeared for the heritage institution serving the new territorial strategy. Its strong networks in the local society allowed it to strengthen and promote the narrative of the “roots of design” and the territory’s legitimacy in the field of industrial innovation and applied arts. In terms of institutional communication and branding, Saint-Etienne was re-conceived as a “land of creation and innovation”. It is in this light that one needs to think of the completion in 2006 of the Saint-Pierre de Firminy-Vert church, designed by Le Corbusier. The building, which had been abandoned since 1978, became the heritage symbol of the “Saint-Etienne, métropole design” project. The development of the architect-designer’s largest European urban complex was thus completed fifty years after the first *unitéd’habitation*. Since then, local authorities and not-for-profit organisations have actively been fighting for it to be listed as UNESCO World Heritage. During the same period, a second flagship element of Saint-Etienne’s renewal appeared, inspired by the success of other European cities in terms of tourism and marketing: the “starchitecture” of Norman Foster’s Zenith.

### ***Cité du design: the spearhead of a creative renaissance***

Saint-Etienne did not become the European Capital of culture, but it was awarded UNESCO’s “creative city” status for design in 2010. This was symbolic, and it contributed to branding the territorial project of which *Cité du design* was the main

element. It was during a trip to Japan to prepare for the second edition of *Biennale du design* that Jacques Bonnaval, the then director of *Ecole des beaux-arts*, discovered the International Design Centre in Nagoya. The project for a new international design centre in Saint Etienne was inspired by the Japanese model and publicly announced during the 2002 *biennale* by the Minister of Culture. It was decided that it would be located on the brownfield site where the old national weapon manufacturing plant was. This was a symbolic place that offered sufficient space to accommodate a building for production, training, research and exhibition in the field of contemporary design. This choice of site also resulted in the redevelopment of an industrial site located on one of the city's major axes which was disused since 2003. Moreover, it gave an opportunity to design a project on a wider urban scale that covers the entire Manufacture – Plaine Achille area where the new Zenith designed by Norman Foster is located. The architectural competition for *Cité du design* was won by Finn Geipel and Giulia Andi and their project aroused much controversy in terms of remembrance (Zanetti, 2010, 2011). Local associations for the preservation of heritage fought against the destruction of administrative buildings and directors' houses required for the construction of the *Cité*. These organisations criticized a vision which they felt gave too much weight to technical and production innovation compared with the working class, political and social dimensions of industrial history. This selective memory is perfectly in line with the narrative about the creativity of Saint Etienne and with the local decision-makers intention to “recodify” the signification of a city which was until then perceived through its working class and mining culture. *Cité du design* was built with financial support from the state and European structural funds. It was the culmination of a process whereby a distinctive territorial resource was built over a twenty year period. It was opened in 2009 and is a platform for higher education, research, economic development, awareness raising and dissemination in the field of design. It also aims at bringing together local stakeholders around this theme: secondary schools and higher education institutions through their involvement in a design consortium, chambers of commerce and industry, businesses, actors of the cultural and tourism sectors etc. The *Biennale du Design* still remains the main vector for the promotion of the territory and of its local skills. For example, the 2013 edition

attracted over 140,000 visitors, including a large delegation from UNESCO's creative cities network.

The last element of the territorial strategy lies in the creation of a cultural quarter around the *Cité du design* in order to encourage “permanent linkages between technologies, design, art, culture and leisure” as well as the emergence of a creative ecosystem. Activities promoted within this 100ha “park city” include a wide range of creative industries. The complex includes a business incubator (in particular in the media sector), the Mixeur (a co-working space developed by Saint-Etienne Métropole), *Ecole Nationale d'Art et de Design*, the *International Rhône-Alpes Médias platform* (IRAM), the Optique Vision centre but also the *Fil* contemporary music centre, the *Zenith* and, as from 2016, *Comédie de Saint Etienne*. The regeneration project of this inner city area was built around the Manufacture d'armes block and aims at expanding the size of the current city centre, perhaps even at doubling it (Mortelette, 2014). The mix of functions between industries, higher education, housing and services is central to this project which seeks to make central areas attractive for visitors but most importantly for the creative classes (Miot, 2015) who have been trained in the city and should be retained more than attracted. The creative quarter is a symbol of the renewal of Saint Etienne and has above all been developed as a showcase, with the risk of being somewhat disconnected from the rest of the city. But this reality raises a number of issues in terms of the metropolitan urban design project's sustainability: how can the idea of a renaissance based on the culture of design can be disseminated at an international scale if the inhabitants of Saint-Etienne themselves are peripheral to it?

## **The creative awakening of Nantes between a touristic narrative and urban cultural development**

Nantes has been one of the most attractive cities of France for the past fifteen years partly because of its cultural vitality reflected by a wide range of projects: some based on heritage such as the restoration of *Châteaux des Ducs de Bretagne* and the reopening of *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in 2016; economic and urban projects with the

*Quartier de la Création* cultural cluster presented as a place of artistic production and revitalization of the territory; urban artistic projects which call in artists whose role is to give meaning to the territory such as during the *biennale de l'Estuaire*, the *Royal de Luxe* parades, the *Machines de l'Îles* well as world famous festivals such as *FollesJournées*. These events were initially aimed at making the city visible at the national and international scales and they have recently been connected so as to become a tourist destination which is not only aimed at businesses. The city also has established an organisation called *Voyage à Nantes* to create a narrative around tourism for the city and to promote the sector. A sightseeing tour is thus developed each year and materialised by a green line that meanders through the city in order to invite visitors and inhabitants to walk around the city and its more or less famous cultural places. However, the touristic valorisation of the city through culture is the result of a long process during which the aims of local cultural policies underwent major changes depending on the opportunities that arose gradually. Three main phases can be identified in this process whereby tourism was developed in Nantes through cultural activities (Sagot-Duvauroux, 2010). In the nineties, culture was perceived as a factor of identity and international prestige. In the 2000s, cultural policy was included in urban design and gave birth to *Quartier de la création*. As from the end of the 2000s, the various cultural attributes of the city were used to build a narrative in order to turn Nantes into an attractive and distinctive destination for tourists.

### ***Changing the image of the city through culture***

As in many industrial cities, Nantes faced the closure of a large number of production plants in the 1980s. The most important event undoubtedly occurred in 1987 when the shipbuilding sites located on *Ile de Nantes* closed down, thus leaving a vast area of brownfield available for redevelopment. Young socialist mayor Jean-Marc Ayrault was elected in 1989 and decided to reinvigorate the city through culture. It is true that at that time, Nantes was often referred to as a sleeping beauty which had paid little attention to the valorisation of its heritage assets, its riverside and its creative vitality. The cultural policy which was then adopted rested on two main aspects. On the one hand, emerging artists were promoted, in particular those in the fields of music and

plastic arts (Guibert, 2010); on the other hand artists and cultural entrepreneurs whose influence was increasingly international were supported. Unlike many other similar sized cities, Nantes did not base its cultural policy so much on major amenity (e.g. museum, theatre, opera house) as it did on innovative projects.

The cultural image of the city therefore bears the impression of a few symbolic initiatives of which its success is as much related to the personality of the project leaders as it is to the consequences of the determined support from the local council (Sagot-Duvaurox, 2010). The creation of *Festival des Allumés* by Jean Blaise played an important role in the identification of “made in Nantes” art. The festival is made visible through its international programming and has aroused keen interest from the population thanks to the animation of various locations in the city and in particular of industrial brownfield sites. It has allowed Nantes to build links with other metropolises such as Barcelona, Saint-Petersburg, Naples and Buenos Aires. The arrival of *Royal de Luxe* follows the same logic. The performances of this street arts company invest the city and involve the people as actors. International co-operations (with Africa, China, South America etc.) open the events up to the world. *Folles Journées* are a third example, based on the same ingredients: offering spectators an offbeat experience compared with traditional cultural offers – in this case through classical music concerts held all day in a place that was for many years unique (the congress centre), and through various formats (short or long), with stars and not so famous artists. Here again, the international dimension of the event allows the population and creators to collaborate with artists and producers from other countries. Through “made in Nantes”, it is worth pointing out that cultural entrepreneurs (Jean Blaise, Pierre Oréface, René Martin) who work alongside artists play a key role and are exported as much as the artists they showcase.

During the 2000s, these initiatives evolved and were central in the strategies that aimed at turning Nantes into an original destination for tourists. *Festival des Allumés* gave birth to *Lieu Unique*, an outstanding national scene located in the old L.U. factories. In turn, *Lieu Unique* gave birth to *Biennale de l’Estuaire* in 2007, an itinerary through contemporaneous sculptures along the Loire estuary. *Royal de Luxe* gave rise to the *Machines de l’île* project led by Pierre Oréface and François

Delarozière. The machines, which are located at the heart of the creative quarter, are pieces from a museum, games, public transport, and elements of the townscape and are today central to the city's attractiveness for tourists. *FollesJournées* gave birth to other *FollesJournées* in cities throughout the world, whether in Tokyo, Lisbon or Bilbao, thus demonstrating Nantes' know-how at the international scale, and promoting the city's prominence at the global scale. Town planner Alexandre Chemetov was commissioned with the master planning for the island. The Western point was quickly identified as the place that should accommodate these different cultural amenities (Morteau, 2015).

In 2006, Nantes joined a European network of cultural clusters, the European Centre for Creative Economy (ECCE). This generated new opportunities that were welcomed by Jean-Louis Bonnin, the then director of cultural affairs for the city (de Graveleine, 2011). The project no longer solely consisted in building a campus for the arts, but aimed at strengthening the position of Nantes Saint-Nazaire in the field of cultural tourism and at developing a real economy around cultural and creative industries. International benchmarking and the choices made by local elected members led to promoting a metropolitan cluster on *Ile de Nantes* (Santagata, 2002; Morteau, 2015), designed like an ecosystem to link social, urban, economic and cultural issues. Numerous experts were commissioned to lead the debate on the definition of the programming of the future quarter and the role that digital technologies could play in it. A project for a *Quartier de la Création* on *Ile de Nantes* was thus being shaped. This raises the question of corporate hospitality for creative enterprises, in particular in terms of their real estate needs and cooperation arrangements. Gradually, *Quartier de la Création* turned into a structure of governance for the creative cluster set up in 2011. Public authorities sought to build links between universities, schools of art and creative enterprises based on a cluster approach. Many events were thus planned in order to foster the inter-organisational exchanges needed for the creative ecosystem to work. The specialisation of the *Quartier de la création* cluster was strengthened in 2014 with more attention being given to spill-overs from cultural activities to the local economy after Nantes took part in the

ECCIA European project. Moreover, there was an increased specialisation in the digital sector which led to the award of the French Tech label.

### ***“Voyage à Nantes”*: how to stage Nantes’ touristic assets**

The flexibility of Chemetov’s masterplan, the emergence of *Quartier de la création*, the adoption of the Nantes Saint-Nazaire SCOT in 2007 and the city’s wish to become a tourist destination led Jean Blaise, the then director of *Lieu Unique* (the cultural centre located in the old L.U. factory) to devise a project that would address both of these issues. This project was *Biennale de l’Estuaire*, a tourism itinerary between Nantes and Saint Nazaire around works of art designed on site. Landscape and artistic creation play a reflexive role here as each of them offers a point of view on the other – landscape on the works and works on landscape. The first edition was in 2007, the same year as the reopening of *Château des Ducs de Bretagne*. It speeded up the redevelopment of the Western end of *Ile de Nantes* around *Hangar à Bananes* and the regeneration of *Nefs de la Loire* where *Machines de l’Ile* are found today (the elephant being the most iconic one). Their monumental character reminds us that ships used to be built in the same place in the past.

As well as being a space of production, *Ile de Nantes* is also a place of consumption, leisure and recreation which are used as a basis for the city’s tourism strategy organised by a *Société Publique Locale (SPL)* called *Le Voyage à Nantes*, the city’s tourism destination management organisation. This agency brings together a wide range of public and private organisations and offers various amenities related to heritage and culture (*Château des Ducs de Bretagne*, the museum of the history of Nantes, the *Habart* gallery), attractions for leisure (*Galerie des Machines*, *Grand Eléphant* and *Carrousel des mondes marins*), events (*Biennale de l’Estuaire*) as well as a tourist information centre. Today, *Voyage à Nantes* is the structure of governance for a cultural and touristic cluster which is developing in parallel to the *Quartier de la Création*. Its activity is centred on digital technologies thanks to the Nantes Tech label.

The main issue for local elites in Nantes is now to build on the previously mentioned initiatives in order to strengthen and perpetuate the cultural image which is now associated with the city: the showcasing of key amenities (the *Château*, *Eléphant*,

the works produced during the *biennale de l'Estuaire*, the museums) is combined with the valorisation of a creative and ludic atmosphere. The city's green space unit has set up "*stations potagères*", a type of game designed by artists for public spaces. Itineraries also link shopping streets, artists' workshops, places for socialising used by the locals, places from which to admire the landscape, parks and gardens, cultural amenities and public art etc. Over the past 25 years, stakeholders in Nantes have thus been successful in fostering the creative awakening of a provincial city which was until then visited by few tourists, by basing their approach on an original tourism-oriented narrative in which the role of urban atmosphere is as important as that of heritage resources.

## **Conclusions**

At the national scale, Nantes and Saint-Etienne today put themselves forward as creative and/or touristic cities. Such an attitude would have been unthinkable some twenty years ago: how can one have imagined that these two old industrial cities, famous for their decline rather than their capacity to innovate, would have been able to claim being part of the knowledge economy or artistic avant-garde in the early 2000s? These two metropolises' recent evolutions are interesting examples which illustrate ways in which the creative city notion is used in order to link cultural, tourism and industrial policies for the benefit of urban development.

### ***The construction of specific and idiosyncratic amenity***

Whether in Nantes or in Saint Etienne, the use of territorial distinction strategies relies on local stakeholders' capacity to identify, valorise and turn a number of "latent" resources (way of life, know-how, industrial memory, cultural heritage) into "active" resources (Greffe, 2006; Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007). Even though neither of these two cities had sufficient "given" resources to promote at the end of the 1980s (heritage, an iconic amenity, a concentration of cultural offers etc.), public sector organisations embarked upon turning a number of specific and idiosyncratic amenities into "built resources" (a pole for tourism, an agglomeration economy, a creative

quarter): design for Saint-Etienne and cultural and artistic dimensions of *made in Nantes*. In both cases, path dependency, which determined the range of future choices based on past choices, was paradoxically rather low taking into account the need for restructuring. The change in trajectory was facilitated by the failure of past trajectories and by the recodification of the spirit of these places.

The most striking aspect of this process is its incremental dimension. The creative renaissance of Nantes and Saint-Etienne is led by individual pioneers and is intrinsically linked to a number of co-operations stemming from opportunities: emblematic cultural entrepreneurs such as Jean Blaise, Pierre Oréface or René Martin (in Nantes), Jacques Bonnaval and Jean-Pierre Charbeanneau (in Saint-Etienne) met Mayors who had a strong sense of entrepreneurship and experimenting. They evolved together and built a common strategic vision in which action prototyping prevails over planning. The convergence of interests allowed individuals rather than institutions to build upon initiatives. These singular persons were able to convince various stakeholders of the feasibility and interest of their project including artists, entrepreneurs, politicians and planners. They are catalysts and generate new cooperation and learning processes that lead to a gradual reconfiguration of territorial policies. One can identify a transfer of individual know-how to organisational learning which means that local strategies are less vulnerable to the turnover of key individuals.

### ***Telling the story of change: the territorialising force of the narrative***

The renewal of types of collective action in Nantes and Saint Etienne is based on the development of a territorial narrative based on a process of memorial selection and overcoming a number of negative representations by generating a new imagery revolving around reinterpretation that does not allude to some aspects of heritage such as decline, deindustrialisation, loss of population etc. This original story told to the outside world and picked up by the media, visitors, elected members and the local population gives a sense of unity in the present time and acts as a starting point to debate about the city and define future needs and expectations. This is the case in Saint-Etienne, where the promotion of design as a territorial value consolidates the

industrial heritage and the valorisation of local innovative capacity. This, however, implies some controversial decisions: regular conflicts occur between the proponents of the technical memory of the place (know-how related to fabrication, invention of technical and commercial processes) and those of the social memory (class struggle, relationships of domination. <th>.</th>). Such conflicts reflect the lack of consensus that the strategic and one-sided exploitation of local history can generate. Generally, local stakeholders' stories told to others, whether in France or abroad, appear to have performative effects on the history they build. The transformation of *Ile de Nantes* is one example: *Quartier de la Création* would probably not have been built if *Festival des Allumés*, the reconversion of the old L.U. factory into a cultural centre and the setting up of *Machines de l'Ile* had previously not led local stakeholders to thinking that art and culture could be the driving force of this old industrial territory's regeneration.

### ***Atmosphere as a resource for a new creative tourism***

The recent evolution of Nantes and Saint-Etienne also shows that the implementation of contemporary territorial projects also depends on the conditions in which they are staged and on the integration of more cross-cutting initiatives. The linking of policies for cultural, tourism and urban development are based on a “*weakening of the dichotomy between tourists and inhabitants for the benefit of a visitor-consumer*” (Fabry, Picon-Lefebvre, Pradel, 2015) for which the authenticity and quality of life seem to be at least as desirable as traditional infrastructure for leisure. This type of hybridization of local public policy is in part the product of the fruitful collaboration between culture and planning. They are able to generate cultural projects which have a real urban dimension as well as planning projects that structurally integrate cultural, leisure and recreation activities.

The convergence between the spectacle of creation (artistic, cultural and technical), leisure offers and liveability gives urban production a cultural value which circulates amongst multiple communities (visitors, residents, workers etc.). The attention paid to fostering specific atmospheres reflects the wish to build links between various resources (artistic, commercial or social amenity), a wide range of

fields of action (design of public space, artistic programming, and transport services) and stakeholders who operate in various areas (a bar tender, a bookseller, a gallery owner, a craftsman, cultural entrepreneurs). The cases of Nantes and Saint Etienne are in this sense a reflection of the ways a specific cultural atmosphere is valorised. It is these atmospheres more than infrastructure that local stakeholders aim at promoting – an approach which therefore differs from the amenity-led approach that has until now been the cornerstone of local cultural policies. A range of technical and creative skills (alternative management of green spaces and street lighting, public space design, installation of works of art and original street furniture etc.) are thus mobilised in order to stage the change of urban spaces. The logic of cultural tourism is therefore also altered to the point that the experience of the city based on senses and imagination are as good a reason for people to visit the place as a tour of a prestigious institution. Such a strategy however requires constant renewal in order to maintain the evanescent dimension of tourism based on events (Nantes) and creation (Saint-Etienne).

## Notes

- 1 Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques
- 2 The former Ernst and Young company.
- 3 The *France créative* platform brings together all professional associations and unions representing the stakeholders of cultural and creative [www.francecreative.fr].
- 4 The cultural and creation activities taken into account are: plastics and graphic design (including architecture and design), music, cinema, television, radio, live entertainment, the press, publishing and video games.
- 5 This study carried out in May 2015 by *Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la région d'Ile-de-France* shows that about half of the country's cultural and creative industries are concentrated in this territory:[www.iau-idf.fr/savoir-faire/nos-travaux/edition/lecosysteme-creatif-en-ile-de-france-1.html].
- 6 United Nations (2008), *Creative Economy Report. The challenge of assessing the creative economy towards informed policy-making*, Geneva and New York, United Nations; United Nations (2010), *Creative Economy Report, A Feasible Development Option*, Geneva and

- New York, United nations; United Nations (2013), *Creative Economy Report, Widening Local Development*, Geneva and New York, United nations.
- 7 DCMS, 1998 et 2001, *Creative industries mapping document*, London; DCMS, 2004, *Culture at the heart of regeneration*, London
- 8 Title of the cover of *Télérama* magazine n°2891, 11–17 June 2005.
- 9 *Libération* newspaper, 15 June 2005.

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