

“The Inhabitant of the Entrepreneurial City must be Entrepreneurial” – Branding the Shrinking City as a Creative One Through Local Population Participation

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ABSTRACT

Place promotion has long been studied through the lens of the “entrepreneurial turn” of the European cities. Research has now established that place promotion is linked to the rise of neoliberalism and interurban competition; different strategies of place marketing have been highlighted; and the efficiency of these strategies – and the social mobilisations against them – have already been deeply discussed.

However, some questions remain to be asked. In some former heavy industrialized cities that now face economic difficulties, new strategies of urban marketing have recently been promoted. They consist of making the inhabitants of these cities participate themselves in the promotional events. For example, the municipality of Saint-Etienne – a declining industrial city in South-East France – organised an event named the “Yellow day”. In the French collective imagination, Saint-Etienne’s inhabitants are linked to the colour green since the European successes of its famous football team in the late 1970’s. By publicly asking the inhabitants of the city to go in the streets wearing yellow clothes during a strongly media covered festival organized in 2005, the mayor wanted to show that “green is the colour of the past, yellow the one of the future since Saint-Etienne wants to be a creative city”. Two other examples of urban marketing events requiring the participation of the local population, in two other French declining cities, will also be examined.

Our objective will be to study the causes, the degree of acceptance among local population, and then the purposes of such events.

Concerning the former, the diffusion of a new conception of urban economic growth based upon the notion of creativity among urban elites seems to be a key explanation of the adoption of these new urban marketing strategies; the point will therefore be to understand how this concept of a “creative city” has emerged on the urban agenda of the cities we observe, and what impact it then has had on the urban policies.

Concerning the latter, three possible goals of these new strategies adopted by the urban elites will be debated. One of them is to try to bring an entrepreneurial spirit into the city: urban marketing would therefore play a performative role, because the inhabitants would become creative... just because the communication service says it is

so. The second potential goal can be both to reinforce the urban inclusion and the loyalty to the local elites by making the inhabitants be part of the new image of the city. The last possible goal of these events is linked to a wish of the elites to convince the upper-middle-class outside the city to come and live inside it – and thus, to gentrify it.

Key Words: shrinking cities, creative cities, urban marketing