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The *off* artistic venues' trigger effects in urban regeneration project

Off artistic spaces are flourishing in cityscapes. For example, in many cities, *off* artists are squatting empty building in order to create underground cultural venues. If some people could considered them as dangerous and marginal, *off* venues could catch a wider audience than outskirts and freaks. In a context of creativity's rising (or even diktat), a large urban neobohemia is supposed to be deeply interested into all kind of creativity and artistic expression (Florida 2002; Lloyd 2002). Moreover, we argue that these *off* venues could be used as tools in city's cultural policies. To understand this interest, it is necessary to review changes in French cities' involvement in cultural policies for the last thirty years. Actually, policies' goals are moving from residents-oriented cultural services supplying toward new comers and visitors needs' matching. This shift implies a change in policies' patterns too. The city, as a built environment and a social fabric as well, is becoming the cultural policies' playground. Especially, cultural policies are now embedded into cities development strategies, as we are showing in the first part of this article. Then, we will explain further what we consider as *off* culture and how is it related to mainstream culture. We will put into relief the current shift that is occurring in/throughout planners and authorities attitude toward these *off* spaces. The example on the regeneration project of La Chapelle Stalingrad area in Paris will illustrate it. Moreover, it is the opportunity to discuss more controversial issues. For whose sake are culture-led regeneration projects planned? Is there any alternative to culture in planning policies?

New goals of cities' cultural policies

In France, cities started to be involved in cultural policies by the sixties, through the Maison de la Culture program. Nevertheless, it was a national program (ie state centralised), based on a new kind of partnership with city authorities (on a half-half fundraising scheme). This program was thought as a national planning policy for arts and culture, focused on medium-sized cities. It aimed to spread highbrow culture throughout the country, by building new highbrow cultural amenities that hosted all the city's main public cultural institutions. But even if cities had to fund half of the construction costs, it was still a national public policy (Urfalino 2004). By the late 70s, especially where city councils were directed by the opposition (Socialist Party), local authorities started to implement their own cultural policy. It implied to increase the cultural budget, to create new administrative departments, and to develop partnerships with both national public cultural agencies and local artists and cultural entrepreneurs.

At this time, several urban changes led cities toward cultural policies. Mainly, the population of cities was changing. Urban social movement activists, rising artistic-related population and new urban middle class had a deep interest into culture. As well, some cities became students districts, for whom entertainment and culture are part of the lifestyle. Thus, needs for cultural amenities and events increased dramatically. The cities' first aim was to supply a wide range of cultural facilities in order to satisfy tastes and needs of the whole community. Most of them played a *catalogue game* by offering basic facilities, such as libraries, art training centres or local history museum (Friedberg and Urfalino 1984). Nevertheless, it did not mean that cities developed a specific offer in order to differentiate themselves. More or less, all of them offered the same kind of amenities. At the same time, culture was a tool of the "politique de la ville", as are called public policies in poor neighbourhood, such as public estates. Besides urban renewal, sociocultural activities occurred in new community centers (called Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture) (Chaudoir and De Maillard 2004). So, until the late 80s, French cities' cultural policies were focused on art training (music school, dance academy), library and amateur artistic practices (Moulinier 2005; Poirrier 2002; Saez 2005).

But, little by little, local authorities realized that a cultural policy could be more than a supply chain. In a context of devolution and of liberalism-oriented thinking spread, culture tended to be considered as a competitive advantage for cities. Since the beginning of the 90s, cultural policies are driven by several beliefs. Cultural (and creative) industries are major locally-based economic forces (Scott 1999). Supporting arts and culture is supporting

local economic (re)development. For example, some cities develop creative industries clusters, such as Manchester and music (Brown et al. 2000), or Hamburg and medias (Brito Henriques and Thiel 2000). Culture (and entertainment) is also the main engine for urban tourism which contributes to local economy. A strong and dynamic cultural framework provides many entertainment opportunities for the inhabitants and the tourists (Gravari-Barbas 2006; Judd and Fainstein 1999). Culture is the taste of urban lifestyle. Symbolic revalorisation through culture is one of the explanations of gentrification process (Cole 1987; Ley 2003; Mele 2000; Solnit and Schwartzberg 2000; Zukin 1982; Zukin 1991; Zukin 1995). Cityscapes, especially consumption (land)scapes, tend to be built by cultural industries (Hannigan 1998; Sassen and Roost 1999; Zukin 1991; Zukin 1995). Thus, cities cultural policies shifted toward new kind of interventions such as supporting local cultural entrepreneurs, organising large cultural events, and building new cultural amenities. New goals for cultural policies are now to build a positive and attractive city image and to promote local economic development. Culture is a communication tool for tourism development, quality of life improvement and competitiveness. It markets the city as an innovative and creative place, two fundamental qualities essential to success in the global inter-city competition (Florida 2002). Cultural policies are therefore increasingly becoming a marketing strategy to attract firms and people (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993; Evans 2001; Guy et al. 2002; Keating and de Frantz 2004; Mommaas 2004; Strom 2002; Verwijnen and Lehtovuori 1999). A shift occurs into cultural policies in order to attract firms, high-valued industries, educated and wealthy inhabitants instead of supporting the local community. Actually, cultural policies seem to become settlement policies.

Few cities succeed to develop a cultural niche often started with a festival, such as comics (Angoulême), photography (Arles), street theatre (Aurillac) or circus (Chalon). But, main cities are looking forward to build what G. Saez called a “Très Grand Equipement” (a very large scale amenity), which may lead city image changes, as TGV (high speed train) is supposed to do (Saez 2005). This last point is becoming an important issue for urban planning. A new belief sprouts in urban planning circles considering that culture is as a magical tool for development. Cultural amenities are becoming flagships in major urban regeneration projects. Most planners expect that these amenities increase the project’s success: they attract visitors and tourists, build a new city image through architectural radicalism (Sydney Opera House or Guggenheim Museum are the most famous examples) (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993; Evans 2001; Keating and de Frantz 2004; Strom 2002; Verwijnen and Lehtovuori 1999). Is it possible to plan a new urban project without culture? Nevertheless, we should wonder if these new cultural

flagships are not becoming a part of the *catalogue*. In other words, is it still relevant to build a cultural flagship in order to create a distinctive image while every city does?

At the same time, it sounds to be more and more difficult to intervene into the built city. According to many local organisations, every building seems to be a part of the community heritage, that should not be destroyed. The claim for history and heritage is an argument in a local identity building process. Especially, it is a way for new comers (i.e. gentrifiers) to legitimize their implication into local politics (Bourdin 1984). It is also the consequence of a rising suspicion against contemporary architecture. Regenerate the city without destruction is one of the contemporary urban paradox. As we will explain later, this heritage diktat is no longer controversial because planners and politicians are basing consensus on heritage conservation.

Thus, nowadays, culture is one of the key element of cities' strategies in globalization era and international inter-city competition. Culture is considered in cities policies as :

- A symbol : culture is a part of local history.
- A lifestyle : artists as pioneers in gentrification process, create a bohemian and artistic urban atmosphere.
- A space: tourism depends on cultural spaces (like places, atmosphere, customs or events)
- An image : cultural activities market the city as an innovative, creative and dynamic place.
- An industry : cultural activities are becoming one of the most important economic activities in the city, both by creating direct value and employment and by attracting visitors as well as improving the tourist industry.
- A tool : cultural facilities are often flagship in urban redevelopment projects.

These trends should appear quite cynical. But at the same time, it should not be forgotten that in France the cultural production is mainly supported by the state through different social policies toward artists (“intermittents du spectacles” welfare system, artistic social housing), protectionist legislation on cultural products, and a very strong public support for performing arts. Moreover, with few presidential large scale projects (such as the National Library, Opera Bastille, Musée du Quay Branly), French cultural policy seems to be driven by a monarchist vision of the arts. But between the business-oriented model and the central state policies, there are plenty of space for arts to flourish.

In culture - off culture: a new semantic scheme

Nowadays, a lot of cultural activities takes place outside the mainstream sphere. Community radios play DiY rock bands, independent documentaries are shown by students cineclubs, local Tv channel are broadcasted in cafes, visual artists and performers occupy empty spaces, techno-travellers squat fields for party, circus settle down in wastelands... These underground culture scenes are not subsidized and have no commercial value. They are typically precarious on an economical side (no subsidies, no regular incomes), legal side (by squatting, organizing unauthorized events), and material side (second hand art craft material,). They could include avant-garde artistic production or mass subcultural activities, legal or not, isolated or collective.

Nevertheless, underground cultural activities should not be considered as separate from the mainstream cultural world. They are a part of the “art world” (Becker 1983). Considering the creative process (in art, technology or science) and the relationships between mainstream and underground culture, and following Gresillon (Grésillon 2002), we are using the semantic scheme of “*in culture - off culture*”. This scheme is based on the description of the major art festivals such as theatre festival in Avignon. The *in* is organized and planned, while the *off* is spontaneous and opportunist; the *off* is free of commercial, academic or trend constraints, so it can be a creative and innovative space; the *in* draws from the *off* new ideas and new talents; the *off* needs the *in* to build its legitimacy; and, little by little, the *off* becomes the real festival: the place to show and to be, the real engine of the festival which attracts more people and more artists until a new *off* of the *off* appears... In much the same way, we will consider underground cultures as “*off culture*”, and mainstream culture as “*in culture*”. Even if *off* is a creative symbol, it should be noted that *off* does not always mean quality and innovation. Neither, it should be consider as subculture: it is a part of the cultural production framework where *in* and *off* are embedded and are working together. This “*in-off*” scheme puts into relief the systemic and cyclical movement of creation.

The rise of *off* cultures should be considered within a wider process of cultural changes in both consumption and production. On the one hand, the access to the “art world” is going to be more democratic and massive. For a long time, being in touch with the art world was a distinctive practice, only reserved for the leisure class (Veblen 1899). Even if it was still driven by a strong sense of social distinction, access to culture has been democratized during the 20th century. Nowadays, more people can be actors in the “art world”: as producer, creator, spectator, or consumer. For example, with new medias and technologies, most of us can easily listen music or watch movies. As a result, cultural tastes and practices are widening and are moving from

elitism to eclecticism, characterized by the embedding of highbrow and popular culture and the mixing of different cultural types (Donnat 2004; Peterson and Kern 1996). Cultural consumption becomes eclectic. Indeed, while culture is consumerized, cultural or artistic choices are also becoming more reflexive, as a tool for personal identity building (Lash and Urry 1994).

On the other hand, hybridation is the current trend in cultural production. Breaking barriers is the way of artistic recognition (Heinich 1998). Barriers could be moral, aesthetic, technical, territorial and so on. Barriers also existed between high art and popular culture. Pop' art led to break these ones by mixing mass culture icons and contemporary art. French cultural scene is leading other hybridation processes. For example, circus, which was the most popular familial cultural venue, is becoming a new highbrow artistic practice by adding contemporary dance, theatre, experimental music or artificial intelligence in shows, toward "contemporary circus". On the contrary, few companies play Opera (the highbrow Excellency) in the street, in order to catch a wider and popular audience. Besides, since the 80s and the Jack Lang cultural policies, subculture such as hip-hop, rock or comics are recognized by cultural authorities as part of the artistic production. Cultural industries and the cultural production economic system need innovation and variety to match the taste of a picky and diverse audience, toward a multitude of niche markets (Benhamou 2004). Lastly, urban cosmopolitanism leads to cultural hybridation both by valorizing others' cultures and by mixing and creating new styles or subcultures.

These changes occur in a context where innovation and creativity are becoming new contemporary paradigms. These paradigms involve new economic and geographic patterns as well as social changes. R. Florida argues that all of these changes are reflected by the rise of the creative class. According to him, high tech industries are clustering in cities where there is high concentration of bohemia, artists, and gay community. Then, he claims that a new creative class is born whose members are paid for their creativity, whatever the economic sectors (culture, medicine, finance, engineering, research...) (Florida 2002). R. Lloyd explains that now, bohemia is not only a way of life for artists and marginals, but it is becoming a resource for urban economy, based on creative industry (such as media, design, advertising...). The neobohemia is involved in both arts and creative businesses (Lloyd 2002).

Furthermore, the *off* culture can take place in specific space that we call *off* spaces. They are *off* cultural space and *off* culture's space at the same time [or: space of the *off* culture and *off* spaces of culture] (Raffin 1998; TransEuropeHalles 2001). In his study on Berlin, Grésillon shows that a

major part of the Berlin cultural life is taking place in such *off* spaces like artistic squats or private flats customized into small theatres. According to him, the Berlin *off* culture is characterized by a search for new artistic modes of production that occurs in *off* spaces. Because *off* spaces are temporary, *off* scene are constantly moving throughout the city, from one place to another. Grésillon shows that, in Berlin, *off* cultural spaces are working in urban redevelopment as symbolic spaces and value. Moreover, he shows that Berlin is currently becoming an international creative city mainly because of the dynamism *off* spaces and *off* scenes, considered as part of the city image and identity. Thus, *off* is participating to Berlin's image and is gazed by tourists (Grésillon 2002; Vivant 2006).

Towards new cultural policies ?

How could planners and local authorities deal with these *off* spaces? Currently, it seems that in several cities, they have a new approach to *off* cultural centre (as artistic squats). Indeed, the developers' attitudes have changed from an opportunist attitude to a strategic one. Until recently, public authorities and urban developers accepted artists squatting or using wasteland while they were waiting for development projects to be implemented, because it was a way to avoid the dereliction of the building and to satisfy a social demand, free of charge. Nowadays, a new urban development strategy seems to have materialized. Artists who settle down in wasteland are now considered part of a long-term strategy framework whose objectives are to upgrade and revitalize the space. The presence of artists is considered as meaningful, and gives a semiotic as well as an economic value to the place. In fact, public authorities are now asking artists to occupy certain wastelands where new cultural facilities are being planned. Some artists have even participated in the revitalization project by proposing new ideas of cultural engineering in wasteland improvement projects (like Usines Ephemères). Some *off* spaces are now fully integrated in urban redevelopment projects. Les Frigos in the ZAC Paris-Rive Gauche or La Friche de la Belle de Mai in Euroméditerranée project in Marseille are but only two examples of this new phenomenon. Moreover, some *off* space are used as a tool in urban regeneration projects. How do planners integrate these *off* spaces in urban projects? What does it reveal about the change in cultural policies of cities ?

Make regeneration easier with *Off* culture

The case of La Chapelle-Stalingrad regeneration project illustrates how *off* culture could be use as a tool for planning and how *off* artists are becoming

planners' pathfinder, as symbolic shifter from decay to glamour¹. Moreover, this example puts into relief the role of inhabitants organizations in culture-led regeneration planning. Indeed, culture appears as the unique acceptable feature for urban projects. What does the culture-oriented planning claim mean ? For whose sake are cultural amenities created?

La Chapelle Stalingrad: the most decaying area downtown Paris.

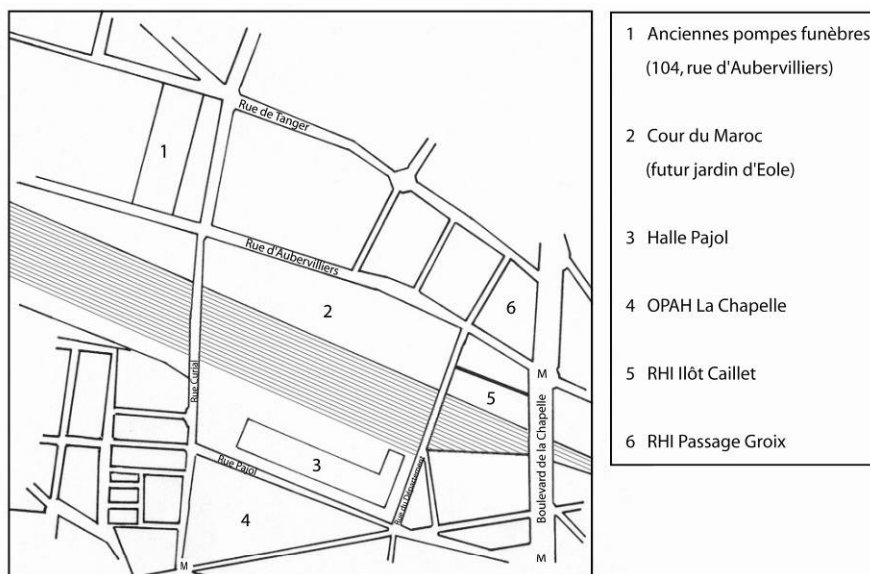
The La Chapelle-Stalingrad neighbourhood is located at the frontier of the 18th and 19th district, enclosed between Gare du Nord railways and Gare de l'Est ones. Even if it is a part of the central city, it is considered as an outlying area. For a long time, it has been neglected by the local authority. Housing is a dramatic issue here. Besides the public estates, lodging a poorer population than the Parisian average, private housing host even poorer and desperate population. Most of the building are decaying, turning into slums. Some ceilings are falling down. Fire risk is high. Flats are overcrowded. Some places do not have water or energy supply. Owners have not done refurbishment works for a long while. Actually, renting slums is real business. Indeed, most of the residents are illegal immigrants who have difficulties in finding a flat. Unfair landlords take benefit of it by overpricing rents for deprecating places. As a result, some immigrants families (mainly Africans) have to share a 10square meter room with more than five people, for a rip off rent (sometimes near 1500euros/month). At the same time, some empty building are turned into crackhouses. Drugs dealing and consumption cause a lot of trouble to neighbours, who organise self-defence residents patrols to push out drugs dealers. This area also suffers of a lack of public amenities such as parks and kids gardens. It is not necessary to say that it is the cheapest area on the real estate market.

In 2001, a political shift occurs at the Paris city council. After 25 years of conservatives supremacy, the new elected mayor, Bertrand Delanoé, is a member of the Socialist Party. This political turn was translated into a new urban policy. A particular focus was made on La Chapelle-Stalingrad, which becomes one of the main urban regeneration area. Several different kind of urban interventions are implemented. An housing improvement program occurs. Landlord may be subsidised in order to refurbish renting housing. Another large housing renewal program leads to demolish several buildings and to build new ones. Some of them will became social housing, others will be sold. Public spaces are redesigned to create a more secure environment.

¹ This case study is based on several interviews (with planners, city representants, local organizations leaders, artists), observations, planning and other officials documents, and a press review.

Large public amenities are also planned. A new park should open in 2007. A large empty warehouse will be refurbished and will host several facilities such as a high school, a sport facility, a public library and a youth hostel. And a new cultural space is under construction. How are these projects related to *off* culture? Before (and while) the real planning process occurs, *off* culture stimulated it. Different empty spaces are turned into *off* cultural spaces. *Off* artistic practices livened up the area. And first of all, *off* spaces influenced the new cultural space project.

Fig. 1 The Chapelle Stalingrad area



Source: Elsa Vivant

But before going further, we should stop and explain why this area is as much concerning by a large regeneration program. First of all, because it needs it. Nothing has been done here for a long time. So to invest in a mass dose and to regenerate this area is a good symbol of political shift. Focusing public action here is also a political duty. Indeed, some of the most important Parisian socialist people are elected in this district (the mayor, the deputy mayor in charge of urban planning, etc.). They should act for their voters. Moreover, in this area, local organisations are very strong, mostly due to the previous government's disinterest. Inhabitants had to manage by themselves some safety issue. Partnerships (or at least consultation) with local organisations is a part of the Socialist Party new vision. Before Segolène Royal and the "Participative democracy", the socialist government acted for a new "local democracy" based on consultation with neighbourhood council and local organisations. So, it seems necessary to react positively to local requests and needs. It does not mean that local organisations gain power. Actually, planning authorities deal with them in order to accelerate implementation process. As it will be shown later, some concessions are made to calm down other claims.

104: from cultural policy flagship to urban regeneration flagship

The 104² is the new cultural amenity currently under implementation in the area. It is plan to refurbish and to transform an old unused mortician's building, and to turn it into artistic studios, training places for artists, exhibitions spaces, show rooms and a community centre. This is a very ambitious project: larger than 30000m² building, more than 100millions euros of construction costs (Direction des Affaires Culturelles 2003). But the real ambition of the 104 is somewhere else.

The new socialist local government uses cultural policy as a symbol of his victory (Delanoë 2003). The two main new orientations are to support creation and to organise innovative events. Supporting creation gets through open up new places for creation. Actually, for few years, a quite large artistic squats movement putted into the political agenda the issue of the lack of spaces for artists. They legitimized illegal squats by complaining about the artistic studio number fall, while artists need space to create. They also developed a quite brilliant location strategy, leading them towards the most valuable areas in the city. They became more visible, especially in the medias, and question politicians about art support.

² Also called Pompes Funèbres.

More or less at the same time, in the French Minister of Culture (during the socialist Jospin government) tried to understand what is happening in cultural places that are not subsidized by the government, i.e. *off* places. In this way, a large research was pursued by Fabrice Lextrait (Lextrait 2001), which ended with the organization of a large conference on the theme of the “Nouveaux Territoires de l’Art” (“New Art Arenas”)³. He studied many different and diverse cases of new artistic experiences taking place in new kind of spaces. This meeting concluded that public authorities and planners should now consider differently these *off* spaces. One of the objectives of the research was to propose a framework for a new cultural policy toward these spaces. Thus, as an heir of Jospin’s era, Paris’s mayor took into account Lextrait’s work and try to innovate by creating a new kind of cultural space. At least it is the 104 project’s goal. Instead of the tautological question: “how to be creative in order to promote creativity?”, location is the main issue developers have to deal with. To create a large public-funded cultural amenity, mainly oriented toward artistic production rather than consumption may be misunderstood by the local population. On the other hand, to attract spectators and visitors in this unrepeated and stigmatised area seems to be a real challenge. Precinct image should change and become attractive, or at least not repulsive.

In order to symbolise its willingness of urban regeneration, the City putted this area under the spotlights by organising special events there. Especially, most of the artistic performance during the first Nuit Blanche were concentrated here. Actually, Nuit Blanche, and other (cultural) events are the second symbol of the Parisian political shift. Events are tools in urban marketing. Firstly it is a communication tool toward local inhabitants, as a way to say: “see how the local authorities are working for you”. But according to critics, to focus on events is as a way to hide other actions (or inaction). Then, events are also a part of a tourist communication strategy. It is a marketing tool towards investors and new comers: “you should come here, it is the place to be. Our city is so lively”. This kind of city image is seeked by many urban managers, and some Parisian events (such as Nuit Blanche or Paris Plage) are copied worldwide.

Nuit Blanche is an one-full-night event, occurring annually since 2002. It aims to provide contemporary art installations and performances in public spaces⁴; for example: a light show in an art deco swimming pool, a five

³ “Wastelands, Laboratories, Factories, Squats, Multi-discipline Projects... A New Era of Cultural Activity”, www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/actualites/rapports/lextrait/eng.pdf (English summary of the report is available online)

⁴ For many critics, it is becoming a kind of popular fair, where arts are just an excuse for a long night out.

hundred guitars marathon in the Sacre-Coeur, or a contemporary art installation within an old church. It could take place neither in the street or in usual cultural places (such as Le Louvre, the National Library) or non-cultural places (like a train station). But the most interesting here is that Nuit Blanche is the opportunity to open the doors of under-working-process places, such as 104. Actually, during the first Nuit Blanche, there were not so many attractions. Partners were feebleness and did not really believe in this idea. But, the 104 was the place where more performances occurred⁵. During this special night, Parisian were invited to come into La Chapelle-Stalingrad area, where they probably never came neither planned to come, whatever the awful reputation of the area, in order to assist to an one-shot art performance. At the same time, the public visited this amazing building, and were informed about the cultural amenity project. Actually, this is not an hazard. Local authority planed this spotlights exhibition of the 104 and the area. It is the first step of a image remaking process. Art performances glamorised a derelict building and a decaying area before the real regeneration process occurred. For one night, 104 and La Chapelle-Stalingrad were the place to be.

Make place safer with off artists

Nuit Blanche takes only one night. It is an one-shot event toward happy few art lovers. But it is not enough to shift the stigmata. It needs a longer term strategy. Indeed, even if *off* artists should sound as dangerous or marginal for someone, they should also be used as tool and as pioneers for urban regeneration. Actually, *off* art scenes are politically correct cleaning agents of a decayed area.

First, as it was explained earlier, there are a lot of empty spaces in the area. Lot of them were squatted, and few became crackhouses, real nightmare for neighbours, authorities, and landlords⁶. The National Railways Company⁷, who owns a lot of spaces there, implements an interesting (and opportunist) strategy to deal with it. While a building is empty without any specific plans, the company authorises non-profit organisations, NGOs or artists communities to settle down in the building. This occupation is generally free of charge. And demolition or sale is often the building's purpose future. So, the company do not pay for refurbishment. Here is the first issue: most of the buildings are not catching safety norms. But the owner is responsible in case of accident. So, what is the interest for the landlord? Mainly, it is a way to

⁵ Other places (such as Point P or the Theatre de la Gaité) that are new cultural amenities projects, were also open this night.

⁶ Landlords are responsible of any accident occurring in their building.

⁷ Sncf then Rff.

avoid squatting and to control occupation (and occupants)⁸. In this area, two main places are occupied like that. First, two houses, located at the entrance of the Cour du Maroc⁹, host the Secours Catholique (social and community support activities) and a pool of independent medias (related to Indymedia network). The second place is a very large empty warehouse, Hall Pajol, where a sculptor, an acrobatic company, an independent theatre company and two local organisations were settled down. Here, independent (*off*) local organisations and artists permit to avoid squatting or unexpected resident. By their works, they are also supplying social care and cultural activities to the community.

But, this is not without any trouble. Building safety should be considered more carefully. Moreover, the city council wished to buy these place in order to implement urban regeneration project. But, the safety issue leads to wait until the tenants leave, because the mayor is personally responsible in case of any accident in a city-owned building¹⁰. But, here is the second problem: tenants do not want to leave! Using people as a tool for planning implies to face with them sometime! Actually, most of the tenants resisted to their eviction, even if it was clearly written in their contract that they will push out to allow public project implementation. Moreover, they argued to be resettle somewhere else, as if it is a right (for them) and a duty for the authorities. These resistances took many different ways. Some just waited, contested and saw. But two were more innovative. The sculptor, who is doing monumental art works, classified all his works as artworks. Thus, it became more difficult and more expensive to move them out. Nevertheless, he had to move, and nowadays, the Halle Pajol is emptied and currently under works. The medias are more influential. Because of their position in the mediasphere (especially in the internet), and even if they are dominated in the field of the media production, they have a quite strong power. They can easily mobilise activists and supporters to prevent the eviction. They did it few months before while the no-vox wished to squat the Point P to turn it into a community centre instead of an artistic spaces managed by Usines Ephemères¹¹. Currently, *off*

⁸ It should also be used as a communication tool for the company (“look how we support local organization, the community, and so on”). But actually it does not. Moreover, the condition of occupation (especially safety issues) are not such a positive communication information.

⁹ Where a new park is under implementation.

¹⁰ In the French jurisprudence, the mayor has a lot of duties. For example, if a kid dies in a playground, the mayor could be responsible. The same problem occurs while the city bought artistic squats in order to regularize them. Here, the mayor is directly and personally responsible. When buildings are own by a company, duty and guilty are spread all over the hierarchy.

¹¹ Usines Ephemères is a *off* cultural organization who refurbished empty places and turned them into artistic places since the beginning of the 90s. As they are no longer

medias are still in the house, and the city council is looking for resettle them. The presence of all these organisations aimed to secure the area by avoiding squatting, especially drugs scene squatting. Few of them provided services to local inhabitants. But their impacts were very restricted.

Another experience, planned as a mid-term occupancy and supported by the local authority, was contributing to the regeneration process more than security guarding and more than a one-shot spotlight event such as Nuit Blanche. In the centre of the regeneration area, a large wasteland is planned to be changed into a new park. The project design and implementation took time. As it is a public project, the local authority have to pass a specific kind of agreement that we call “marché public”¹². This process, of course, takes time. So, while all these administrative and design processes took place, the owner (ie the city council) authorised an *off* circus to settle down there, from October 2003 to December 2004. More, it was subsidised by the local authority (100 000 euros) in order to invite other companies and to organise a real artistic and cultural activities program. Even if it has been subsidised sometimes, the Cirque Electrique is definitely *off* in the circus scene. Its artists were not trained in National Circus School (as such as most of the contemporary circus artists are), but in an alternative school (les Noctambules and then Fratellini). They are connected with other *off* scenes (*off* music shops, *off* artist studio, *off* musicians). But as *off* and *in* are working together, as a system, the Cirque Electrique was, for a little bit more than a year, involved in the city’s cultural policy. And was the agent of an urban regeneration process.

First, as other temporary occupants, the circus, as a known tenant, permitted to control and to secure the site. Artists even cleaned it by removing wastes. Critics also argued that they cleaned the site by removing drugs users and homeless too. Then, as it was agreed, the Cirque Electrique and other (mainly circus) companies played different shows. A real artistic program was planned, mediated through designed flyers. Moreover, the Cirque Electrique and friends were part of the Festival Paris Quartier d’Ete. It is a one month cultural festival (subsidised by local authorities and the state), offering several shows and performances all around Paris, generally at low fares. Being a part of that event helped to catch a wider audience than circus addicts or local public. Medias informed about the shows. More, medias described the atmosphere and the site, as a “*Kusturica’s movie no-man’s land*” which

squatting, and they are dealing with local authorities, they are considered by some of the *off* scene as traitors.

¹² By this procedure, different firms are in competition, regarding the design or the implementation of the park. A commission (with elected representatives from different parties, state represents) chooses the contractors based on their proposal.

worsted a visit by itself. Actually, most of the public would never come here without mediated circus shows. As we observed, most of the audience (whites) constricted with local residents (blacks). More than a local cultural leader, the Cirque Electrique opened up the neighbours towards all Parisians. During a summer, artistic performers, experimental acrobats and DiY musicians turned this drugs dealers' playground into an exciting poetic *off* venue. For those who had been there, the image of a trapeze show, at nightfall, in a wide open space, in front of running trains and with an unique view on the Sacre-Coeur, reminds an out-of-time experience. And nowadays, the Cour du Maroc is still the symbol of this unique taste of urban freedom. Less intense but longer, the image-remaking process occurred with the Cirque Electric as it did with the 104 during the Nuit Blanche. These focuses on the area throughout cultural events are both planned.

Is there any other solution than culture?

These examples show how *off* cultural scene can be used as tools by planner, to clean and to secure a site. But then, culture is also used by planner as a project process facilitator. Facing resident claims for culture, how do planners react?

As it was explain before, a large empty warehouse and its surroundings are going to be regenerate through a comprehensive planning process, that we call Zone d'Aménagement Concerté. During the 90s, the first plan was to demolish and to clean the whole site and then, to rebuild housing (mostly estates housing). Local organisations protested, arguing that too much housing was planned, and no program was dealing with the lack of public amenities. The project was in stand-by for several years. After 2001, the new council wanted to redevelop the area. A consultation with the local population was implemented to decide what the program would be. A gap appears between residents organisations and city's planners. The city wanted to create several public facilities (school, library, sport facilities), a youth hostel and offices. Its first plan proposed to demolish the uninterested huge warehouse and to replace it by smaller-scales ones.

But residents claims were totally different. First of all, they wanted to protect the building that they considered as a part of the local history. "*It is a cathedral of the railwaymen history*", they said. They argued that industrial heritage should be conserved and valorised. This is definitely true in old industrial area (such as north of France), where post industrial crisis implies a socio-economic crisis and an identity crisis as well. But is it the same in Paris? Definitely not. Perhaps, this claim reveals an apprehension towards contemporary architecture. Nevertheless, considering industrial buildings as

heritage is quite new. Even if planners and architects tried to preserve them for a while, this behaviour was not shared by many people. Moreover, the claim for refurbish it into a cultural centre proves that few examples are now well known by the public. Indeed, local organisations wanted to turn the building into a cultural centre, that they compared to the LU factory in Nantes, the most famous (and successful) example of cultural conversion of an industrial building in France. Organisations designed a real architectural project that they presented during consultation meetings (Cepa 2002; Cepa 2003). The proposal could seem exciting and interesting, but the city council has a very similar idea for the 104, just 100 meter away, on the other side of the railways. Sincerely or not, local organisations argued that the 104 is too far away and that there is a lack of cultural amenities in their neighbourhoods. Of course, the city could not accept these propositions. Nevertheless, its position changed a little and the building will not be fully demolished. Actually, in this context, to preserve the building is a tool to create a consensus on the project. To comply with some part of the residents' claims is a way to avoid others. As the conservation is acted, it is more difficult now for associations to fight against the project. If the cultural project is unrealistic, they are still influencing the project. For example, they are deeply involved in the creation of a little but professional theatre instead of a gymnasium. This last point should be more controversial. It questions for whose sake do local organisations mobilise. A theatre, even little, could attract a culturally-oriented population, that have more cultural capital than the average (and especially the local average). On the other side, a gymnasium fixes youth. In other words, sport facilities are used by young people, who stay, talk, make noise, are visible, especially when they belong to an ethnic minority, while a theatre is considered as a upgrading tool in a gentrification process. Of course, that is not the way things are explained; and local activists are probably genuine. Nevertheless, contradictory interests between different kind of population living in a social mix neighbourhood is a constant. New comers or middle class gentrifiers have more resources to negotiate their position in the neighbourhood. For example, they are more aware of urban projects and are more mobilised in consultation, even if they are the minority (Bacqué 2006). This is especially true in this area where a lot of people are illegal immigrants. For example, in one of the most active organisation, all the members belong to the middle class and the upper middle class (working as professionals or in the social services, education and medical care).

At the same time, it appears that these associations are not really involved in the 104 project. Even if they could be curious, they do not wander and push up the city to obtain more information. The project design process and implementation did not include a real consultation toward the population. But in the other hand, associations do not reclaim it. How could we explain this

disinterest? May be a cultural project is consensual and is not considered as a threat for residents, so does not encourage participation.

Epilogue

All this area should dramatically change these next few years. Built environment will be renewed. More facilities are going to be created. Security issues would probably disappear by moving to a more remote site. Quality of everyday life should increase. But, even if social engineering is involved in the project, a settlement change should be expected. Illegal families could not apply for public housing. And they will probably not own or rent the new flats (even if they are sold at a low fixed price). We should wonder where will they go. But does it matter for someone? On the other hand, who will be the new residents? Estate housing is still working as a social housing sector (even if “social” could have a large interpretative meaning). But due to the huge housing crisis, the refurbished private housing would probably host the highest bidder. In other words, a gentrification process would change the social face of the neighbourhood. Here, because they are used as a tool for regeneration, *off* cultural scenes are the unwitting agent of a settlement policy.

Moreover, this example reveals a dangerous but common trend in planning practices. It seems that culture tends to be an alibi in order to avoid local resistance in urban regeneration processes. Culture (amenities, actors, agents, scene) is a consensual function that stops local organisations' reclaims. Uncontroversial, it legitimizes urban regeneration process, even if their social effects could be doubtful. Culture is a tool to trigger the implementation of regeneration project. Is it possible to plan a regeneration project without a cultural feature? Is there an alternative to culture? Could planners imagine a no-culture urban project? In some ways, this reveals the lack of imagination of all of us, and especially planners and architects. Facing many local reclaims, it sounds more difficult to intervene into the built city. Buildings conservation is a mean to avoid or at least to limit protest and culture is an easy answer (even the easiest). Regarding to existing example, this kind of refurbishment does not need a total transformation. *Off* artists had done it for twenty years on a DiY scheme and without money. To turn buildings into cultural centres sounds to be the new model in urban practices, all around the world (Vivant 2006). Apparently innovative, this kind of urban policies are actually quite conservative. Moreover, why do residents claim for culture? And which residents? In other words, for whose sake do planners act and residents claim? What should be discussed further is if, thought as a trigger for urban regeneration, the use of culture and *off* artists does not tend to be a trickle down theory's secret agent. To what extent could it be argued that, on an urban planning point of view, cultural policies and the use of culture in urban

regeneration project reveals the spread of the liberal thinking by attracting the wealthier people and by arguing that it would benefit to the whole community? On the one hand, the generalisation of the “critic artist” through the whole society and especially in managers’ world (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999), allows urban managers to base an economic strategy on culture. On the other hand, the common interest for arts and culture of left-wings thinkers and urban activist as well, seems to blind them, to hide the dark side of the regeneration project, and to hind their opposition and protesting capacities.

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