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# Creativity in the Governance of The European Industrial Cities : Process, Outputs and Limits

## 1. Introduction

The urban governance literature has stressed the evolution of urban government modalities. The control of vote and the leadership on municipal administration have lost their strategic role in government process. The city's government is increasingly the production of the collective action[i]. Elected officials need to structure coalitions with different local authorities, with private actors and with local representative of State.

Scholars explain this change by three main dynamics[ii]. First, institutional changes with a local power increasing: decentralisation in France, devolution in Great Britain, regionalism in Spain or in Germany,… Second, the decrease of the public budget in a context of liberal economy leads public bodies to structure public-private partnerships. Third a social change with an evolution in collective representations concerning the repartition of public and private roles in delivering public policies: habitants, associations, interest groups look for active participation in the design of local policies.

Of course, all these evolutions in the urban government concerns the industrial cities. But the change is maybe stronger for this type of cities than for other. In industrial

cities, the State and national economic firms used to important be very present. Local authorities were in charge the production of collective services (school, housing, sport, culture) but the national actors (big firms and State) were in charge of the employment and the economic growth[iii]. This "Fordist compromise" has been deeply questioned after the industrial crisis. The national level has stopped acting directly in economic development and has limited its public funding according to the neo liberalism doctrine. Local authorities had to act in economic development in relation with SME's and banks. But the lack of cooperation between elected officials and local firms has limited the capacity to deliver collective actions.

In this context, local authorities were looking for narratives and for catchwords enabling collective action. The success of the word "creativity" in the urban strategies of the European industrial cities appears as a solution to resolve the limitation of local political capacity of urban governance. To argue this idea we will use the results of a comparative research we made about urban regeneration cities of three old industrial cities: Genoa (Italy), Saint-Etienne (France) and Sheffield (UK). This research was funded by the French Ministry of the Ecology and the Sustainable Development[iv].

**2. The set up of "Creativity" in local agenda: domestic reasons**

The term creativity is set up at local political agenda because it has a capacity to enable collective action. Around this catchword, economic interests, social actors and elected officials cooperate. Why does this term creativity help to tackle old barriers to collective actions in the European industrial cities?

In industrial cities, conflicts exist around the design of the local development policies. A part of business interests with traditional trade unions promote an economic strategy based on the modernization of industry. They want the public support to develop research and development of high-value process to modernize local established tracks. An example, firms, research centres and local authorities have cooperated to develop the cluster Viaméca in Saint-Etienne. This cluster based on mechanic industries has been selected by the French government to integrate its national policy of creating poles of competitiveness. But, this industry-led economic strategy isn't shared by all actors. Some of them promote other objectives such as the diversification of the economic basis by encouraging the development of services (for firms but also for households: trades, health, tourism,…).

This dual vision of the economic strategy can lead to tensions or conflicts. In Genoa, trade unions have criticised local authorities concerning the municipality's will to develop tourism, culture in the local economy. In a public meeting, the municipality was accused of developing jobs of low quality. The trade unions were supported by local industry representatives. But hotels and leisure firms have sustained the municipality's strategy to organize international events (Genoa was the European capital of culture in 2004, Genoa with the support of Italian Government has organised the G8 meeting in 2001). In Saint-Etienne, the mobilization of local business representatives is limited in actions to develop households services. They don't consider this economic sector as a development issue even if economic experts insist on its importance the local economy[v].

In a context of tensions in the design of local economic strategy, creativity appears as a way to generate collective action in the industrial cities between local authorities, business interests and social actors. To set up this topic in local agenda prevent elected officials to choose clearly between industry-based strategy and services-based strategy. For industry tenants, creativity is approached in terms of developing innovations in industry process. The creativity participates at the industry modernization. For services tenants, the creativity is approached as the sign of entrance in the knowledge industry. To be creative means to develop services for firms but also for households in their every day life.

But the term creativity appears also as a key element in the agenda of industrial cities because of its capacity to structure cross-sectoral coalitions. It offers elected officials an opportunity to structure coalitions integrate business and culture interests, and universities. Indeed several types of creativeness exist: technologic, cultural, social,… It represents a big opportunity to involve in common projects several categories of actors that had weak cooperation habits. Of course each partner keeps in mind its own definition of the creativity but this isn't the problem: the priority for elected people is to develop cross-sectoral coalitions. These coalitions bring a political capacity to the mayor and to the municipality in a context of political assets fragmentation.

In Saint-Etienne, collective actions have been delivered between the business interests, the local authorities, the cultural centres and the high schools around the Design. Before this, two cooperation local systems existed in parallel. Business interests used to cooperate only with local authorities and engineering high school. Cultural centres, art and architecture high school and local authorities used to develop

projects in common. The Design has tackled the old barriers to form cross-sectoral actions.

**3. The Set Up of "Creativity" in Local Agenda: external reasons**

The success of the term creativity on the agenda of industrial cities is also a consequence of global economic and institutional change.

The internationalisation of economic exchanges has lead to a departure of production activities from developed countries to low personal costs countries. A low transport cost giving an economical viability at this economic repartition of activities at world scale. The central issue for industrial cities became: how to keep development in a context of competition and delocalisation? The evolution to a knowledge local economy appeared as the only way to keep add valued activities[vi]. That's why the term creativity has emerged with a so strong intensity in local agenda of the European industrial cities.

Paralleling economic global mutations, the design and the content of local development policies have been transformed from national redistributing policies to what the geographer Neil Brenner calls the locational policies[vii]. Locational policies are designed by the local authorities. Their objective is to facilitate the local economic development. They are pro-active by reinforcing local economic advantages. The cities are seen as in competition. Locational policies seek to develop networks (transport, internet), to produce high quality urban spaces and housing to attract qualified and high revenue households, to set up clusters to facilitate innovation diffusion. To develop the creativeness is a sub-objective of locational policies agenda.

To promote creativity is a way to increase its advantages in economic concurrence with other cities. To become a creative city is also a way to be more attractive for students, for high qualified people who are the main assets in the development of the knowledge economy. At last, the local authorities have assets to develop creativeness by structuring local clusters as example.

**4. The Outputs of the Collective Action around Creativeness**

How to measure the collective action about the topic of creativeness? Our point of view is to develop the analysis of outputs: what are the products delivered in reference with the term of "creativity"?

The set up of creativity on the local agenda of European industrial cities leads to deliver immaterial and symbolic actions. Studies are produced about the economic role of creativity, about the creative people (Who are the creative? What is their way of life?). Expertise about creativeness is present in the most part of big European cities. Consultant from the United States – the most famous is the academic Richard Florida - working in English or Canadian cities. The benchmarking leads to a general diffusion of studies about the creative potential of other big European cities. In France, the national federation of public urban planning agencies organised its annual meeting in 2006 about the creative city. In Saint-Etienne, it's the local public planning agency who proposed at local authorities a study about the characterisation of creative people in the region[viii]. The University of Saint-Etienne has been a partner of this study. In Sheffield, the public private organisation in charge of developing cultural industries is active in national lobbying to set up policies on this topic. Its members are often in contact with other British and American cities.

All the studies present methodological limits. The creative people don't correspond with statistical categories. Also, it's very difficult to obtain information at local level about the innovation in economics. The national statistic systems measure the innovation at regional and national levels. Other limit is the absence of proof concerning the link between creativeness and economic development. Most expertise underlines a parallelism between local economic development and creativity. But the studies don't show in detail the process of innovation and in particular the impact of the urban context on creativeness.

The methodological limits of studies produced around the question of creativity don't limit their diffusion. The real motivation of their author is not to measure exactly creativity process at the city level. The scientific attempts are not the central issues. The authors want to introduce the term of creativity to see how political officials, business interests and other organisations will be able to deliver common projects in reference with this notion.

The integration of creativity in local agenda of European industrial cities leads to the delivery of operational projects. In Sheffield, a creative neighbourhood has been planed in the urban regeneration project. A specific public-private organization – Creative Sheffield – was in charge of the design and of the settlement of this project. Housing, offices and estate for economic activities have been built to develop the "creative industry". In Saint-Etienne, the "Cité Internationale du Design" will be inaugurated next year. This building will regroup firms, designers and students to develop design innovations. The project is also to dedicate the neighbourhood where

the Cité has been built to creative activities. A military brownfield will be recycled just behind the Cité du Design with University buildings, retail real estates, restaurants and cultural centres.

The creation of creativity on the local agenda of European industrial cities leads to innovation in the design of the local public policies. The Cité du Design has been charges to advice the administrations of the city centre and of the Communauté d'agglomération de Saint-Etienne Métropole[ix] to help at the diffusion of the design in all local actions (transport, housing, urban design, public amenities,…).

The creativity doesn't remain a narrative or a discourse reference. In Saint-Etienne, in Sheffield and with less strength in Genoa, several actions are delivered which link the general objective to develop local creativeness. Some of them are symbolic and immaterial. But others have operational and concrete dimensions.

**5. The Limits of the Collective Action about "Creativity"**

Coalitions, collective projects are delivered about creativity. But what is the stability of the collective action produced around creativity?

The term creativity is not easy to understand for habitants. This word introduces a division between the creative and the other. In industrial cities, some people suffer from a lack of confidence after having lost their job in the economic crisis at the end of the seventies. That's why people manifest either indifference or scepticism concerning actions developed around the policy of creativity. In a local enquiry, habitants from Saint-Etienne testify that they were still attached to classical

representations of their city and had difficulties in recognizing themselves in new local slogans (design, creativity). A new mayor was elected in Saint-Etienne in 2008 (M. Vincent, PS) after 15 years of continuity (M. Thiollière, UMP). This political evolution shows that the population didn't believe that they were actors of the urban and economic regeneration of their city. Politicians and inhabitants didn't share creativity as a collective value. It has appeared progressively as "la chose du prince" for habitants.

The firms and the local business interests show prudence in their implication in actions developed in reference with the creativity question. In Saint-Etienne, small and medium size enterprises – the most part of local firms – remained observers concerning the project of "Cité Internationale du design". To tackle this issue the local authorities decided to recruit someone to develop the partnership with local firms in the Cité du Design. In Sheffield, the development of the creative neighbourhood is realised with firms coming from all England regions and not essentially with local business.

The integration of creativity at local agenda doesn't produce deep evolutions in the way to design and to deliver projects. Creativity appears more as a catchword than as a new vision of government. The participation of habitants is limited. The local authorities reproduce their management habits (high selection in the access in political arena, tendency to reproduce what has been already tested in other cities).

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to underline the interests of the mobilization of The Urban Regime Theory (URT) to analyse narratives and representations in urban policies. We will stress three aspects.

First, the URT help to see concrete effects of narratives in the formation of agreements between actors (the URT insists on symbolic gains that discourses and representations can produce). Discourses, representations are assets exchanged between actors in coalition. They are often produced by elected officials and help them to structure cooperation with business interest or social organisations.
Second, the URT underlines that discourses and representations are also assets to maintain cooperation. They prevent from "free rider strategies": they act as regulative tools[x]. New members of coalition have to inscribe in this collective representations. Narratives act as norms or rules.

Third, the URT invites to analysis in details the evolution of narratives and representations. These evolutions have a key role in the stabilisation of government coalitions: they facilitate the integration of new members, they allow a redefinition of political agenda without disintegrating the coalition.

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[2] Alan Harding, « Governance and socio-economic change in cities », in "*Changing cities: rethinking urban competitiveness, cohesion and governance,"* ed. N. Buck, I. Gordon, A. Harding & I. Turok (London, Palgrave, 2005), 62-77.

[3] Vincent Béal and al., « Redeveloping Saint-Étienne. The weight of the inherited structure of social and political relationships in a French industrial city », in "*Urban trajectories under conditions of decline. Economic crises and demographic change as a trigger for new concepts of regeneration*," ed. Hans-Joachim Bürkner (Conditio urbana, LIT-Verlag, to be published)

[4] Rémi Dormois and Florence Menez, *Renouveler le modèle de développement économique local au nom de l'urbain ? Recherche comparative sur trois villes en reconversion de l'Europe de l'Ouest : Gênes, Saint-Etienne et Sheffield*, (Paris, Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture, 2007).

[5] Laurent Davezies, *La République et ses territoires* (Paris, Le Seuil, Collection La République des Idées, 2008), 110.

[6] Actually, the impact of the increase of energy cost is not integrated by local actors in their thinking about economic development. Whereas for some economics expert this will lead to the return of production activities in Europe in a system of regional production systems around big cities.

[7] Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: urban governance and the rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), 351.

[8] EPURES and Université Jean Monnet, *Une classe créative à Saint-Etienne ?* (Saint-Etienne, Epures, 2007), 50.

[10] The political institution of cooperation between 43 municipalities.

[11] Alistaire Cole and Philip John, "Urban regime and local governance in Britain and France", *Urban Affairs Review* 33 (1998): 382-404.