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### Can Participatory Arts Help Deliver (more) Socially Just Creative Cities?

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# **Can Participatory Arts Help Deliver (more) Socially Just Creative Cities?**

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## Introduction

Bilbao, Barcelona, Berlin, Amsterdam... over the last 20 years creativity seems to have acted as the new mantra of urban policies. Criticisms linked to the most visible effects of Creative Cities policies, such as expensive flagship projects, touristification of cities and gentrification have become mainstream. Which newspaper has not written about the contestation around the Olympic Games in Rio? Who has never heard someone complaining about gentrification? From the streets of Paris to the favelas of Rio, these kinds of reflection have spread into ordinary, daily use.

This research started from an interrogation: what are the expectations of art in the Creative City narrative? Is the specificity of artistic processes, and artistic discourses, taken into consideration? I realised, in the course of this work, that this reflection is strongly grounded in the understanding of culture and arts encapsulated in French Cultural policy. Since its launch following the Second World War, national French cultural policy has invested cultural institutions, and theatre in particular, with a mission: that of creating the good citizen, one that is critically aware and which is linked to its co-nationals through a shared culture. Cultural institutions are thought to be a key instrument through which to 'include' people in French society, by giving them access to the best of the arts and humanities. This vision is called 'cultural democracy'. Although challenged as elitist and inefficient, and tempered by a relative shift in the '80s, this vision has strongly shaped the French conception of the role of arts in society, and by extension in the city. Enabling a fair geographic spread of art and cultural institutions across the national territory was envisaged as a way of achieving "equality" and national cohesion. Today the mission statement of the French National Theatres is still framed by this vision. The theatre is to be accessible to all, it is explicitly tasked with connecting to people who are the least likely to come to its shows. The theatre is one of the key policy instruments to create equality. In this conception, the specificity of art was to be the generator of citizenry and equality.

It seemed to me obvious that if I were to find contemporary reflections on the role of the arts in the city, it would have been in the discussion strand linked to creativity. How is this specificity of the artistic process conceived as part of Creative City narratives? Most of my reading on the Creative City seemed to be alien to this line of inquiry. Creativity was conceived at large, as an activity open to all, that would trigger innovation in policy making (Landry, 2000), as the characteristic of a large group of people, a new 'class', which preferred some cities over others, and whose concentration would be synonymous with growth and success for the city in terms of international competitiveness (Florida, 2002). Artists were conceived almost as 'hooks' and accessories in the early Creative City proposals. It was by being there, by creating a certain type of atmosphere, that they would participate in making the Creative City. How, though, were artists' creativity at play in the Creative City? For Florida, if there is something unique about artists, it is that they are 'bohemians' who know how to make a place cool and attractive. Nothing else is said specifically about their contribution to creativity in the city, especially if there is no revenue-making activity deriving from their art. The reflective framework of Creative Cities was set so as to be grounded in the analysis of creative industries (Pratt, 2011, Mc Robbie, 2011), and therefore in an economic understanding of the city. In academic literature, Creative City policies have been portrayed as the 'new packaging' of neoliberal policies (Ratiu, 2013, Borén and Young, 2013, Peck, 2011), the relevance and efficiency of such concepts and policies has also been criticised or further elaborated.

Despite being widely criticised in the academic world, the concepts of Creative Cities and the Creative Class continue to travel around the globe in the domain of policy making. That is why some researchers (Pratt, 2011, Ratiu, 2013, Leslie and Cantugal, 2012, Beaumont and Yildiz, 2017) have flagged-up that there are other possibilities for conceiving a Creative City, which integrate not only the economic but social dimensions of what a city is, and how it is made. Those researchers have increasingly engaged in looking at what the artists actually do to the city (Sharp et al., 2005, Mc Lean, 2014, Cossu and d'Ovidio, 2017, Marti-Costa I Pradel, 2011, Borén and Young, 2013), what each art project attempts to realise and succeeds or fails at achieving, how artists have

resisted the discourse of Creative Cities (Grobach and Silver, 2013, Novy & Colomb, 2013, Van Schipstal & Nicholls, 2014) and how they have proposed alternative uses of the city (Mould, 2018). These new roads for research are an attempt to re-adjust the discourse and analysis of the Creative City. They represent a drive to focus less on political announcements and flagship projects and to look at the actual dynamics in place on the territory. They are also an attempt to re-conceptualise the relationship between creativity and the city. My research wants to contribute to this effort to re-approach the term Creative Cities, while enlarging the remits of the debate. I propose to ground my research in an understanding of the Creative City that engages directly with the question of social justice. The research conducted by S. Fainstein (2010) and A. Sen (2009), presented in the section ‘What would a (more) socially just Creative City be?’ helps us define what ‘just’ means: a city that is equitable, democratic and diverse.

While situating my research in the framework of the urban planning literature on the Creative City, I propose a displacement of focus. The specific contribution of my work is to make the link with art theory and to bring an analysis of the new conceptions artists have developed of their role in the city, as regards to city making, in theory and in practice into the debate. In

Chapter 2: Alternative models of (more) socially just Creative Cities I demonstrate why looking at participatory arts in particular can help us understand the specificities of the artistic process with regards to the making of the city, as a way of allowing, stimulating and initiating changes. The theoretical background is provided by Jacques Rancière (2008), who has proposed a new conception of aesthetics. The specificity of art, aesthetics, is that it proposes a new “*distribution of the sensible*”. The impact of an artwork cannot be anticipated in advance, he argues. The meaning of the artwork will be defined by its spectator. What artists do is to propose a reorganisation of the set of meanings and signs that are accepted and understood within society. This is a proposal that only achieves its meaning at the moment of reception, that is independently from the intention of the artist. Thus, Rancière shows that any expectation for arts to provide a given and quantifiable impact is deluded. The aesthetics rely on the disconnection between the intention of the artist and the artwork’s reception by the spectator. By looking at the history of participatory arts and its contemporary developments Claire Bishop (2012) explains that ‘participatory arts’ is one form artists have found to mobilise their specific creative process to collectively propose new distributions of meanings and signs. Contemporary participatory arts have several characteristics that make them relevant case studies through which to analyse the conceptions artists have of their role within the city. 1/ They are context sensitive, i.e. they are created within a specific localised context. They are historically linked to a willingness to change the way the city functions, as in the work of the Situationist International or of GRAV in the 1960s. 2/ One of their purposes is to challenge prevailing social organisations. They involve non-artists within the creative process, not with the intention of creating a specific impact on participants, but with the objective of collectively constructing situations in which the organisation of signs and meanings are challenged and displaced. They engage participants collectively to test new possibilities. As part of socially engaged practice artists often choose to engage with people who experience some forms of marginalisation in the prevailing social order. I will analyse works by Thomas Hirschhorn and Tania Bruguera, two highly recognised contemporary artists, to provide examples of how these ‘tests’ take shape and are implemented. Based on this understanding of ‘participatory arts’, I show that these forms of practice provide the

characteristics through which to analyse the potential input of artists towards a (more) socially just city (i.e. one that is (more) equitable, diverse and democratic.)

In order to help us build an answer to the overarching research question: ‘Can Participatory Arts Help Deliver (more) Socially Just Creative Cities?’, and based on the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 1 and 2, I formulated the following hypotheses and research questions:

1. ‘More-than-capitalist’ Creative Cities visions may already exist (Leslie and Cantugal, 2012), and they may be influenced by the political orientation of the carrier of the visions (Garcia, 2013). These visions may differ between stakeholders. These visions may take into account issues of inequalities (Jakob, 2011) and redistribution (Pratt, 2011). One needs to construct a situated and contextualised (Pratt, 2011; Prince, 2010) understanding of the way Creative City visions of different stakeholders play out in a given location.

To this hypothesis, corresponds a series of research questions aimed at investigating the reality of alternative visions of the Creative City. Do such alternative visions exist? How are they influenced by political orientations? Who are they expressed by? How do they differ between stakeholders? Do they take into considerations the three dimensions of the just City defined by Fainstein (2010): those of equality, democracy, diversity?

2. Artists may play an active role in building an alternative vision and implementation of the Creative City, Sharp et al. (2005).

A series of research questions investigates the implementation of the visions through analysis of artworks: How are these visions implemented? What are the outcomes? What is the interplay between these different visions? What are the power relationships at play?

3. Participatory arts bring in the possibility of collaboratively engaging residents and stakeholders to activate the specific power of the arts, which relies on a ‘new



organisation of the sensible' and the creation of 'plurivocality' and dissent (Rancière, Bishop).

Corresponding questions are: Has the making of the artwork been participatory? What form did the participation take? How may the artwork be read by the audience? Did participation make the artwork univocal or plurivocal? Did it create consensus of dissent?

In Chapter 3: Methodology, I present my choice of case studies and the methodologies. To identify the case studies, I have proceeded to a first round exploration of cases, in which I could test my hypothesis. Plaine Commune, a borough of Greater Paris, which includes the city of Saint-Denis, provides good background through which to look at these issues in more detail.

- In 2014 this area adopted a strategy document flagging the area up as 'Territory of Culture and Creation' within the Greater Paris Metropolis. As a traditionally communist area, a political orientation that implies a critical reading of neoliberalism, it was likely to have defined an alternative vision of a Creative City.
- Since it is an area of metropolitan relevance, there are several stakeholders responsible for the urban development of different parts of the area: the state, the borough, the municipality. At the same time, the area is populated by artists and artists' spaces, since it is a cheap area in the north of Paris, relevant for socially engaged artists fighting exclusion and stigmatisation, and one of the poorest areas of the metropolis. It seemed a good field in which to analyse the interplay of visions between different stakeholders.
- I could find several participatory theatre projects, which engaged specifically with the local population and had developed a reflection on the role of art projects in the city.

In order to understand the way participatory artworks were read and constructed (Sharp et al., 2005) I followed three participatory theatre projects. This also allowed situated and contextualised analysis of the interplay of visions between different stakeholders, as regards to each art-project.

My analysis was constructed mostly on the basis of observation of rehearsals and of performances, completed by 16 semi-directed interviews of the area's stakeholders, who have a large range of 'occupations' and 'roles', from local authority employees in charge of urban development and culture, to artists and local residents. In order to construct understanding and refined knowledge of what local residents perceived as spaces of creativity and culture in Saint-Denis, I also organised five collaborative cartography workshops, which involved 49 participants, in three different neighbourhoods of Saint-Denis.

Chapter 4: Spaces and Creative Processes in the City: the Case of Saint-Denis presents the context of Saint-Denis, one of the archetypical "banlieues" of Paris, marked by a great social mix, poverty and squalid housing, stigma, but also a high pressure on land in some areas due to its proximity to Paris and the new development plans in the Greater Paris Metropolis. It briefly introduces the territorial organisation of the area, necessary preliminary knowledge to grasp the interplay of power between different stakeholders. The chapter analyses the content and the production of the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy, detailing the initial divergences of visions between the various parties involved in the making of the strategy, namely the state and the borough of Plaine Commune.

Chapter 5: Case studies of three participatory theatre projects in Saint-Denis reviews the three participatory theatre case studies:

1. 'The Football pitch, the Player and the Consultant'<sup>1</sup> is an urban planning consultation participatory art project, commissioned by the local authority and co-managed by a theatre collective and an innovative urban planning consultancy. The aim was to enable stakeholders' voices to be heard in a different way, using the resources of sports and theatre, in the framework of the development of a new urban project in the Pleyel neighbourhood, close to the future Olympic Village.
2. 'Montjoie! Saint-Denis!' is an *in situ* theatre project, commissioned by an independent art institution and led by a theatre Troup called Hoc Memento which was set-up by two researcher-artists. The aim was to produce an 'in-situ' theatre play. It took place in an independently led 'third space' located on a brownfield site in the Southern part of Saint-Denis.
3. 'The Ephemeral Troup' is a theatre play produced with 25 young people, founded and led by Jean Bellorini, a director who is well-recognised in the world of public theatre. The aim was to produce a high-quality play, shown on a national theatre stage, within the main programme of the theatre featuring young people from the area. It aimed at bringing new people to practice and frequent the theatre and also to provide young people with an experience of theatre and of 'freedom'. It took place in Théâtre Gérard Philippe, one of the main cultural institutions of the municipality.

For each case Chapter 5 provides a description of the project, a presentation of the neighbourhood and institutional contexts specific to the project, a short methodology section giving complementary information on the methodology applied to the specific case, a review of the relation between the project and the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy. Since the scale at which the art projects develop varies considerably

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<sup>1</sup> The original title in French is 'Le Terrain, le joueur et le consultant'. I have chosen to translate 'le terrain' as 'The Football Pitch' so that the reference to sports appears clearly in the title. However, the word 'terrain' could also be translated as 'field'. The word has both meanings in French: 'the field' and 'the sports pitch'.

from one case to another, I provide a review of the process of participation, which informs the way the participants have been associated to the process of making the artwork, a section on the objectives and on the outcomes of the project, as well as a brief review on the learning to be drawn from it as regards to the research hypothesis, which will be developed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Case Studies Analysis and [Discussion](#) reviews the findings in relation to the research questions. For each hypothesis (and research questions attached) it presents the elements of the case study that validates or invalidates them. It shows how the three case studies have been conceived and worked on the three dimensions of the just city, revealing successes and limitations. Finally, the chapter reveals that there are several visions of Creative City at play in the same area, and that the imbalance of power between the different stakeholders leads to the implementation of divergent visions in sub-sections of the same municipality.

In the conclusion, I show how the findings of this work bring the discussion about just Creative Cities one step further.

Before starting my analysis in Chapter 1, I would like to provide the reader with the background of my approach to the city of Saint-Denis, which is relevant to the research work I conducted as part of the PhD. I do so in the following section.

### [Understanding the context and building knowledge](#)

Firstly, I would like to outline my specific interest in this research. As Dona Haraway (1988) would claim, it is not against scientific objectivity that one should situate knowledge. It is only by understanding that there is no full neutrality, and the fact that the researcher comes to their research object with a certain body and history, that one can actually build the objectivity of the research: a situated objectivity as she calls it (1988:575). In the following pages I raise several characteristics of my approach to the territory that have shaped my experience of the place, of being a researcher and of the research itself.

While the Plaine Commune ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy provided a specific framework through which to analyse potential alternative visions of the Creative City, I have been personally connected to Saint-Denis for a long time.

Firstly, the name of Saint-Denis and its associated postcode '93'<sup>2</sup>, are associated in my youthful memories with the voice of the French Rap Band NTM. In the '90s NTM (Nique Ta Mère/Fuck Your Mother) had become mainstream. NTM was posing as the voice of the rebellious and upset youth of the 'banlieues', with another rap band from Marseille called IAM. For those that have listened to their songs, the raucous voice of Joey Starr is unforgettable. As a young white female from a small remote and provincial city, their songs were both extremely attractive to me, because of their forthright rebellion against injustice and call to affirm oneself, and repulsive, as voices of men disrespectful to women, coming from a world that did not leave any place for women, but a stereotypical and objectified role. This was my first univocal introduction to the 'voice of the banlieue'.

The 'banlieues' in France is a category that has been constructed by social science (Tissot, 2007) and which has been the main locus of the 'Politique de la Ville', a policy that aimed to fight against socio-economic and geographical segregation. For as long as I can remember, I have always been disturbed and revolted by inequality and poverty. Understanding the reality that some extreme social conditions are located geographically, and the willingness to understand why and how to change that, has been at the core of my interest for urban sociology and urban planning.

In my professional life I have alternated periods of research within the framework of my academic training with periods of hands-on action and activism for Europe and for social justice.

My interest in 'Politique de la Ville' and for Europe, my willingness to de-centre the understanding of issues (Harding, Narayan, 2000), looking at them from a European lens, rather than national lenses, led me to work with the URBACT European programme, a programme initially focussed on deprived urban neighbourhoods. This was my first professional experience. In 2003, I worked there as an intern and later as a projects officer. My companionship with the programme has continued up to this day.

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<sup>2</sup> The Department of Seine-Saint-Denis is frequently referred to by using its two-digit postcode '93'. This use has been particularly frequent in rap songs but has spread over into popular usage. In the popular imagination '93' refers to the 'banlieue', with its mix of violence, poverty, drug use and difficult police interventions which I describe later in this work.

In 2003, the URBACT programme's offices were located within the 'Délégation Interministérielle à la Ville' in Saint-Denis, more specifically in the Southern part of Saint-Denis: La Plaine. It was my first real and prolonged contact with Saint-Denis. Although a big part of my experience was that of walking quickly to the RER train station in the evening after having left the office late, a bit worried to walk by myself in what were at the time pretty deserted streets, and waiting in the cold for a very unreliable suburban service on a windy platform, I did not limit my explorations of the territory to the train station-office trajectories. I have always been a passionate walker and I would take lunch breaks as a time to discover the surroundings of the office. My observations did not teach me much more about the physical and social reality of the area than what one can read in books, as I try to convey in Chapter 4, but it did provide me with the actual 'feel' of the place; something one experiences with one's own body. The area has changed but still provides a feeling of being torn between investments and poverty, between new and old. It was at that time that I accidentally bumped into T. Hirschhorn's Musée Précaire Albinet, which I describe later. It seemed to me, at the time, a very stimulating artistic proposal. This research has allowed me to investigate why and how the project was built, to learn about its actual impact on the territory and the people, more than 10 years later.

In 2005, a time in which riots emerged in the 'banlieues', I was studying urban and regional studies in London. As the only French person of my group, it made me the first person people would ask about the events. Beyond the very alarming reports in the foreign press that were insisting on the image of 'Paris is burning', I was led to look more at the details of what was actually happening and of the scale of it, without really having conducted any scientific research into it.

Figure 1: Pleyel Towe, Source : 163 Ateliers



Une vue de la tour de la ville, © 163 Ateliers

brand-new office building, protected behind closed gates at night. It was another occasion to have a first-hand experience of the neighbourhood as a user and as an interested urban planner, though not beyond.

This section aimed at showing that I did not come ‘new’ to the area. While I had not actually researched the place, I had a long term first-hand experience and knowledge of it, as a user. The next section reflects on characteristics of mine that had some impact on my research.

For the social researcher, and for social research, the implicit meanings that can be attached to one’s body, attitudes, expressions, clothing and so on, have an impact on how she/he acts, reacts, and on how other people perceive her/him. It is clear to me that being a white female user of the space in Saint-Denis is not neutral. When I worked in Pleyel and La Plaine, the characteristic of mine that had the most impact on my perception and understanding of the space was that of being a woman. The feeling of vulnerability in the streets, particularly at night, is intensified by the fact of being a woman. But it is not in the areas of La Plaine or Pleyel, in which there are many employees during the day who come from Paris, that I experienced my body colour as one of my main characteristics. In the city centre of Saint-Denis, as in the Northern part of the city, being white means being ‘noticeable’, being different, being in a visible minority. Most of the white people I have met and interviewed are not residents of Saint-Denis, they are people who come to work and leave in the evening. In Saint-Denis, the



question of race, of whiteness as opposed to being black or 'beur' (with origins from the Maghreb), is marked by the historical relationship of France with its ex-colonies, by the exploitation and reception of the workers from the Maghreb in slums after the second world war, by years of stigmatisation and 'racialised' forms of exclusion operated by the state, as well as by economic and societal actors. These hierarchies and histories are projected and embodied<sup>3</sup>. Most of the residents, notably the younger generation, who while being extremely close to Paris live in a very different reality, are originally from the ex-French colonies.

This affected my own perception of reality more than other people's perceptions of me and my role: I rarely experienced overt manifestations of this difference. When conducting interviews with various stakeholders, it was more my position as an outsider to the process, or as an educated white sociologist that proved noticeable. As an observer, I was an outsider.

During the workshops I led in the IUT (Institut Universitaire Technologique) and in the libraries, it was clear, however, that my 'whiteness' seemed to reinforce hierarchies and the positioning of people towards me. The only white people in the room were those who were in a relative position of power, standing by the teacher.

Methodologically, my understanding of participatory arts is based on direct involvement and direct relations with some of the arts projects mentioned in this research; not those of the case studies, but the ones that I use as references in the artistic-theoretical framework. My interest in participatory arts is the result of a long term commitment to practically researching the links between arts and politics within an NGO with which I have been involved since 2007, European Alternatives, whose slogan is to promote Equality, Democracy and Culture beyond the nation state. The organisation – a bottom up citizen-led transnational organisation, was founded on the idea that artists and culture are essential to building a progressive Europe, to enlarging the ways that Europe is conceived today. Before engaging in this PhD, I had been leading several projects,

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough, it is in Saint-Denis, at Théâtre Gérard Philippe, that the most confrontational discussion on racism, colonialism and post-colonialism in the art world took place. The furore surrounded the play 'Exhibit B' (2014), the work of a (white) South African Artist, Brett Bailey. This 'play-installation' was composed of scenes which reproduced the colonial gaze on black people in 'human zoos', and had to be cancelled because of the major objections it galvanised.

including a Festival, which were exploring these themes on the links between art, culture, politics and activism. This is how I came to meet Tania Bruguera<sup>4</sup>, whose work I discuss in Chapter 3. She has become a member of the advisory board of European Alternatives. Thanks to that, we got the chance to explore several of her projects, to work together and to share ideas on several occasions. For example, I put together an action in Paris, in which she read the manifesto of Immigrant Movement International<sup>5</sup> in front of Saint-Bernard Church, from which asylum seekers had been violently removed in 1996. This was in the context of a curated walk in one of Paris's most diverse neighbourhoods, La Goutte d'Or, as part of the TRANSEUROPA Festival 2012. Tania is an internationally recognised artist, she is also a very enthusiastic and hardworking person. Her personality and work has become an inspiration and a source of reflection for me. She has always been supportive of European Alternatives' mission and we have always been supportive to her, notably in the period in which she was detained in Cuban jails because of her activism there. I curated a transnational action to support Tania while she was in prison in Cuba in 2015 as part of the above mentioned festival. This was a performative artistic reading of Hannah Arendt's 'Origins of totalitarianism', which took place in Paris, Rome, London, Lublin and Belgrade in various artistic venues. I have also had the chance to discuss the theme of 'activism' specifically with Tania, as well as the links between arts and social change. Two of these interviews were recorded at the time and are available online (European Alternatives, 2005). Discussing with Tania helped me understand what she meant by having initiated a social and cultural centre as a work of art in its own right. The actions I curated within TRANSEUROPA festival in 2012 and 2015 are clearly part of this new wave of artistic performances linked to politics, even if, at the time, I had not worked out the whole history behind such actions, nor the exact reasons why they could be an adequate form of action. This previous experience nourished my work as well as my own reflections.

The hands-on experience with arts projects also helped me in this PhD with the case studies. The experience of working with artists and in the arts sector, as well as the

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<sup>4</sup> Tania Bruguera is a contemporary Cuban performance artist. She is internationally recognised as one of the leading contemporary artists. She is part of the participative arts. She uses the concept of 'Useful Arts', *Arte Util* in her work.

<sup>5</sup> More information about the Immigrant Movement International can be found in Chapter 2 (p. 73).

experience of what it means to practically put together an art project, helped me relate to other artists. I was able to find some common language and common ground which helps building trust. It was quite difficult to follow the project of 'The Ephemeral Troup' of Théâtre Gérard Philippe, for example. The team are kind and dedicated but also extremely busy and focused on delivering a beautiful experience to the participants and a high-quality play. In order to progressively 'get in', it was essential to find the right language and positioning. On several occasions during the research I had the feeling that my own experience of building such projects helped me connect to the team and therefore to understand when/how I could come in and when/how it was better not to.

## Chapter 1: New roads for research on Creative Cities

The relationship between artists and urban planning has been articulated since the early 1990s through the frame of the Creative City debates. This chapter provides a theoretical framework for my research. It analyses the literature on Creative Cities with specific attention to the concepts used in the Creative Cities debates and the policies this has stimulated. It pays specific attention to the place devoted to artists within this debate. The Chapter briefly introduces the main concepts behind ‘Creative City policies’, it proposes a review of the works that have been the most influential within the policy debates, that is Charles Landry’s ‘*Creative City*’ (1995, 2004) and R. Florida’s ‘*Creative Class*’ (2002, 2008). It highlights the underlying political content of such concepts and the side-effect of the politics which have emanated from it. Finally, it reveals new avenues for research on Creative Cities. Authors such as Borén and Young (2013), Beaumont and Yildiz (2017), Jakob (2011), Leslie and Cantugal (2012) have hypothesised that there can be a new ‘Creative City model’, which would be ‘more-than-capitalist’, non-exclusive and situated.

### The Creative City: Several concepts more than a unified theory, formulated for policy makers

In this section, I review the main concepts surrounding the Creative City and highlight the fact that since they have been created to the purpose of informing and advising policy makers they cannot be easily separated from policy implementation.

The Creative City concepts were first conceived in the UK and the US. Hall and Robertson (2001) situate the development of the renewed interest for arts as a city regeneration tool in the policy circles at the end of the 1980s. They write:

The significance of the arts as a route to urban regeneration was first enshrined in policy in the UK with the 1988 Action for Cities programme [ ... ] where they were regarded as a means to “deal with the problems of unemployment and alienation in the country’s inner cities, as well as contributing to the creation of a classless and tolerant society (Hall and Robertson, 2001:6).

The Creative City concepts appeared at a specific time, in which both the cultural sector and cities were experiencing dramatic changes. Cities were looking for new ways to respond to economic changes and post-Fordist forms of production. The cultural and artistic sector was required to justify its existence and funding.

In the 90's, there was, in the UK, a strong demand for evidence-based policy from the New Labour Government in all domains, including cultural activities. In the context of reduced availability of funding, the questions became: *Why* should public money be used to fund the arts rather than other activities? *What* is the specific input of the arts in society? Comedia, the consultancy firm created by Charles Landry in the mid-80s, participated actively in providing reports and proofs – evidence-based – on the social impact of the arts, notably the extensively criticised but also seminal report by Matarasso in 1997 *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*, in which the author aims at demonstrating what art can bring to society, such as community building, reduction of crime and better health.

Landry is arguably one of the first advocates of the Creative City, as Edensor et al. (2010) put it

The 'creative city' concept was first introduced by Landry and Bianchini (1995) in their book entitled *The Creative City* and popularised to policy makers by the second book *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* by Landry (2000). (Edensor et al., 2010:6)

Landry's 'Creative City' proposes an extended vision of creativity and focuses on creative industries and culture. In *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (2000), Landry addresses a call to institutions and urban makers to be creative in their ways of thinking the city, of conceiving and implementing policies. Charles Landry proposes an extended understanding of Creativity. He focuses on "organisational structures" and on "creative thinking". He pays more attention to governance and decision making in cities than to economic, societal or physical attributes of cities.

Charles Landry does not give a precise definition of what 'creative' and 'creativity' are, they are more a position, a way of doing, of being open to new ideas and new processes. Anyone can be creative: "Although being creative was mostly associated with artists and sometimes scientists [...], I could see that [...] anyone can be creative under certain conditions". (Landry, 2000:12)

Charles Landry does not define with precision the role of arts and culture in the city. His main focus is on cultural industries, as “hotbeds of creativity” and as an “interconnected sector, perhaps the fastest growing in modern urban economies” (2000:9), although he also mentions “cultural heritage and traditions” (2000:10). Landry (2012) refers to “culture in general”. One of his definitions is that “culture is the panoply of resources that show that a place is unique and distinctive” (2000:7). Landry advocates for going beyond what he conceives as a “narrow conception of culture – museums, galleries, theatre and shopping” (2000:9), but in his book, artists are, as such, quite absent. Even if they are implicitly referred to as parts of the Creative City, artists are rarely mentioned as key actors.

Landry places the research for creativity in the domain of entrepreneurialism and growth. *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* includes many different definitions of creativity, one of which is “the method of exploiting (cultural) resources and helping them grow” (2004:14). This has little to do with arts, but rather proposes a vision that will boost growth. The cultural sector provides opportunities to boost tourism. Landry highlights for instance the success story of Hay on the Way (UK), self-proclaimed ‘Book Town’, which managed to create “something out of nothing”. According to Landry’s data, Hay on the Way, had, at the time, 1,400 inhabitants, 15 large guesthouses, 4 hotels and a “dramatic rise in cafés and restaurants” all providing a “vibrant cultural life” for the employees of “international companies” (Landry, 2000:10). In this example, success means attracting tourists and creating consumption opportunities for non-residents, while - one supposes - creating jobs for the locals.

The international take-up of Creative Cities and Creative Class concepts by politicians is mostly presented in the literature as deriving from the work of Richard Florida in the *Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). According to Pratt and Hutton (2013), Florida is “arguably the most influential advocate” (2013:90) of the Creative City.

In this book, Florida says that creativity is at the core of the new economy. His hypothesis is that in order to boost the economy, cities must attract the ‘Creative Class’. The residential localisation choice of the Creative Class is identified as the main factor

for economic growth in cities. It is where ‘creatives’ are, that the economy grows. Cities must develop policies to attract those creatives if they want to be the winners in a context of global international competition. For Florida

The presence and concentration of bohemians in an area creates an environment of milieu that attracts other types of talented or high human capital individuals. The presence of such human capital in turn attracts and generates innovative, technology-based industries (Florida, 2002:55). A bohemian atmosphere, measured by the ‘Bohemian index’ is understood as the key factor of the residential localisation choices of ‘Talented individuals’ and is associated with high technology concentrations.

Florida insists on three key elements of success for cities within the international competition: the 3T’s, i.e. ‘Talent, Technology, and Tolerance’.

- Talent: a city that can attract top talents is going to be competitive.
- Technology and Innovation: a city that can help “transferring research, ideas, and innovation into marketable and sustainable products” (The Place Brand Observer, 2016) will perform better in the new economy.
- Tolerance: A city with a tolerant ‘Bohemian atmosphere’ will be attractive to the creatives. Florida mentions tolerance towards the gay and lesbian community as an indicator of tolerance, as well as a multicultural atmosphere.

Based on these categories, Florida created a ranking between cities: the Creative Cities Index. Cities that are at the top of the ranking score high on these three elements.

Like Landry’s Creative City, Florida’s ‘Creative Class’ concept is strongly connected to the necessity for cities to grow and to become attractive, to compete on the international stage and attract those who – he considers – boost growth. Florida poses as key “the role of individual locational choice in response to amenity values as the motor of contemporary urban growth.” (Storper and Scott, 2009:147). He argues that the reason behind growth is a combination of cities’ characteristics, which makes them able to attract and retain what he calls ‘the Creative Class’. In the first understanding of ‘The Creative Class’, one sees that the most important challenge for cities is to create the right milieu to attract talent. In this framework, more than a central component of the theory, artists’ presence is useful more as a hook for other talents rather than for their own contribution to creativity. Florida proposes a broad understanding of creativity and

of ‘creatives’. The creative class is the one, which engages in work that “create[s] meaningful new forms” and “new forms of designs that are readily transferable and broadly useful” or “professionals who work in knowledge intensive industries” and “engage in creative problem solving”. (Florida, 2002:34) Florida’s understanding of creativity is mostly about innovation and economically measured activity. One of Florida’s key measures for creativity is the number of patents recorded in one place. According to Florida (2002), the Creative Class includes “all those who are “fortunate enough to be paid to use their creativity regularly in their work” (Florida, 2002:35), which amounts to 30% of the US population. It actually looks like Florida’s measures of the creative class do not easily include artists, many of which actually struggle to be paid for their creative activities and sustain their life expenses thanks to “non-creative” jobs. This reveals little analysis and interests for artists and for those experimenting non commercial forms of creativity, beyond what is associated with the creation of a ‘Bohemian atmosphere’.

This theory is what Max Nathan calls ‘Florida 1.0’ (2015:4). In fact, Florida later changed his position and “returned to conventional urban economics and New Economic Geography frameworks” (2015:7), using the frame of agglomeration economies rather than an explanation based on the bohemian atmosphere of a city. Florida also refined the term ‘Creative Class’ to focus it on talent’ and defining it “in terms of both qualifications and occupational characteristics, such as levels of autonomy at work” (2015:7). Most of the Creative City debates have focussed on Florida 1.0 theories, before he partly renounced some of its key concepts.

The Creative City concepts take stock of the changes in the global economy. Creative City concepts emerged during the transition to a post-Fordist economy. They incited urban planners and local policy makers to look at the new trends in the way cities’ economies function, one in which ‘creativity’ and soft skills play an increasing role.

As Scott and Storper (2009) put it:

As the new economy emerged after the 1980s [...] it generated a new division of labor, with a much greater role for cognitive skills than in the previous post-war period. [...] These developments in turn have been accompanied by new rounds of creativity and innovation in



activities like management, finance, consumer relations, cultural and symbolic conception, and so on, and much of this innovation has occurred in their agglomerated urban productive centers. (2009:163)

Scott and Storper's approach is focused on revealing the logic of the agglomeration economy. However, they strongly disagree with the idea that "jobs follow people" and insist that,

a more effective line of explanation must relate to urban growth directly to the economic geography of production and must explicitly deal with the complex recursive interactions between the location of firms and the movements of labor (2009:147).

As one can see, between Landry, Florida and Scott and Storper, the concepts that fed the Creative Cities debate diverge significantly. The links of causality between creativity and growth are not explained in the same way. The type of policies that are recommended diverge. That is why I have chosen to use the wording "concepts of Creative City" to point out the main concepts described above and in the literature, rather than using the wording of "theory" or the singular of "concept".

What makes the concepts so influential is their take-up by policy makers. Borén and Young (2013) suggest that "the ongoing focus of academic work on 'creative cities' reflects the increasing centrality of notions of creativity in urban policy around the world" (2013: 1799). This continuing attraction of the Creative City for policy makers is one of the reasons why it makes sense to engage with the concept further, to see if and how it can be used. The concepts were initially formulated by consultants (Landry, Florida), who proposed - together with them - recipes to policy makers throughout the world. The ideas were accompanied by solutions that were made to be taken up by policy makers and urban planners and transferred from one place to another. One illustration of this is the way Charles Landry presents *The Big Issue* - a journal sold by homeless people in the streets in the UK - as a "creative solution to homelessness". He presents it as a project whose "key strength is that it is easily replicable" (Landry, 2008:13). Replicability is a key element of these policy solutions. Peck (2005; 2011) points out the uptake of creativity around the world, giving several examples, from the Mayor of

Denver, who “moved to buy multiple copies of the book<sup>6</sup>, distributing them as bedtime reading for his senior staff” (2005:742) to the “Government of Singapore moved to relax its absurd restrictions on homosexuality” (2005:742), from Amsterdam to Memphis. In Europe, one of the most influential and regularly quoted examples is the regeneration of Bilbao. Its success, rebranding itself on the international scene, thanks to the construction of the Guggenheim (inaugurated in 1997), led other European cities to fund megaprojects designed by star-architects (Vivant, 2009), redirecting investment to expensive flagship projects, rather than caring for the local community. Barcelona is perhaps the other most famous European example, presented as a success story for Culture-led regeneration thanks to a mega-project – the Olympic Games of 1992. Another illustration of the spread and penetration of the concept of Creative City policy at the international level is its take-up by major international institutions, such as the European Commission and UNESCO, as a framework for analysing and comparing cities. In 2017 the European Commission created the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor<sup>7</sup> to “support (its) efforts to put culture at the heart of its policy agenda”, after “the adoption of the first 'European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World' (2007)”. The Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor is “a tool to promote mutual exchange and learning between cities to boost culture-led development”. The influence of the Floridean thesis on the work of the Joint Research Centre, the European science and knowledge service that created the monitor, appears quite clear. The Monitor website says that it “provides comparable data on how European cities perform in the areas of culture and creativity, and how this performance relates to jobs, wealth and economic growth”. Some of the “29 indicators, nine dimensions and three major facets” selected, are clearly derived from the Floridean Creative Class concept. The three major facets are: “Cultural Vibrancy”, “Creative Economy”, which indicators are mostly types of creative jobs and patents (these would be “Technology” and “Talent” in Floridean wording) and the “Enabling Environment”, i.e the tangible and intangible assets that help cities attract creative talent and stimulate cultural engagement (including a “Tolerance” indicator). The Floridean analysis provides the right tool to justify linking

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<sup>6</sup> Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002).

<sup>7</sup> <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/cultural-creative-cities-monitor/>, [Accessed: 18 September 2019].

cultural investment to growth and jobs, which are the main objectives of Europe's 2020 Strategy, the strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The UNESCO network of Creative Cities, launched in 2004, is another manifestation of how widespread the concepts of Creative Cities have become. To date, 180 cities "that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development" are involved in the network, with the objective to "place creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level"<sup>8</sup>. Like the need for cities to situate themselves on the international stage, this focus on creative industries appears clearly within a context of competition among international cities. However, it is possible that the UNESCO approach goes beyond a mere application of a 'fast policy', as Pratt suggests:

Contrary to the one size fits all mentality of the Creative City 'manual' (the normative place marketing model) the UNESCO network is focused on local partnership building and the notion of examining shared experiences and challenges across cities. (2011:124)

Critics of the Creative City concepts were almost immediate and have been extremely vivid. The Creative Class concept, as presented by Florida (2002) has been fiercely criticized in academic literature. Jamie Peck (2005) has attacked both the style and the content of 'The Rise of the Creative Class' in an academic article, which has the tone of a pamphlet. According to him it "mixes cosmopolitan elitism and pop universalism, hedonism and responsibility, cultural radicalism and economic conservatism, casual and causal inference, and social libertarianism and business realism". (2005:741)

Several articles take stock of the existing criticism to the concepts of Creative City. Borén and Young mention a long list of criticisms, including:

The potentially negative redistributive impact of serially reproducing 'hip' urban downtowns (Peck, 2005); the fuzzy definition of key terms such as 'creativity', 'creative class' or the 'creative/cultural industries'" (Markusen, 2006; Pratt, 2008; Evans, 2009); whether there is a 'creative class' with some sort of common class identity" (Markusen, 2006; Catungal et al., 2009; Evans, 2009); creativity (or certain forms of it) being valued only when it contributes to

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<sup>8</sup> UNESCO website : <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home>, [Accessed: 18 September 2019].

economic growth” (e.g. Gibson and Klocker, 2005; Gibson and Kong, 2005; Peck, 2005). (2013:1801)

Below, I untangle the criticisms directed towards the concepts of Creative City, mostly the earlier 1.0 (Nathan, 2015) Floridean concept of the Creative Class from the criticisms directly addressed to the policy implementation of the concept, as opposed to the later concepts of ‘Florida 2.0’ (Nathan, 2015:25). I detail and classify the main criticisms into categories that are used for the rest of this work, notably the criticisms that appear the most relevant to look at in the French context, and in the context of Saint-Denis and Plaine Commune, as a non-affluent ‘banlieue’ (suburb) of the first ring around Paris, within the new metropolis of Greater Paris.

The fuzziness and arbitrary make-up of the Creative Class, but also its elitist and exclusionary conception, have been widely pointed out. Borén and Young highlight that “one of the key problems in debates around the ‘creative city’ is the lack of analytical precision in the terms used (Markusen, 2006; Evans, 2009).” (2013:1800) The Creative Class includes many ‘not so creative’ people, but rather knowledge intensive jobs such as law clerks, accountants and auditors, for instance, and excludes creatives who are not paid for their jobs. The mere idea of the Creative Class is exclusionary and hides liberal and neoliberal conception of creativity based on individual merit, which hides the obstacles to access it. According to Pratt and Hutton (2013), Stefan Krätke in *The Creative Capital of Cities* (2011) “presents perhaps the most comprehensive deconstruction of Florida’s creative class thesis.” (Pratt and Hutton, 2013:90). According to Krätke

the so-called ‘creative class’ comprises a ‘simple admixture of different middle-class groups with varying levels of education’ (see also Siebel, 2008) rather than a coherent socioeconomic model distinct from that of the ‘new middle class. (Krätke, 2011, quoted in Pratt and Hutton, 2013:90)

The ‘creative class is not a strong concept’. It hides political conceptions, notably of individual merit and talent.

The hidden discriminatory nature of the concept, in terms of gender and race, is another

set of critiques, and is less extensively covered than I would have expected. Leslie and Catungal (2012) argue that there is an inherent discrimination towards some groups within the apparent neutrality of the Creative Class concept, “not just as an after-effect of creative city policy – but as an embedded element within creative city theory and policy”. (2012:112) While Florida insists that the creative class is diverse and mobile, Leslie and Catungal point out two issues with the theory when it comes to hidden presuppositions having impacts on who is able to be part of the Creative Class: one that is based on the undefined and generic “category of ‘immigrant’, which effaces differences within the category” (2012:116), notably when it comes to the country of origin; and a second, which is based on the methodology and index used. In that case, “the measure of tolerance is based on demographics – the mere presence of racialised populations – rather than the commonly used Index of Dissimilarity or other measures of socio-spatial inequality” (2012:116). They remind us that “Florida’s most tolerant creative cities are also some of the most racially segregated” (Thomas and Darnton 2006: 162 quoted in Leslie and Cantugal 2012). Leslie and Catungal also highlight the assumption that access to the creative class is based on merit (human capital and availability for long working hours) also hides the gender and racial bias inscribed in the theory.

Parker (2008) reminds us that perceptions of merit are filtered through racialized and gendered lenses. She notes, for example, that “while women and racial minorities textually and materially participate in Florida’s Creative Class, they face high barriers to entry, remain economically and structurally marginalized, and operate within masculinist norms and leadership. (Leslie and Cantugal, 2012:116)

They remind us that most creative jobs are occupied by men

Most creative occupations (e.g. publishing, advertising, information technology) continue to be highly gendered in terms of career advancement and divisions of labour, reproducing general gendered inequities in the broader economy (see Kelan 2007; Nixon and Crewe 2004). (Leslie and Cantugal, 2012:116)

This holds true in the UK, the US and Canada, countries directly referred to in the academic literature when it comes to race, gender bias and the Creative City. It is also – unsurprisingly – the case in France. A recent report by the High Council for Equality between Women and Men (HCE) (Bousquet et al., 2018) accounted that, in 2018, women represented 60% of students in arts, 40% of artists actually active, 20% of the

artists supported by public funds, 20% of the programmed artists, and 10% of the awarded artists. At equal position and equal skills, a female artist earned on average 18% less than a man. Like women, newcomers are often excluded from the city's artistic networks, as Leslie et al. (2012) demonstrated in their study of artists in Toronto, finding that the art world and its institutions are not representative of the broader cultural diversity of the city.

### Creative City policies have exclusionary and adverse side-effects

Pratt and Hutton (2013) suggest that “it makes more sense to consider the Creative City a field of policy rather than one particular policy as the ideas have been fragmented” (2013:90). A lot of the debate on Creative Cities discusses the impact of the policies implemented under the inspirations of Landry and Florida's books. Several types of policies have been associated with the Creative Cities concept, from the investment in mega-events and star-architects' buildings to the support to creative clusters, from City Branding strategies to investment in public arts. Here I am referring to various types of policy choices that are influenced by Creative Cities concepts. I will go on to look at the most developed criticisms of the policy choices and of their effect on cities and their inhabitants. I use the phrasing ‘Creative Cities policies’ to refer to these diverse types of policies.

Serena Vicari Haddock (2013:274) identifies several negative aspects of making Creative Cities policies:

1. Fragmentation of urban territory with concentrated investment only in some part of the territory, at the expense of other areas, which create new geographical inequalities.
2. A redefinition and commodification of public space, which are damaging to the inhabitants and the arts sector.
3. An increase of housing costs and expulsion of small local businesses, more likely to provide jobs to the local community than newly attracted businesses, which create exclusion from the labour market.

4. A selective construction of identity, in which one interpretation of history and culture is valorised against others, with the choice to valorise some cultures above others, which imposes of symbols.

In the next sections, I review the negative impacts of Creative Cities policies, such as the unannounced imposition of a neoliberal political agenda, the counter effect of such policies on the arts sector itself and the creation of new inequalities.

The repackaging of neoliberal policies with the ‘coolness’ of culture is one of the main issues highlighted in the academic literature. This strand of criticisms reveals that the Creative City concepts hide political assumptions and choices which are unstated by name. As Ratiu (2013) says, it is “not a simple technical issue of city planning but an ideological one, depending on values that various agents implicitly share ». (2013:129-130)

Borén and Young (2013) remind us that

As Peck (2011) suggests, such policies have spread rapidly not because they have been effective, but because they can be mapped onto existing strategies (e.g. ‘cultural industries’ policies) and because they ‘conform’— they don’t demand radical change by policymakers or disrupt vested interests and existing power structures and they “accessorize” neoliberal urbanism in a manner befitting cultural tropes of competitive cosmopolitanism”.

The Creative Cities concept provides a cool and easily defensible agenda to those focusing on growth, accumulation of capital and profit at the expense of some of the cities’ residents. Leslie and Cantugal call them policies that “repackage the status quo” (2013:1800). As Ratiu mentions, such policies have been “crafted to co-exist with urban social problems, not to solve them, while the creative city concept is seen as “the funky side of neoliberal urban-development politics (Peck, 2007: 2)” (2013:128). This links the debate on Creative Cities to that of the neo-liberalisation of urban governance, as initiated by Harvey (1989), and that of the rise of growth machines (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Growth coalitions would be using the trendy name of Creative City to continue pursuing their interests under cover of a new concept.

Creative City policies have counter-effects on the arts sector. The Creative Class concept geared Creative Cities policies towards looking at arts, culture, creative

industries as a motor for growth and as a support for City Branding exercise. In some cases, this has been proved to have a counter effect on the arts sector. The policies aimed at boosting the local economy by consumption-oriented policies lead to adverse forms of touristification and standardisation, already highlighted 40 years ago by Zukin (1982), and to the exclusion of the artists who are supposed to be ones initiating and stimulating the creative spark of a place and its specific atmosphere. Even Florida (2002) mentions the risks that are engrained in Creative City policies such as the rise of house prices “forcing artists and other creative people out of their communities and further exacerbating social and economic inequality between the haves and the have-nots of the creative economy” (Florida, 2016). The city as an ‘entertainment machine’ (Lloyd & Clarck, 2001) is not a city for all, but one that caters to those who have the means to access the new forms of commodified entertainment. Interestingly, Bianchini (2004), one of the initiators of the idea of the Creative City, highlights that the commodification and standardisation of cultural experiences is a threat to the actual idea of the Creative City.

Once you step inside the multiplex cinema, or the bowling alley, or the themed bar or restaurant, or the town centre or out of town shopping mall, you find that these places tend to lack the sense of discovery, unpredictability and of multiple possibilities which is a feature of traditional European city centres” (Bianchini, 2004:2).

Bianchini points out that the ‘anywhere’ places – or to follow the terminology of Marc Augier (1995) the ‘non-places’ - and the rise of the “experience economy” (in the definition of Pine and Gilmore (1998)) are probably “contributing to undermining the "creativity potential" of a city”. (Bianchini, 2004:2)

Negative impacts on the arts sector itself are numerous, through commodification of the arts, erasure of difference through homogenisation (Zukin, 1996), self-exploitation of people in the artistic and creative sector (d’Ovidio and Cossu, 2017, McRobbie, 2011), ultimately leading to a decrease in creativity itself (Marti-Costa, Pradel i Miquel, 2011). Bain (2010) highlights the need for artists to find experimental spaces in the city at low cost and deplores their loss, due to Creative City policies.

Finally, Creative City policies have led to the emergence or deepening of several new inequalities. In *Inequalities in the Creative City* (2017), Gerhard et al. show that new



inequalities have appeared as a result of Creative City policies. The book (Gerhard et al., 2017:4) focuses on “what inequalities appear and where” and points out discourses as “powerful purveyors of possible inequalities from this new city remaking”. It highlights that “in current neoliberal, informational, and global times, the push to manufacture creative cities generates a host of outcomes in needs of excavation”. They highlight that “creative city policies do not reduce but hides existing inequalities and even births new ones”.

Diversion of investment from the needs of the poorest to feed those of the richest is one of the negative effects pointed out both in the literature and in the streets. The massive demonstrations in Brazil at the time of the Rio Football World Cup is an example of social movements reacting to a feeling that investment was moved away from tackling burning social issues to serve another type of investment, which benefitted another. The insistence on sustainability, containment of costs, and social justice shown in the recent Olympic Games applications by London and Paris is another example of how the criticisms have - at least on paper - been taken into account. Finally, the negative impact of the touristification of cities is now widely discussed in academic circles, but also in the press and in policy circles, such as the debate around the effect of Airbnb.

Displacement due to higher housing costs is one of the most quoted negative side effects of Creative Cities policies. The case of Barcelona is exemplary. The city invested in renovation and mega-projects for the Olympic Games 1992, putting the city back in the international scene. Alongside this Barcelona's city authority adopted a policy to encourage cultural tourism in the 1990s (Dodd, 1999). The process, according to Garcia (2013), did involve citizens and spread of investment to non-central neighbourhoods. However, after the Mayor changed, the orientation of the policy became more focused towards growth, and citizens started to oppose events such as the Universal Forum of Cultures (2004). There is no simple line of consequence between the Olympic Games and the massive impact of tourism in today's Barcelona. However, 30 years down the line, the city is now putting into place solutions to ring-fence the impact of tourism on the city, notably when it comes to its impact on housing prices, and the Mayor's office is occupied by a municipalist citizens' coalition.

Symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1979) and the imposition of what valuable culture is, as a negative impact of a mega-project, is more and more referenced (Vicari-Haddock, 2013). The support to star-architects' buildings or mega-projects dedicated to the entertainment of the richer population produces forms of symbolic and real violence towards the less affluent, who are pushed away from their homes at the benefit of forms of entertainment that they cannot afford or may not be interested in.

The rise of inequalities due to the actual structure of the creative economy, i.e. the development of low-paid jobs to serve the higher paid professionals, and the development of flexible, low-paid jobs within the creative economy itself, are another set of pin-pointed inequalities. Several studies show how the creative economy relies on flexible, project-based jobs which involve short contractual relationships, long working hours and no labour union representation of workers. Hutton (2017) highlights that

the cultural economy also generates inequality. The cultural labor comprises a relatively small number of well-remunerated, elite creatives at the top and a large base of mostly younger workers at the base, reflecting the occupational structure of cultural activity. (Hutton, 2017:15)

Hutton (2017) reminds that there is a “widening gap between those producing culture and consuming culture (Gill and Pratt 2008).

Actual increasing inequalities imposed on women and racialized minorities are quite revealing of the exclusionary effects and symbolic violence towards some parts of society, even if as Parker (2008) highlights, the voluminous literature on creative class politics includes only a handful of articles that address gender and race (e.g. Leslie and Catungal 2012; McLean 2014; Parker 2008). First of all, women and racialized minorities are over-represented at the lower-paid side of the spectrum of the job market. Negrey and Rausch (2009) find that, in all cities, women are disproportionately concentrated in low-paying service class jobs. Mc Lean (2014:670) also highlights that the Creative City concepts devalue care work and social reproduction both symbolically and economically (Kern and Wekerle 2008; McRobbie 2011; Parker 2008). Additionally, barriers to entry to access creative occupations are higher for those groups. Florida (2016) recognizes that in the US creative jobs are not race-neutral:

Across America, almost three-quarters (73.8 percent) of all creative class jobs nationwide are held by white (non-Hispanic) workers, compared to about nine percent (8.5 percent) by African

Americans. By way of comparison, non-Hispanic whites make up roughly two thirds of the population (64 percent) compared to 12 percent for blacks. (Florida, 2016)

Pratt (2011) shows that women are underrepresented in the creative sector

whereas there are more or less 46% women working in the UK workforce, the figure is just 27% in the audio-visual sector. The picture is even worse for black and ethnic minority workers; the proportion of black and ethnic minority workers in London, where more than half of creative sector employees work, is around 24%, but in the audio-visual industries it is just 7%. (2011:128)

Leslie and Cantugal (2012) remind us that creative jobs are a cradle for discrimination, notably when it comes to expectations regarding work/life balance and time spent networking outside office hours. Not only do the networks of ‘boy’s clubs’ play a powerful role in that sector, but also the fact that the definition of ‘quality of life’ does not include any reference to childcare provision or family related issues shows how little this is taken into consideration. Due to heavier family duties, women bear more of the burden than men when confronted with this flexibility:

In her study of project-based work in new media sectors in Europe, Gill (2002) suggests that the increasing flexibility and informality of creative labour have contributed to women-workers experiencing isolation and overwork, as they are forced to bring more work home. (quoted by Leslie and Cantugal (2012:117)).

Multiculturalism and tolerance become a nice package to spice up homonormative and dominant cultural formats. In her analysis of a queer art Festival in Toronto, McLean (2018) highlights how much the promotion of diversity regulates the artists’ work “in order to stage marketable notions of ethnic and queer diversity” (2018:3563). She suggests that “politicised artists can become ensnared in the production of homonormative space, including pink-washing strategies” (2018:3575), a situation that meets the resistance of the artists.

### Is the reference to the Creative City still useful today?

Is the reference to creativity and to the Creative City still useful? All the aforementioned criticisms would encourage one to go, together with Oli Mould (2018), in the direction of a call *Against Creativity*, if creativity means the unchallenged acceptance of the

dominance of neoliberal discourse and agency. At the same time, the discussion about Creative Cities has sparked a very interesting debate, and has the merit of providing a renewed interest for understanding the role of arts and artists in the city. The influence this debate has on policy makers is another reason to keep working at it. Borén and Young (2013) highlight that such critics have

little impact on urban policymakers, who continue to enthusiastically embrace ‘creativity’ in certain forms, particularly those with a Floridean inflection, and to develop new areas in which to study the adoption of creativity in urban policy”. (2013:1801)

Reviewing the main criticisms addressed to the Creative City informs us on how to build a counter-model, one that would aim at avoiding the pitfalls and issues linked to the initial Creative City proposals. Is it possible to build a Creative City that is not neoliberal? A Creative City that does not instrumentalise artists but which recognises their possible input into building the city? A Creative City that does not create new geographical, labour, race and gender inequalities? If it was possible: what would be the ways to achieve it? What should one look out for when studying existing examples to see if and how that is possible?

In the next section, I review the possible uses of the concept of creativity that have been pointed out in the literature. I highlight the proposals to reinvest the idea of the Creative City, which could help re-direct policy making. The road to this work has been paved by several researchers, who have proposed to look beyond ‘Florida 1.0’ and to see if and how building alternative Creative Cities models would help. New paths of research proposed by academic authors make a direct reference to policy making. They make it an objective to provide policy makers with new types of input on how to use the Creative City ideas, as we will see below.

First of all, there have already been some changes to the implementation of Creative City policies following the 2008 financial crisis, as well as a renewed insistence from artists on the importance of non-commercial involvement with urban issues. The financial crisis of 2008 has changed the impact of the Creative City concepts in many ways. Malcolm Miles (2013) argues that it has interrupted the Creative City policies replication, “providing an opportunity to re-assess the idea of a creative city and the values implicit in it.” (2013:123) Could there be a Post-Creative City? Could the “creative imagination of diverse urban groups lead to new socio-political as well as

cultural formations?” (2013:123). Serena Vicari-Haddock (2013) has a more nuanced view regarding the relative slow down of Creative Cities policies. She argues that the new nature of urban space creation, led by private actors, may encourage them to continue to use the neoliberal model of the Creative City as a way of maximising revenue. However, she recognises that the financial crisis has led to an “erosion of the creative city model”, notably through the questioning of over-consumerism and the strengthening of claims for alternative forms of development, which support new forms of ethical, organic forms of consumption.

To this production, corresponds demands for forms of creativity and innovation that are different from those produced by big companies” [...] “It is a generalised creativity, which needs spaces for experimentation at a low cost and direct engagement, far from that, which through concrete and mortar, produces processes of valorisation”, which may very well use “free raw material” and is now attracting many of the “young people pushed away from the labour market towards fragmented forms of creative work. (2013:277)

Activist occupations of cities show alternative models. These ‘bottom-up’ creative engagements with the city returned to the foreground at the advent of the financial crisis offering a form of intervention that directly targets neoliberal capitalism and its dominance of the city. Miles (2013) suggests that “alternatives emerge in direct action – notably Occupy in 2011-12 – and activist art” (2013:123). By playing at the interface between culture, economy and social affairs, and by mobilising the potentialities of arts to improve social justice, several actors have attempted to propose alternatives to the neoliberalisation of the city (Borén and Young, 2017, Romeiro, 2017, Cossu and d’Ovidio, 2017, d’Ovidio and Rodriguez Morato, 2017). However, risks of the instrumentalisation of artists and art places – even in their more progressive forms such as occupied spaces - by the municipalities (and other actors) should not be underestimated. Temporary occupation by artists can lead to increased land value. For instance, Colomb (2012) shows how Berlin stages temporary occupation of space as part of its Creative City identity. Elsa Vivant (2016) highlights how the real estate developer Brémont supported the artists of the independent cultural centre 6B in Saint-Denis by renting them out space at a low cost in order to increase general land value around the building.

This strand of research requires us to look at each case study in detail, in order to understand what the exact impact of the mobilisation of artists in the city are. When does it create exclusion? When does it create emancipation? The answers are complex and embedded in each context and artistic project.

For example, Mc Lean (2014) shows how complex the impact of artists' work in a neighbourhood is:

I demonstrate how the project of feminist arts activism uncovers the multiple exclusions that creative city policies and practices entrench. My analysis reveals how these activities are complicit in cultivating spaces of white privilege and heteronormativity, but also shows that neoliberal imperatives are not always over determining. (2014:669)

This is an incentive to rethink and reconceptualise the relationship between the arts and the city. The attractiveness of the Creative City theory helped justify the interest for culture and arts in policy circles, notably when their direct economic impacts were proven. In that sense it is a neoliberal interpretation of culture, i.e. one that has direct economic impact and creates growth. But, interestingly, as Edensor et al. (2010) put it, “the basic tenet of this concept is that cities are facing immense challenges with the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial era” and “need to be creative in thinking solutions to urban problems” (2010:3). If being creative means stimulating new forms of production of urban policy making, there is potential in this proposal that artists can help build the Creative City, not as hooks for other talents but by using their own specific creative work as a way to envisaging a different kind of public policy making. Borén and Young (2013, 2017), in Sweden and Arab et al. (2016) in France, have researched the forms of collaborations that exist between artists and local authority employees in charge of urban development, analysing the potential impact of including artistic creative processes in policy making. Their results show that the input of artists in changing the physical shape of cities and the urban planning process often remains limited.

There is a general call by researchers to try to revise the “Creative City Model” (Jakob, 2011) and develop a new one. They propose to work on a nuanced and situated understanding of Creative City policies. They claim that this approach can also lead to policies which carry out and act for another vision of the city, one that is attentive to the

issues of inequalities among other things. Pratt (2011) suggests a situated approach that includes specific attention to the issues of equity and redistribution of resources. He says that he attempts to “create a platform for a more nuanced and subtle approach to creativity, culture and cities: one that is situated and not universal” (2011:123) and proposes

to map out an approach that is concerned not simply with the growth possibilities, but also redistributive strategies” (...) “It questions whether we can conceive Creative Cities as a truly progressive field of policy and practice, in direct contrast to what we judge to be the socially regressive form they take at present. (2011:123)

Borén and Young (2013) suggest that

The focus of enquiry should shift towards a more in depth understanding of how creativity is constructed, contested and performed in specific urban contexts, understanding the creative policy gap between policymakers and those engaged in all kinds of creative practice, and developing forms of artistic intervention to attempt to make creative policy making more inclusive and ‘creative’. (2013:1799)

They encourage researchers to build a situated, contextualised understanding of creativity and of Creative Cities policies and to try to build an alternative conception of Creative Cities.

Doreen Jakob (2011) calls for a conception of Creative Cities that sees equality as a central concern. She wants

an overhaul and revision of the creative city model in which equality, and not growth and centrality, stand at its center. Such an approach includes the enactment of creativity not as an urban development strategy but as a human right. (2011:193).

Leslie and Catungal (2012) hypothesise that it is possible to go towards a creative and socially just city. They identify two further avenues for research on social justice and the Creative City. They propose to:

1. Engage thoroughly with artistic and academic work on explicitly anti-racist, feminist and anti-capitalist forms of creative production, which may be run “as volunteer-based, not-for-profit entities”, in order to exemplify the possibility of “more-than-capitalist” (2012:120) ways of doing the Creative City.
2. To use ethnographic investigation to “illuminate the everyday lived geographies of creative spaces, particularly in terms of political and affective contestation”

(2012:120)

They invite us to look at the ways Creative City policies take into account questions of equality and social justice.

Authors also point out that there are various simultaneous conceptions of creativity at play on a given territory. As Ratiu (2013) puts it

There are different approaches to the issue of sustainability in the creative cities, as well as diverse strategies for building the sustainable creative city by using artists' creativity and the arts. My claim is that they firstly depend on various levels of urban space and agents considered: cultural district/city, small cities/metropolis, and individual artists/artistic institutions. (2013:128)

The predominance of one conception above others is not stable in time and depends on the ideological choices of the actors in power and of the imbalance of power between different actors. The analysis provided by Garcia (2013: 287-303) about Barcelona is quite enlightening. She explains how, as long as Barcelona's strategy remained participatory, and attentive to the least affluent neighbourhoods, the strategy seemed successful. It was when political leadership, and therefore methods and allies, changed, that residents began to express discontent towards some the city's creative policies. The example of Barcelona suggests that 1) the political choices of the municipalities and state actors may still play a role in the actual local definition of what creativity means and what it is; 2) the imbalance of forces between different actors evolves quickly; and 3) residents and citizens have a key role to play in the development and the definition of Creative City strategies.

Understanding the complexity of policy implementation is key. Implementing a policy means adapting it and appropriating it. Many authors underline the necessity for cultural policy to be embedded in the local context to be successful. Grodach (2008) concludes his analysis of two cultural flagship projects in Los Angeles and San Jose (California, US), with the statement that "the flagship cultural strategy may not be easily replicated and, as a result, highlight the danger of singling out Bilbao as a model" (2008:209). Prince (2010) has shown, as regards to the creative industries concept, "how a global form can maintain its universality, while distinctive knowledges and policy forms are



assembled around it in different places” (2010:139), and how the transfer of a global form is “driven by the active engagement and contextualization of them in these other places, rather than as a result of neocolonial processes of homogenization and dominance” (2010:139). Even the main detractors of the Creative Cities concepts, such as Jamie Peck, show that ‘fast policy’ is not an exact replication of ideas from one place to another, but that policy adaptation is the result of several negotiations between actors, translations into the local context and that the main objectives of the initial policy may be well twisted throughout this system of adaptation (Peck and Theodore, 2015).

From my own experience with the URBACT programme<sup>9</sup>, a programme dedicated to exchanges between cities of policy ideas and urban development solutions, I have seen how difficult and slow it is to actually transfer an idea from one context to the other, in order to embed it in the local context. In the framework of this programme, cities come together for a period of two years to exchange their practices on one aspect of urban policy making. To allow the transfer from one policy practice labelled as ‘Good Practice’ by a city to another city, the programme has had to create a series of two year long networks – called transfer networks – within which civil servants exchange and reflect with the support of an expert on how the practice could be implemented in their city. This requires capacity building of civil servants and codified ways to involve local stakeholders<sup>10</sup>. Far from a ‘one size fits all’ approach, transferring policies proves a complex and time-consuming matter. Prince invites us to

recognize that policy evolves through connections being made by a variety of actors on the ground. In making policy, policymakers draw on, and are shaped by, a range of influences and sources that have reached them through a variety of channels.” (2010:136)

We can draw from this that to understand how Creative City policies play out within a territory, one should also pay particular attention to the variations of conceptions between the different stakeholders and to the imbalances of power between these stakeholders.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.urbact.eu](http://www.urbact.eu) [Accessed: 8 January 2020].

<sup>10</sup> <https://urbact.eu/transfer-networks-urbact-learning-lab-build-capacity-and-promote-cohesion-across-europe> [Accessed: 8 January 2020].

Despite a huge body of literature on Creative Cities, researchers point out several underdeveloped sectors of research. Those relevant for this research are mentioned below.

- Interest for smaller cities and notably cities outside of the UK and the US, outside of the ‘bohemian districts’ and historic centres of the US cities. Markusen and Gadwa (2010) say “Amid the buzz on the creative city and cultural economy, knowledge about what works at various urban and regional scales is sorely lacking” (2010:379).
- Influence of the general context and national frameworks on Creative City Policy. Kevin Cox (2017) highlights that city entrepreneurialism is different in Europe than in the US or the UK, in the sense that several factors limit its extent, and that in any case there has been more emphasis on creating jobs in Europe than in the US.
- Other conceptions and forms of creativity that can be or have been activated, such as the notion of vernacular creativity (Edensor et al., 2010).

### What would a (more) socially just Creative City be?

In this chapter, I reviewed the negative impact of the neoliberal implementation of Creative City concepts. I discussed how an alternative city model could be attentive to the question of inequalities in the city. In opposition to a neoliberal unequal city, what would a just Creative City look like? In this section I argue that a (more) socially just Creative City would be one that engages in the pursuit of social justice rather than one that is accepting or deliberately increasing inequalities.

The phrasing of ‘just city’ is largely associated with the work of Susan Fainstein (2010). Fainstein reinterprets the main theories of Justice developed in philosophy and social sciences, notably those of John Rawls (1971), Martha Nussbaum (1999), Iris Marion Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (2005). Based on these examples, she attempts to define a concept of justice that is practical and could inform policy making. She highlights three principles that would make a just city:

- Equity: Redistributive policies, which aim at making the worst off become better off.

- Democracy: Focusing on the process by which decisions are made and the role of deliberative process and political interaction.
- Diversity: referring to the recognition and acceptance of difference.

So a just city is one in which those three dimensions would be taken into account: Equity, Democracy and Diversity. As regards the principles of equity and diversity, the definition Fraser proposes of cultural justice helps us understand how a work of art can act for or against equity and diversity. Fraser defines cultural injustice as “being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and/or hostile to one’s own” (Fraser, 1995:71, quoted in Sharp et al., 2005:1006). Art works can actually be exclusionary, rather than providing inclusion. Sharp et al. (2005) propose an analysis of how public art production and reception interplays with the issues of social inclusion and justice. Art is called for by political decision makers as a tool for social inclusion. However, art is not by definition a provider of social inclusion, social cohesion or social justice. In their work, Sharp et al. look at specific examples of public art, i.e. art placed in the public space, and look at the effects they may have, such as attempting to address the issues of non recognition and ‘invisibilisation’ of different groups, and of disrespect, by “giving voice, countering stereotypes and rediscovering the margins” (2005:1009), or countering cultural domination via “the arts of resistance” (2005:1014). What would art that is inclusive, that works in the direction of social justice look like? Drawing from Frasers’ definition of cultural injustice – which is an element of social injustice, Sharp et al. propose that an inclusive city, in terms of public art, would be one “giving expression to the multiple and shifting identities of different groups, as indicative of presence rather than absence, and of avoiding the cultural domination of particular elites or interest” (2005:1006). Their work highlights that

The play of inclusion in public art operates at two interconnected levels in the ways in which it is read as part of a city space and the process through which it is implemented (2005:1020).

Therefore, the process of production of the artwork shall also be considered. This is linked to the principles of democracy and diversity. Sharp et al. invite us to look at

the different 'stages' through which participation takes places from agenda setting to policy formulation to implementation, the critical factor being the extent to which, and how, citizens are included in the processes" (2005:1007).

Sharp et al. invite us to think differently about the role of the arts as regards to social justice. Participation and the expression of multiple voices, does not necessarily create consensus, on the contrary "It may become an agonistic process" (2005:1021), they say.

I propose, finally, to ground our understanding of a (more) just city in the analysis proposed by A. Sen in *The Idea of Justice* (2009). Sen "invites us to engage in a public reasoning in pursuit of justice" (Brown, 2010:309). Instead of turning our eyes to the Theories of Justice, which focus on defining what the ideal frame for creating justice is, Sen proposes to look at the real world. He insists that one should focus on understanding how policies can make the world (more) just. Such policies will be based on a rationale that is likely to be contested. Making a more just world entails making politically grounded decisions. There should be a debate followed by a societal decision on what are considered the most unjust conditions and what are the ways to address them. From Sen's *Idea of Justice*, one can take that one action in itself is unlikely to create justice, but it may be able to enforce more justice, to create less injustice and encourage more just situations. In the case of arts projects, they are unlikely, at a small scale, by themselves, to create a just city, or to create social inclusion. As Sharp et al. remind us. "the capacity of public art to foster inclusion, is at best partial, able to address the symbolic rather than material needs" (2005:1021). This does not justify abandoning the idea that art can help foster social justice, but invites us to re-scale expectations. It is an appeal to investigate art projects and their creation processes in more depth, to understand how they interact with the question of social justice. In particular it highlights the need to pay attention to the ways artworks may be 'read' by the public, for instance whether they may help alleviate cultural injustice or even help people reflect on the way things are done as well as their own impact on social justice.

The first hypothesis, derived from the analysis provided above, are the following:

First, 'More-than-capitalist' Creative City visions may already exist (Leslie and Cantugal, 2012) and they may be influenced by the political orientation of the carrier of

the visions. (Garcia, 2013). These visions may take into account issues of inequalities (Jakob, 2011) and redistribution (Pratt, 2011). These visions may differ between different stakeholders. Borén and Young (2013)

The literature has not fully engaged with a more nuanced appreciation of how ‘creativity’ is actually understood and implemented by urban elites (urban politicians, strategists, policymakers and planners) in a range of different contexts, and how this contrasts with understandings of ‘creativity’ held by other urban actors”. (2013:1801)

There may be an interplay of these different visions on a territory. One needs to construct a situated and contextualised (Pratt, 2011; Prince, 2010) understanding of the way Creative Cities’ visions of different stakeholders play out in a given location.

The second hypothesis is that artists may play an active role in building an alternative vision and implementation of the Creative City, Sharp et al. (2005). A specific focus on the way artworks are read by the audience and to the process of making of the artwork helps one understand its actual impact on issues of social justice, such as equality, democracy and diversity (Fainstein, 2010).

These hypotheses will be revised after the following Chapter, in order to integrate the input from art theory in the research.

## Chapter 2: Alternative models of (more) socially just Creative Cities

In this chapter I aim to analyse how artists who experiment with participatory arts have developed new creative proposals in order to achieve (more) social justice, while focussing on the urban environment and the social fabric of cities.

Until now I have described the main strands of research regarding Creative Cities. It may appear obvious to the reader that I find the literature to be over-focused on creative industries, rather than on a wider conception of arts and culture. Why is the experience of creative process in the domain of the arts so often left out of this debate? The reason for my surprise— as I explained in the introduction — is that the source of my interest for this research comes from an interrogation related to the role of arts in society, and more specifically the role of arts with regards to the most economically disadvantaged people and areas of a city.

The literature on the Creative City reviewed in Chapter 1 comes mostly from urban sociology and urban planning. References to the history of artistic movements are rare. During this research, I have struggled to find the connection between the analyses focussed on culture and arts in the city and the analyses available in the arts history and arts criticism sectors about the implications of socially-concerned art for the city. There is a gap in the Creative City literature regarding the specificity of the arts, and the ways an artwork can change the city and its social fabric. This Chapter aims at filling this gap by bringing in art theory and critical analysis about arts and social change. I have highlighted that Sharp et al. (2005) invite us to look at how artworks are made and read. This chapter shows how, within the art world, the issues linked to the production process of the artwork, and the reception of the art, have found new answers in the form of participatory arts. Participatory arts have been built and conceived as a response to the ‘city context’, and beyond that, as a way to shape the city, to intervene, not only in its social fabric, but also in its actual form. A growing number of artists have taken the city as a space of production of meaning. This is called ‘contextual art’ (Ardenne, 2004), ‘participatory arts’ (Bishop, 2012), ‘relational arts’ (Bourriaud, 1998), ‘*in situ* art’

(Buren, 2004), ‘site-specific art’ (Kwon, 2002) and ‘Useful Art’ (Bruguera, 2011). The artists within this trend place the building of social relations at the core of their work. The artworks are built in direct relation to their context. By involving people who are not usually involved with contemporary art in the production of their artworks, those artists attempt to challenge the current forms of social organisation. It is in the ‘mode of production’ of their art that they conceive their role in society and in the city.

In this chapter I make use of the theories of Jacques Rancière (2009) to look at the relationship between art and politics, and of the conceptual framework proposed by Claire Bishop (2012) to analyse participatory arts. We will see that many artists conceive their role as an integral part of the creation of social processes. In this work, I bring in analysis of the historical building of participatory arts in their relation to the city, by appealing to the Situationist International and GRAV (in the 1960s), Augusto Boal (in the 1970s), and the community arts movements (in the 1980s). I demonstrate how social engagement is constructed by considering the work of two contemporary artists, Thomas Hirschhorn, with the ‘Musée Précaire Albinet’ (2004) and Tania Bruguera, with ‘Immigrant Movement international’ (2010-present). I conclude that contemporary participatory arts *do* propose a strong engagement with the social fabric of the city. Neither is this engagement the result of a preconceived political message. By creating in a participative manner, these artists propose to build alternatives to existing social structures and hierarchies. They enable the emergence of “new organisations of the sensible,” (Rancière, 2009:71) which have the power to challenge social and cultural injustice.

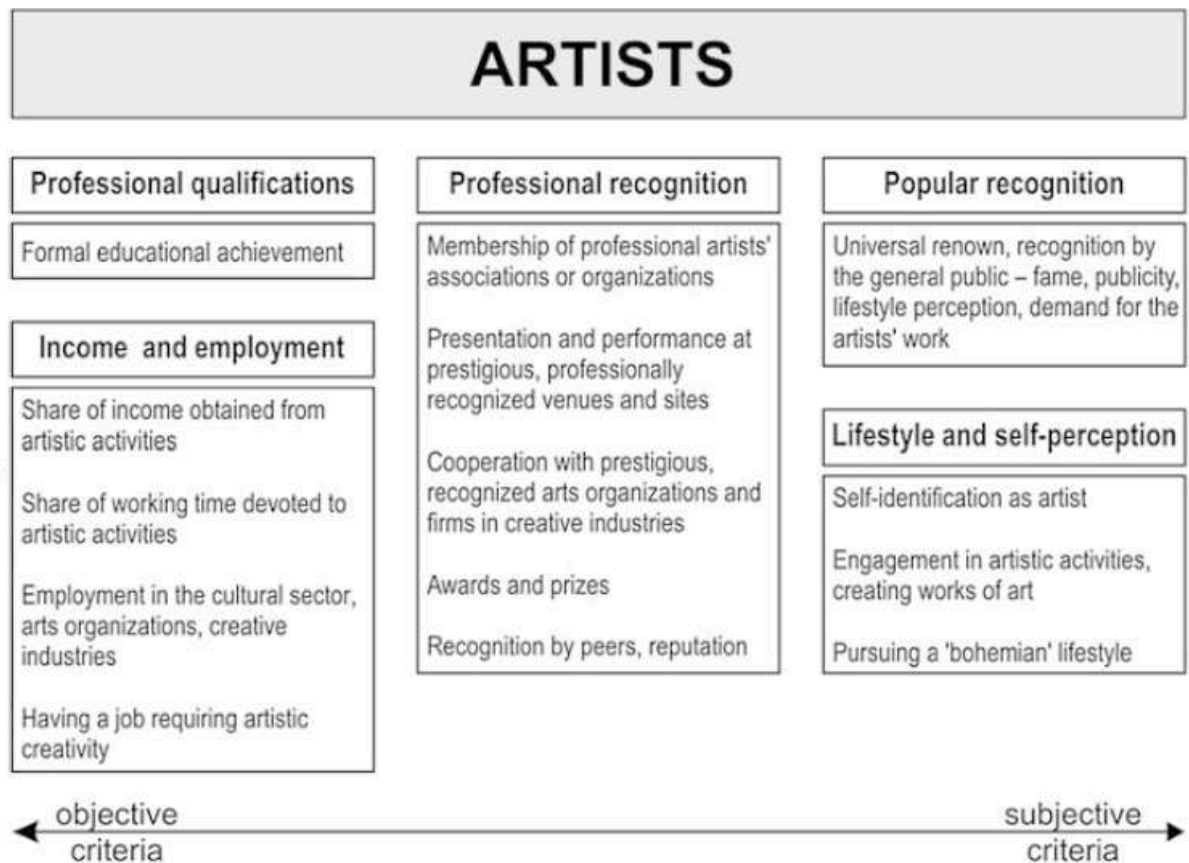
### Artists and the Creative City: Artists mobilise creativity to change the way the city is made

In most of the literature related to Creative Cities, artists are mentioned as part of a wider groups of ‘creatives’. Since I am proposing to look at artistic activities rather than at the creative economy, I first clarify, who I include in the category of artists. Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2017) have provided a detailed literature review and analysis on the definition of artists. They highlight that there are several “conceptual

ambiguities linked to artists”. There are “many possible ways to define an artist as an individual or as a member of a particular, distinct professional and social group, making it a very ambiguous concept.” (Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek, 2017:4)

To understand better how one can define ‘artists’ Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2017) have elaborated a table, represented below in Figure 2, which classifies the approaches:

Figure 2: Approaches to defining artists, source: Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek, 2017: 4



Following the criteria defined in Figure 2, in order to define ‘artists’, I refer to people who respond to both objective criteria (such as the fact of drawing some – or all of – their income from artistic activities) and subjective (self-identification as artists) criteria. In the three case studies I am looking at, the artists are people who qualify to all five categories defined in the table above: popular recognition, lifestyle and self-perception, professional recognition, professional qualifications and income and employment. I am focusing on artists who envisage their work as an action within society, whose aim is to

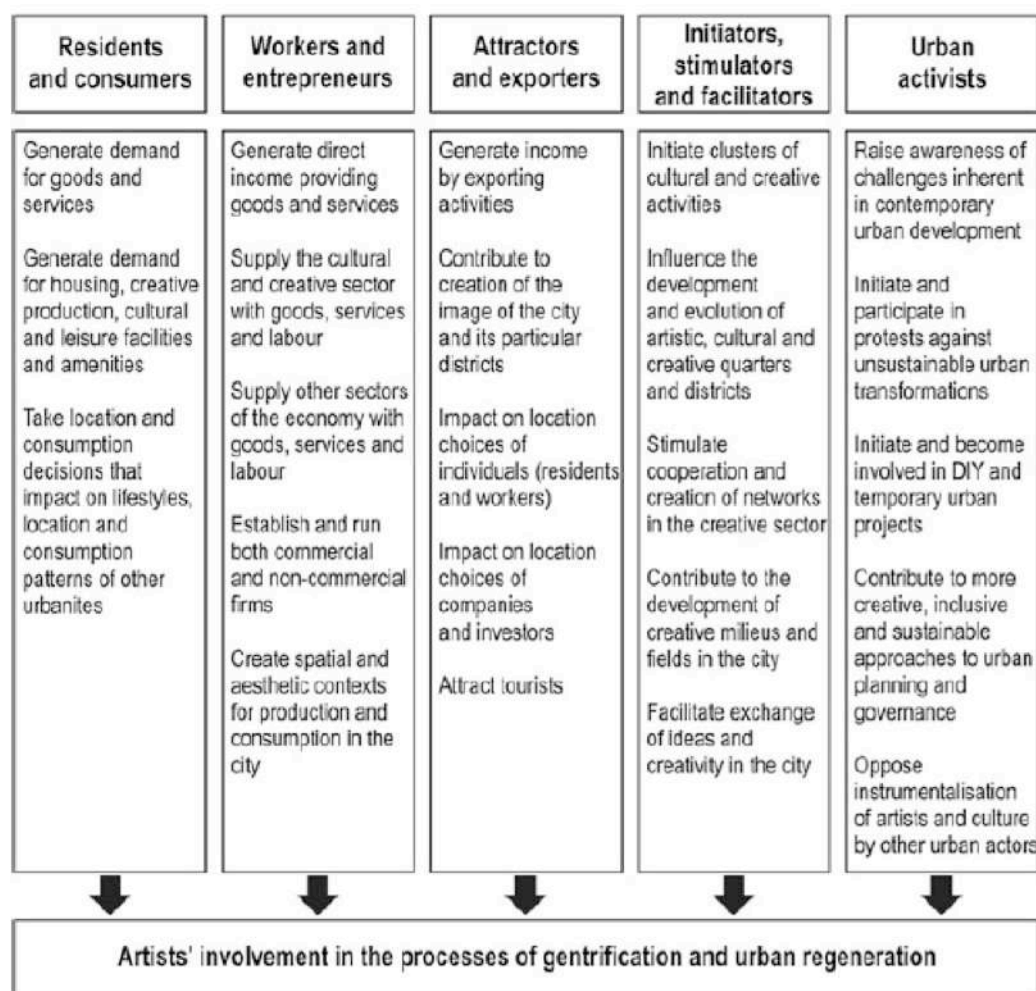


have an impact not only on the individuals who are taking part in the project but also to have an impact on the social fabric and on the place they operate in. Since I am looking at the creative mechanisms that underpin artistic practices, which may be specific to certain arts, I need to define what qualifies as art practice, as opposed to cultural activities or creative industries. The definition I follow for art practice is based on the definition of the project as artistic on the part of the artist.

This perspective also opens up the possibility of looking at the discourse on the Creative City from an artistic point of view. Here I propose to move away from the focus on 'creative industries' and to re-connect the discourse of the Creative City with artists. I am not suggesting a return to an 'elite' understanding of arts against what would be a more 'democratic' use of creativity. But since creativity has been invested by capitalist forces (Mould, 2018) under the imperative to 'Be Creative' (McRobbie, 2016), it seems that one needs to use another entry point to the question of what creativity can bring to cities, and therefore the passage through the arts, as one privileged location of creativity, is useful. I am proposing to look at what is specific in 'artist-led creative processes', which could usefully be included in alternative – 'more-than-capitalist' - Creative City models.

The contemporary expectations with regards to the artists' impact on the urban economy identified in urban planning literature have been summed up by Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2017) as presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Artists' impact on the urban economy, source: Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek, 2017:16



Looking at the typologies of expectations with regards to artists elaborated by M. Murzyn-Kupisz and J. Działek (2017), my analysis is placed more specifically in the last column, which looks at artists as urban activists. My analysis is not looking at the impact of artists on the urban economy, but at the impact of artists on the ‘making of the city’. The term “fabrique urbaine”, which I translate here as ‘making of the city’<sup>11</sup>, is used in French social sciences to define the “process by which the interaction between

<sup>11</sup> The translation of this term is problematic because the terminology used in French encompasses a wider reality than the original term ‘urban fabric’ in English. In fact, it is sometimes said that the French terminology is the result of a mis-translation of the English term. According to H. Noizet (2013) the idea of ‘urban fabric’ corresponds to a ‘weak’ definition, limited to the material configuration of the city. The French terminology implies a broader concept.

urban society and city, in its material reality, spaces and territories, produces a specific ‘urban reality’ in perpetual transformation”. This definition “poses the question of the construction of ‘the urban’ in the long term, with a triple dimension: spatial, social and temporal.” (Noizet, 2013:389). This definition highlights the fact that the social fabric of the city is an element of the full production of the city. It appears that by focussing on the economic development of the city (Florida), or on its governance (Landry) the models of the Creative City have overseen how much the social dimension contributes to making the city. Socially engaged artists do not only create in order to interact with the institutions that currently govern the production of the urban form of the city (public authorities, developers), but also to contribute to the social construction of the city. They aim to act on *how* the city is made by participating in the creation of new forms of social organisation. Forms of interaction between artists and the institutions that currently govern the production of the urban form of the city include, in my understanding, actions of resistance against the current neoliberal Creative City, and cooperation with local authorities and developers to change urban planning. Artists’ interventions in the social dimension of ‘the making of the city’ have so far been misconceived by the discourse which desires to make artists generators of ‘social inclusion’ or other social benefits, such as the reduction of violence, health issues etc. The table produced by Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2017) does not cover the full range of what artists do in the city. In their comprehensive review of urban literature on artists, Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2017) do include a short section on artists’ contribution to quality of life and ‘community cohesion’ but this is not reflected in the typology, probably because the actual impact on the ‘urban economy’ is low. The very title ‘artists’ contribution to quality of life and community cohesion’ (Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek, 2017:25), thereby places the analysis directly in the wordings of the community arts movement, and so the ‘New Labour’ analysis of the ‘social impact of the arts’.

Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek report how artists are thought to help improve the quality of life:

It has been acknowledged that art and artists may significantly contribute to improving quality of life in the city. They do so through provision of cultural services, enhancing the liveability of urban areas or involvement in beautifying, diversifying and enriching the visual urban landscape. (2017:25)

They also highlight how artists may contribute to social cohesion and social inclusion:

Artists may add to community cohesion and social inclusion by working in and associating themselves with particular communities, including groups in danger of social exclusion such as selected ethnic groups, sexual minorities, the disabled, the elderly, the unemployed or young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Perloff 1979). (2017:25)

The analysis rightly points out that such an involvement with the community may be the case for some artists, but not for all:

Many artists may, however, be unprepared or disinclined to serve broader community roles, while their impact on the social cohesion of the neighbourhood might not necessarily be positive, though often unintentionally so. (2017:26)

Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek also highlight that the outcomes expected are not always met: “in many cases artists are unable to foster stronger links with the local community”, and so they rightly insist that “even where instead of the ‘creative city approach’ a more inclusive ‘creative place-making strategy’ is implemented” (2017:27).

As a result, artists’ involvement and authorship may be an issue, as, for an example, an artist can dominate the process, or over-simplify the narratives of a particular place. These are all extremely relevant and justified criticisms. This is also one of the reasons why I propose to look at participatory art projects in the understanding defined above. Art projects which do not have a didactic approach, nor the pretence of creating one specific outcome and in which the artists are not understood as the main producers, but as people who have a specific input in the process of understanding a given context. The artists’ actions I am referring to – which I will describe in more depth in the next section - often operate outside of the business sector, they have only marginal impact on employment of individuals involved or on ‘social inclusion’. They may, however, have an impact on the social dimension of the ‘making of the city’.

The above analysis places a lot of emphasis on the artists and says little about the artworks. Beyond artists’ intentions and actions, I argue that it is the artwork itself, which has the potentiality to change the way cities are made. Authors such as Sharp et al. (2005), McLean (2018) have produced powerful explanations, showing that the expectations of the artists may be totally wrong, or that an artwork which one could have thought as misplaced may take a whole new dimension when reinterpreted. The analysis of ‘the paradox of the spectator’, provided by Jacques Rancière in his book *The*

*Emancipated Spectator* (2009), as detailed in the next section, will constitute the background of our analysis on the potentiality of artworks to have a societal impact. Although the artworks discussed range from performance to visual arts, the reflection is already taking the specificities of theatre into account. The philosophical reflexion on the potentiality of arts to create social change, is, in many ways, grounded in a reflection on theatre. First, theatre was one of the most popular art forms in ancient Greece, and therefore provided the material for reflection to the ancient Greek Philosophers, who have structured Western philosophical traditions and reflections on the arts (Plato and Aristotle). Second, theatre often claims to be the ‘political’ art by excellence (Guenoun, 1997), in that, even before the play starts, the audience of the theatre is a ‘united assembly of people’ who have come willingly to share a common experience. The ‘paradox of the spectator’, as Rancière names it, is at its highest in a theatre room, in which the audience is seated in the dark, while the actors play in front of them on a lit-up ‘stage’.

### According to Rancière the specificity of art is to propose a new ‘distribution of the sensible’

According to Rancière (2009) the specificity of art is that it proposes a new ‘distribution of the sensible’, it reorganises meanings and signs. Interpretation of this redistribution is left to the viewer. This definition poses that all art is potentially political. Art has the potential to change society and therefore, to change the city.

In Western thought, the dominant understandings of the potential role of art in the city are grounded in the philosophical tradition. Belfiore and Bennet (2008) have identified three main strands in the European intellectual tradition that are still at play today.

1. The “negative tradition”, deep rooted in the analysis of mimesis in Plato’s Republic. Plato considers the artist as “an image-maker, a representer, (who) understands only appearance while reality is beyond him” (quoted in Belfiore and Bennet, 2008:141). Plato does not believe that arts can bring access to any superior knowledge or understanding of the world. Artists reproduce only the shadows of

reality<sup>12</sup>. Instead of bringing people closer to Truth, artists take audiences further away from it. From this negative tradition comes the criticisms addressed to arts as a tool of perversion and entertainment which distract the individual from the search for Truth.

2. The positive tradition, as in the Aristotelian notion of dramatic *catharsis*, which describes the mechanism by which the audience is purified by the theatrical performance, for having experienced pity and fear through the events presented on stage. This is the tradition that believes in the transformative power of the arts and has “developed into theories of healing, edifying or educational power of the arts” (Belfiore and Bennet, 2008:141).
3. The ‘autonomy’ tradition, which rejects instrumental logic – also manifest in the tradition of “art for the art’s sake”, in which “the value of the work of art resides primarily in the aesthetic sphere” (Belfiore and Bennet, 2008:141).

Rancière proposes to change the way one looks at arts to overcome these divisions. The key relies in understanding the active role the viewer, the spectator plays. The spectator is not, as classical (Platonic and Aristotelian) interpretations of theatre imply, a passive individual, who needs to be either freed from art (in Plato’s and Rousseau’s interpretations) or changed (in the Aristotelian interpretation). According to Rancière, the idea of the Platonic *mimesis* has created the “paradox of the spectator” in which there can be no art without spectator and at the same time, in which the spectator is always ‘evil’ in her/his passivity and needs to become active and to change. The paradox of the spectator is formulated as such:

There is no theatre without a spectator (...) but being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is being separated both from the capacity to know and the possibility to act. (Rancière, 2009:2)

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<sup>12</sup> This is the Platonic definition of ‘mimesis’, best explained in the allegory of the cave (Book VII of the *Republic*), in which humans are like prisoners who have lived chained within a cave all their lives. They can only see shadows reflected on walls and for them these shadows represent reality. In the theory of mimesis, artists merely reproduce these shadows instead of leading the people ‘outside of the cave’ to discover the Truth.

Rancière explains that, for Plato, this analysis showed “theatre is an absolute bad thing: a scene of illusion and passivity that must be abolished in favour of what it prohibits – knowledge and action” (Rancière, 2009:2). According to Rancière, “this is the most logical conclusion, but not the one that has prevailed in the critics of the theatrical mimesis” (Rancière, 2009:2-3) (one critic of the idea of the mimesis is Aristotle). Rancière says that in the second interpretation, which derives from the Aristotelian interpretation, “whoever says ‘theatre’ says ‘spectator’ – and therein lies the evil”. (2009:6) What is problematic is that the spectator watches the events on stage passively. What is required is action, drama, which can lead to catharsis, reflection and learning. The spectators need to leave their passive position and “learn from as opposed to being seduced by images”. (2009:38)

Aristotle grounded his reflection on the popular Greek practice of theatre. In the classical understanding of (Aristotelian) mimesis,

The stage was thought as a magnifying mirror where spectators could see the virtues and vices of their fellow human beings in fictional form. And that vision in turn was supposed to prompt specific changes in their minds. (Rancière, 2009:60)

Rancière strongly disagrees with the tradition that has deduced from the idea of the dramatic catharsis that art can induce the changes it has intended. Change does not work in predetermined forms because something is given to an audience with a certain intention and that this intention is being respected in the act of reception. He proposes instead to use the logic of emancipation to go beyond this paradox of the spectator, in which the spectator (and by extension the viewer, recipient of a work of art) is thought, from the outset, to be wrong and passive. This is a vision which treats artists as superior to the spectator in the sense that she/he knows what the spectator needs and can teach it to her/him. Rancière argues that the transformative power of the arts relies, not in the intention of the artist, but in its reception by the spectator.

Rancière constructs a new understanding of the relationship between art, politics and aesthetics. For Rancière, there is a total disconnect between the intention of the artist and the reception by the spectator. This disconnect is precisely what defines aesthetics. The actual political potential of art relies in its aesthetics, in this disconnect between intention of the artist and reception by the viewer. According to Rancière, thanks to his grounding in aesthetics, art is able to act on what he calls “the distribution of the

sensible”. In his definition, the “distribution of the sensible” is the organisation of meanings and signs that is at the basis of all social and political structures:

Human being are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together’” (Rancière,2009:80).

He argues consequently that the artists have nothing to teach to the viewer. Because they propose new sets of representations, new organisations of the senses, all artworks are political *per se*.

The political efficiency of arts, meanwhile, relies on their ability to create ‘*dissensus*’. In Rancière’s view, there is no equation between the intention of artists and the effect of artworks, and that’s where the question of ‘what is political in art’ has been (and is still) misunderstood. In fact, for him, the efficacy of the artwork relies exactly in this total disconnect between intention and reception:

The aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations (...) it is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible” (2009:72)

Rancière’s work helps us to conceptualise the relationship between art and politics in the contemporary era. His theory is extremely influential in the art world and specifically for artists that are interested in the relationship between arts and society.

In a way, Rancière’s analysis could lead us to say that since all art has the potential to be political, and since it is in the disconnect between intention and effect that the efficacy of arts reside, that there is little possibility for arts to actually plan the effect they will have in a given context or place. This is the ‘*aporia*’ of political art.

Reflecting on this conclusion, one might be tempted to conclude that given there is no possibility for art to plan its impact, there is therefore no possibility of art being socially engaged and political. Bishop (2012) helps us understand how to overcome this problem by analysing the development of participatory arts. Participatory arts propose to act on the societal realm *not* via the message they carry but by constructing situations, in which collectively built ‘new distributions of the sensible’ are proposed and in which the active role of the recipient is fully recognised.



## Participatory art as the new form of socially engaged art

Participatory art is a new way of doing socially engaged art. In her book *Artificial Hells* (2012), Bishop analyses '*participatory arts and the politics of spectatorship*' from the point of view of art criticism. She highlights that Rancière's analysis, established at the beginning of the 2000's, helped overcome the usual divides that were rendering the making and the analysis of 'social arts' difficult. It helped overcome the opposition between aesthetic quality and social action. Rancière's analysis proposes a resolution to the question of the autonomy of arts, since, in his view, what is autonomous is "our *experience* in relation to art" (Bishop, 2012:27) rather than the work of art in itself.

Bishop highlights that the artworks Rancière chooses to comment on, as examples of the operation of reorganisation of the sensible, all deal with highly politicised or very ethically disturbing situations, such as the work of Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar about the massacres in Rwanda. But for him such art pieces are not akin to militant activism, in that they do not pretend to induce one particular type of effect. On the contrary they propose a new frame through which to look at a situation from a different perspective. They propose to the spectator a different 'organisation of the sensible'. The artist is fully aware that the spectator has their own role to play in the reception of the artwork. Rancière's work informs Bishop's analysis in two ways: "firstly, in his attention to the affective capabilities of art that avoids the pitfalls of a didactical position in favour of rupture and ambiguity" (2012:29), and secondly in the idea that "art is an autonomous realm of experience in which there is no privileged medium" (2012:30). The keywords are 'ambiguity' and 'realm of experience'. Bishop takes from Rancière the reading that aesthetics does not mean beauty but rather a means of reorganising the 'domain of the sensible.' At the same time, she refuses the notion that art cannot be critical or political beyond the mere essence of arts (the disjunction between cause and effect). According to Bishop, because they involve many people actively, participatory arts give birth more than other artforms to a multiplicity of meanings. These is an art form that poses itself as a proposal and does not have pre-conceived didactical content. She proposes that we look at participatory practices not as a *modus operandi* – i.e. a process led with the idea of a specific outcome – but as an art form in its full rights. She proposes to look at the

genealogy of the ongoing “*return to social*” (2012:3) of the arts to understand in what sense participatory arts try to operate differently in the production of meanings, by rethinking the work of art, its production and realisation, and its border with life. As we will see in the examples mentioned below, theatre and in-situ performance have played a key role in this genealogy.

In this work I am using the terminology ‘participatory art’ because it has the benefit, as Bishop says, to insist on the involvement of many people in the making of the artwork. Participative arts are, according to her:

This expanded field of post-studio practices, (which) currently goes under a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, interventionist art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and (more recently) social practice. I will be referring to this tendency as ‘participatory art’ since it connotes the involvement of many people (as opposed to one-to-one relationship of ‘interactivity’) (2012:1).

Bishop highlights the “surge of artistic interest in participation and collaboration that has taken place since the early 1990s. According to her “up until the early 1990s, community based art was confined the periphery of the art world; today it has become a genre in its own right”. (2012:1).

Participatory art can be defined as an art “in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance” of the art work (Bishop, 2012:2). If one goes back to the proposal made by Sharp et al. (2005) to pay attention to the process of making the artwork, looking at participative art is a way of ensuring that there is - at least - the basic level of participation. This justifies my choice to look at participatory art as one art form that differs from others. In participatory arts the artists have a different role than the usual status as ‘main producer’ of an art work. Instead, they produce ‘situations’: “The artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than a collaborator and producer of situations”. The art project is a long-term project rather than an easily identifiable art piece: “the work of art is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant” (Bishop, 2012:2).

I argue that the current boom of participatory art interventions, notably linked to the city, can be understood as an artist-led Creative City. In the course of this work, and thanks to the input of art theory, I unveil how much this ‘return to social’ on the part of art and artists is linked to the question of the role of arts and artists in cities. Participatory arts have been built with the objective of dealing with social justice differently from more classical forms of public art (such as a sculpture displayed in the urban environment for instance). This is art that engages not only with the physical shape of cities but with its social fabric, one that has appeared independently from Creative City policies, but one that could nourish another Creative City model, a ‘more-than-capitalist’ model. This type of art therefore enjoys a relative freedom from the forces of neoliberalism which are so often pointed to when it comes to the role of arts in the city. This also underpins their potential to be spaces of emancipation from those forces. It challenges the logic of the arts market (how can this art be sold? How can it even be rendered to those who have not participated in the experience on the spot? Can it be repeated?).

In *Artificial Hells* (2012) Bishop attempts to give an overview of the development of participatory arts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She demonstrates that the willingness to change the relationship between artists and spectator was part of a larger political envisioning of what society could and should be. The choice of the artform in itself represents a political project (in the sense of creating dissent or debates or negotiations, not in the sense of proposing ready-made activist ideas). From its origins - in the Italian Futurist evenings, the Dada urban strolls or the mass participation political theatre in post-1917 Russia - participatory arts were closely linked to political ideas from across the political spectrum. Marinetti, the futurist, was became adherent of fascism, and several members of Dada were to support communism.

Today, participatory arts blur definitions of what art is and what it is not, of who is an artist and who is not an artist, and of who is a spectator and who is not. These art projects create a disruption and therefore new dynamics between the groups involved in the production and reception of artworks. The art critic Jean March Huitorel (2019) reminds us that - in the domain of visual art - the blurring of what is art and what is not had

already been begun as a result of some technical inventions such as the invention of photography, which created a whole new discipline and some key artistic movements, such as the cubist collages of the 1910's and, of course, Marcel Duchamps's 'ready-made' art ("the viewers make the painting"<sup>13</sup>). The third period of intense blurring of the boundaries of art is to be found in the participatory arts, contextual arts, in-situ and relational arts, which boomed in the 1990s.

#### Early development of participatory arts and the city

At the time in which Henri Lefebvre conceptualised the 'Right to the City' (1968), artists were getting more and more involved with the urban environment and with the construction of the social. A very short and schematic historical overview can help us understand the roots of participatory arts and help us demonstrate that the current form it takes has appeared in the 90's in parallel with the Creative Cities discourses.

In the 1960s, several groups worked to re-define the relationship between artist and spectator and to redefine art, notably in response to the 1950s elitism of conceptual art. This movement in art is closely connected to the 1968 activists' movements, which proposed that – in the political field - participation equals democracy.

The Situationist International (SI), formed in 1957, was mostly a group of intellectuals, who would not necessarily be described as artists, with the philosopher Guy Debord at their core. They provide an example of the interconnection between a new thinking about the role of arts and about the making of the city. The SI challenged the separation between art and life. They aimed at reviving "both modern art and revolutionary politics by surpassing them both – that is, by realising what was the most revolutionary demand of the historic avant-garde, the integration of art and life" (Bishop, 2017: 83). The SI devised methods and tools to explore the urban environment (the 'dérive' or 'urban drifts') aimed at creating a psycho-geographical understanding of the city. Playfulness and games were at the core of the experience. The urban drifts were conceived as a way of re-appropriating one's future and building emancipation, against the experience of the modernist city.

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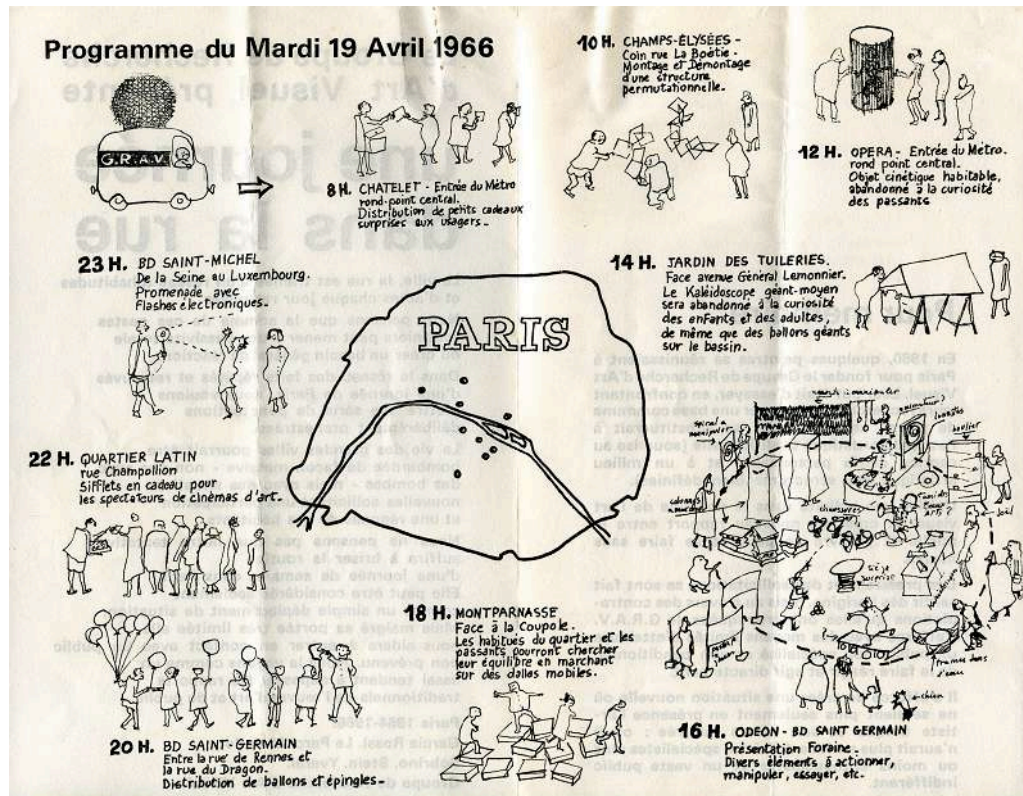
<sup>13</sup> "ce sont les regardeurs qui font les tableaux".

Our cities are (even more) fossilized. We want to live in a land of knowledge, among living signs like every day friends. The revolution will also be the perpetual creation of signs that belong to all.” Vaneigem (1961 [1997]: 233) quoted by Bonard and Capt, 2009:4).

According to Bonard and Capt, the situationists’ goal-less urban drifts are a form of political project, “Their description of the urban space allows the denunciation of a perceived space as sanitized, policed, preventing the emergence of any collective consciousness” (Bonard and Capt, 2009:5). Here we see that the Situationist International conceive the city not as an object like any other but as the locus of a creation of collective consciousness or in opposition to alienation. The Situationists were close to H. Lefebvre for a couple of years, and they shared the idea of the ‘situation’; SI in their words / ‘the moment’ in Lefebvre’s words. Lefebvre does insist on the mutual influence they operated on each other and on the endless nights they spent discussing together. Without over-interpreting these links, one could underline the parallel genesis of contemporary ideas on art and politics, and on the renewal of the forms of engagement with the spectator. ‘The right to the city’ plays an influential role in the practice of social resistance movements and collective creation movements led by artists who engage with the city and urban planners/architects groups who attempt to use artistic methods in their work. This trend was largely revived on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of Lefebvre’s death in 2018. The Situationist International are still largely referred to as an inspiration for the current participatory arts movement, despite, at the time of their practice, acting as a hermetic, closed collective rather than an open movement.

The activities of the Groupe Recherche d’Art Visuel (GRAV), also active in 1960s Paris are closer to what participatory art has since become. For instance, with *A Day in the Streets*, on 19 April 1966, GRAV created a day of public actions around Paris. “Photo-documentation of the project shows a Parisian audience of all ages laughing and smiling as they engage with various objects in public space” (Bishop, 2008:91)

Figure 4: A Day in the Streets, GRAV



Source: <https://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/docannexe/image/8334/img-3.jpg>

Figure 5: A Day in the Streets, GRAV



Source: <https://anniekoh.tumblr.com/post/151027159760/groupe-de-recherche-d-art-visuel-grav-1960-1968>

The Manifesto of GRAV 'Enough Mystification' (1961) clarified their approach to participative arts

To the best of our abilities we want to free the viewer from its apathetic dependence that makes him passively accept, not only what imposes on him as art, but a whole system of life... (GRAV, 1961, quoted in Bishop, 2008:89).

This conception of 'the viewer', that of an otherwise inactive spectator, may seem utterly patriarchal and condescending to the contemporary reader. But the conceptualisation of what participation in an art project means changes with time. The '70s came with new proposals with regards to participation in arts, which ultimately gave birth to the 'community arts movement' in the '80s. The practice of building collaboratively was seen as an effective way of opposing capitalism and oppression, as a means of building consciousness of oppression and empowerment. The participatory artwork is a space of empowerment space in which social hierarchies are supposed to be rendered obsolete. The form itself is thought to be revolutionary.

Theatre plays a key role in the development of participatory arts

In the theatre world, this period sees the birth of the 'invisible theatre' of Brazilian Director Augusto Boal (1931-2009), which takes public places as a stage for the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (also known as TO). His inspiration was the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1968) by Paulo Freire, and he places himself clearly as a Marxist. It should be remembered that the two theatre forms discussed below were created in the context of two very strong dictatorships in Argentina and Brazil, and that Boal was in Argentina, in exile from Brazil. Boal wanted to generate a transition from the spectator to the "spect-actor". His approach can still appear very didactic, and maybe even paternalistic, as we will see with the example of the invisible theatre. It is one of the manifestations of the idea that Rancière condemns, that 'being a spectator' is considered as bad in itself on the assumption that it is intrinsically passive. However, Boal brings something new in the fact that the play is made by the people who take part in it, willingly or unwillingly, and that the work of art does not exist outside of the unplanned participation and unexpected endings that the 'spect-actors' give to it. This was a new way of thinking of an art work – specifically a theatre play – with an ending that is not pre-determined. It is also clearly linked to the city, in that the city becomes the stage.

Bishop highlights that this type of action is “a precedent for much contemporary art that seeks to go unannounced in public space”. (Bishop, 2012:124)

Invisible theatre was “developed in Buenos Aires as an unframed mode of public and participatory action designed to avoid detection by police authorities” (Bishop, 2012:122). Bishop recounts one of the examples described by Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974 in the Spanish version). The play was “set in a busy restaurant, at lunch time” being guaranteed to have always a “full house”. It was less a play than a “loosely constructed situation”. It is a play in which some actors are seated in a restaurant, among the people eating there, and they utter some pre-agreed lines. In this example, at the end of the meal, one actor proposes loudly they they will pay their meal by working, other actors respond by calculating how many hours this first figure would need to work in different occupations (rubbish collector, gardener) to pay for the meal. The restaurant therefore becomes a ‘public forum’ as the customers discuss the situation among themselves and intervene in the discussion. “Eventually, one of the actors starts collecting money to pay the bill – which offends some people, and causes more disturbance” (Bishop, 2012:123). The actors do not reveal that they are actors. The waiter and the restaurant owner are accomplices: they are not professional actors but they repeat lines that have been written for them in advance. With this type of play “Boal takes theatre to an audience, and stages with them a discussion”, in this case, “about specific issues of labour” (Bishop, 2012:123). “His invisible theatre aimed at training the public to be more conscious of class difference and to provide them with a forum to articulate dissent” (Bishop, 2012:124). This approach may appear very didactic today: i.e. bringing a discussion to an audience, staged in a specific way, in order to create a specific reflection in the mind of the public. Nevertheless, this example is relevant for us for several reasons: 1) It takes the theatre to the people, rather than inviting the people to the theatre. It takes the city, the public place as the stage 2) it proposes a new role for the spectator – a spectator who had not even planned to be one, such as many participative unplanned actions in public space do today 3) it informs us about a new conception of the relationship with the spectator. Boal’s idea is to take art as a form that enables us to think differently about social hierarchies and about a current context.



The experience of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is perhaps even more relevant to our understanding in that it was proposed as a “practical training in social antagonism” (Bishop, 2012:122), i.e. as a “rehearsal of revolution” (Boal, 1985:155). By involving people in the making of the play, Boal saw the potential for their empowerment as actors of social change. He proposed TO as practical theatre experiments aiming at working for the emancipation of the oppressed. Boal’s theory was that, by being given a chance to step into a theatre play, by being left the freedom to suggest different reactions to the actors – and even by replacing them on stage, the oppressed could form the collective consciousness of their oppression and would feel empowered to fight against it. TO combines pedagogical, therapeutic (Boal’s wife, Cecilia is a psychoanalyst who used to work closely with him) and political objectives. TO performances usually start with the representation of a short play that exposes one form of oppression and the audience is asked to discuss the situation and to step it to attempt to change its ending. TO methodologies were open and evolved with each workshop led by Boal. The methodology has been highly influential. It is used up to this day in a large variety of contexts, and all around the world. Popular topics include racism, the stigma attached to people with aids (in Sudan notably, it has been taken up as an official programme (Interview with Cecilia Boal, 2019), and gender violence. It is interesting to note that despite being launched as an emancipatory theatre, TO is, as philosopher and political activist Julian Boal (the son of A. Boal) mentions, used today by the “forces of neoliberalism”, notably by Human Resources departments “for the recruitment and domestication of workers” (Boal, 2019:31), in clear opposition to the intentions of A. Boal. According to J. Boal, however, the fact that the intentions of A. Boal are regularly subverted and have been over-ridden is a matter of the changing context and of the recuperation within the ‘New Spirit of Capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) of what TO had hypothesized as the conditions for emancipation. According to him, it “reveals unwanted affinities between this method of critical theatre and the present state of our subjugation” (2019). What Julian Boal argues is that the emancipatory hypothesis that A. Boal realised in his theatre forms have in fact been realised within neoliberalism.

Today those hypotheses are mostly realized but in a perverse manner. What I have called emancipatory hypotheses were: the abolition of the social division of labour, the critique of the

autonomy of art, confidence in the capacity of self-emancipation of the oppressed, and a strategic bet on individual heroism (2019).

J. Boal argues that the call to heroism has been perversely realised in that of the auto-entrepreneur. The analysis of the development of the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology gives one clear example of how the intentions of an artist can easily be distorted and transgressed. The political ideal promoted by the author can easily be perverted. The participative form is not - in itself – emancipatory or more efficient in unsettling the existing forms of stratification in society (which create specific forms of injustice and inequalities). It is not because it is participatory that an art work is more efficient politically.

#### Engaging with non-artists and redefining what art is

Born at the end of the 1970s, ‘community art’ is somehow the child of 1968 and the early 1970s movements, in that it contested the hierarchies in place and the fact that artists were magically gifted creativity, as opposed to non-artists. It was also the signal of a renewed artistic engagement with politics, one in which – in some cases – meant artists directing their action to the social realm. Alongside public art installations (Sharp et al. 2005, Hall and Robertson, 2001), community arts is one of the most commented-on of all forms of artist action in the city (Evans, 2005, Shaw, 2003).

In the UK, the community art movement tries to find ways to reconcile artistic participation and production by amateurs with more professional movements and is often referred to as ‘participatory art’. According to the UK Arts Council Committee, community arts are those that have as a “primary concern (...) their impact on a community.” (Bishop, 2012:177). Community art shows attention to the marginalised. It is a new form of engagement with the social fabric. It has the intention of changing it: “the ideological motivations of community arts revolved around precisely this attention to the marginalised, whom they sought to empower through participatory creative practice, and through opposition to elitist cultural hierarchies”. (Bishop, 2012:177). Community arts was developed in opposition to existing hierarchies:

It was positioned against the hierarchies of the international art world and its criteria of success founded upon quality, skill, virtuosity, etc... since these conceal class interests; it advocated participation and co-authorship of works of arts; it aimed to give shape to the creativity of all sectors of society, but especially to people living in areas of social, cultural and financial deprivation; for some it was also a powerful medium for social and political change, providing the blueprint for a participatory democracy. (Bishop, 2012:177).

The main characteristic of community arts has been that it rethinks creativity as an operation that does not belong to a few but to the many. It has also been accompanied by a greater recognition of ‘popular’ culture, since it happily mixes ‘high brow’ and ‘low brow’ cultures.

In France, the development of community arts goes hand in hand with the recognition of the role of arts as a powerful means to improve individual lives, notably in deprived neighbourhoods. In the ‘80s the Ministry of Culture started to finance socially engaged artistic action with amateurs, which was labelled ‘socio-cultural animation’. Taking stock of the 1970s claims for more participation and more social justice, cultural policy moved on from its main objective of financing structures that allowed access to many to the ‘best works of humanity’ (Malraux, 1959) to also financing what in the UK was called community art. In those years the budget of the Ministry of culture considerably increased. The French cultural policy turn in the 80s has also shown a changed attitude towards new art forms and towards the recognition of amateur creativity. Both ‘high arts’ (museums, houses of culture, dance, theatre) and ‘socio-cultural animation’ were financed simultaneously. This change of policy precipitated a change of attitude towards new art forms, which would previously have been labelled as ‘low brow’ or ‘popular’, such as, for instance, the hip hop movement. However, while supporting the emergence and development of these new art forms, the distinction between the art produced by artists and those by amateurs was maintained. The socio-cultural animation was often delegated to NGOs and to social actors, who use artistic formats as a form of social healing, notably in the French area-based city policies (‘Politique de la Ville’); policies targeted to improving life in the most impoverished districts.

In the UK, the elaboration of the Creative Cities discourse has close links with the experience that the arts sector went through, and the necessity of finding new ways of

justifying its existence and funding. Indeed, for community arts, the “more common tale is one of gradually eroded funding under Margaret Thatcher’s conservative government (1979-92) leading to the new total disempowerment of the movement by the mid 1980s”. (Bishop, 2012:187). At the beginning of the 1990s, the government changed position with regards to its willingness to support community arts and withdrew funding. Those believing in the power of culture and arts mobilised and provided a framework to measure the social impact of the arts. It is interesting to note that one of the two main resources Bishop uses on community art (she says resources are rare) is written by Charles Landry. It is entitled “*What a way to run a railroad*” (1985) and is a critique that aims at explaining the high rate of failure of radical projects.

Charles Landry was also involved in early 1990s efforts to quantify the social impact of the arts, through his consultancy, Comedia, which produced the seminal report - *Use or ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*, by Matarasso (1997) - aimed at assessing the social impact of the arts in the UK. This report was heavily criticised, notably by Paola Merli (2002), for its political objective of “using participatory arts as a form of governance, under the heading of promoting social cohesion” (Paola Merli, 2002:108), and for its methodologies. It is intimately linked to the objective of New Labour to provide evidence of results for policies. Matarasso’s report poses that the “new objective should be “to start talking about what the arts can do for society, rather than what society can do for the arts” (Matarasso, 1997, p. iv, quoted in Merli, 2002:108).”

I argue that the “original sin” of the Creative City concept originated from a misrepresentation of the role of arts in society, from “the author’s strong desire to be relevant and useful to the policy process and to contribute to decision-making” (Paola Merli, 2002:107), of the time and by concomitantly accepting the neoliberal underpinning of the political analysis of the New Labour.

At the time of its formulation, the Creative City concept was – at least partially - built on the willingness to promote inclusive cities rather than to support the elaboration of neoliberal policies, as this quotation from F. Bianchini, a close collaborator of Charles Landry and co-writer of the first version of *Creative Cities* (1995) shows:

The interculturalism approach goes beyond opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences, to the pluralist transformation of public space, civic culture and institutions... city governments should promote cross-fertilisation across all cultural boundaries, between ‘majority’ and ‘minorities’, ‘dominant’ and ‘sub’ cultures, localities, classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, as the source of cultural, social, political and economic innovation” (Bianchini, 2002:6).

The solutions Charles Landry proposes in the later version of books related to the Creative Cities concepts – like the proposal to foster Creative City making – still fail to identify the specific input arts can bring to the process and, on the contrary, propose to expand the use of the concept of creativity to all areas of governance. The theories of the Creative City take stock of the relative difficulty (and the withdrawal of funding) the arts sector was experiencing at the end of the 80s and try to propose an alternative way of conceiving the input of arts and culture in the making of society. From the moment of its birth, the Creative City model implied an instrumentalisation of arts to other means. Meanwhile the artists, or at least some of them, proposed other ways, by pushing the boundaries between art and life in other directions.

#### Relational and participatory arts – a new way of being political for artists

And so we must return to Rancière and Bishop, to look at contemporary participatory arts. Current participatory arts are not about changing the participant or teaching her/him something. They are about collectively building meanings, or more specifically multiplicities of meanings. They are about building complexity and dissensus, rather than preaching to the converted with a clear, univocal message.

Participatory arts today are no longer based on the idea that being a spectator is bad, but rather on the idea that the collective input in the production of an artwork, which nevertheless remains authored, is more powerful in creating new meanings and understandings of a situation or context. Participatory arts are not about social inclusion. Indeed, the idea that “social participation is particularly suited to the task of social inclusion risks not only assuming that participants are already in a position of impotence, it even reinforces this arrangement” (Bishop, 2012:38). Participatory art has made numerous attempts to move away from the position of the teacher and the student.

Nicolas Bourriaud is an influential art critic and curator. In 2001, he published *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), in which he theorised and described a new form of art – so-called ‘Relational art’, “an art that takes as theoretical horizon, the sphere of human interactions and its social context, more than the affirmation of an autonomous symbolic space, that would also be private” (Bourriaud, 1998:14). Bourriaud situates the birth of ‘relational arts’ as a result of “general urbanization”, or the birth of a global urban culture and the increase of social exchanges after WWII, and to the extension of the “urban life model to the quasi-totality of cultural phenomena” (Bourriaud, 1998:15). According to Bourriaud, the limited space available for both production and exhibition of arts in cities is the birth factor of

a form of art whose inter-subjectivity forms the substrate, and which takes as its central theme ‘being together’, the meeting between the viewer and the painting, the collective elaboration of meaning, which takes the shape of a length to be experience, as an opening to an unlimited discussion” (Bourriaud, 1998:15)

He argues that this form of art, finding its roots in the 70s, and booming in the 90s, aims at the “production of new forms of relations among people”. (Bourriaud, 1998:15).

Bishop conceives participatory arts differently, as one form of art that pushed the blurring of borders between art and social action to the maximum. Two of the most famous artists of the new wave of political artists, who use collaborative works in the domain of visual arts are Thomas Hirschhorn and Tania Bruguera.

One example of Thomas Hirschhorn’s work is the Musée Précaire Albinet (2002-2004), which took place in the municipality of Aubervilliers, one of the municipalities within Plaine Commune, the setting of my case studies.

The project planned the construction of a “precarious museum” at the foot of a block of buildings in a deprived of Aubervilliers. The goal of the Musée Précaire Albinet was to exhibit some of the major works of 20th century art history, with the support of the Pompidou Centre and the Fond National d’Art Contemporain, and involving actively people from the neighborhood in the different phases of the project [...] The Musée Précaire Albinet took place for twelve weeks. The construction was achieved with the help of neighbourhood inhabitants; it included an exhibit space, a library, a workshop and a refreshment area, in a green space occupied for the occasion. In all, twenty original and ten limited editions were exhibited, during the eight simultaneous exhibits dedicated to Kasimir Malevitch, Salvador Dali, Le Corbusier, Piet Mondrian, Fernand

Léger, Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol. This project gathered more than forty inhabitants from the neighbourhood, paid for their participation in the construction and operation of the Museum, and also developed a considerable training program addressed to about fifteen people, between 18 and 25 years old, who were particularly involved and had responsibilities in the whole process of the Musée Precaire.” (Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers website, translation by author)<sup>14</sup>

The artwork here is the concept of the Musée Précaire, including all the activities that were happening within it, the social relationships it built and the training it provided. Participation is not a side effect but the core of the project. The preparation of the project lasted two years and involved several meetings with residents. The project went far beyond the presentation and access to the artwork to encompass a training programme for young people as well as various moments of sociability around food and debates. The catalogue of the exhibition includes all the letters with partners, the minutes of meetings with residents, proving that all of these were full parts of the artistic project. The artist does not become invisible, the artwork is authored, but the borders of the artwork are extended. The intentions of the artist are not to produce social justice or inclusion, but to produce an artwork that has the potential to stimulate several processes that transgress usual forms of action, even in the artworld. Getting a museum to lend artworks to be displayed in a precarious setting in the streets of one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the area would not have been an easy task.

This is how Hirschhorn presents the project in the catalogue of the museum:

The precarious museum Albinet wants to be a breakthrough, wants to be a concrete manifesto on the role of art in public life. It carries in it the violence of transgression; I am not a historian, I am not a scientist and I am not a researcher, I am a warrior. [...] The Precarious Museum is a project that does not want to improve, that does not want to appease, that does not want to bring calm. (Hirschhorn, 2004)

Another leading artist in the new type of social and participatory art is Tania Bruguera (Guardian, 2019), feminist Cuban artist. Bruguera uses her position as a recognized international artist to challenge the Cuban regime as well as to question the structure of society in liberal regimes, for instance the invisibility and lack of rights of irregular

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/projet/thomas-hirschhorn>, [Accessed: 28 September 2019].

migrants. Bruguera's work uses the notion of 'Arte Útil' (Useful art). This is how she defines it:

Useful Art is not something new. It may have not [sic] be called that, it may not have had been mainstream in the art world, but it is a practice that somehow has become a natural path for artists dealing with political art and social issues [...] All art is useful, yes, but the usefulness we are talking about is the immersion of art directly into society with all our resources" (Tania Bruguera)<sup>15</sup>.

Her key project, when she conceived Useful Art, was *Immigrant Movement International*, a project she built with the support of the Queens Museum of Art. It takes the shape of an 'artist-initiated socio-political movement'. In the first year of its existence it functioned as a community centre in the district in Corona, Queens, in which people could attend language and arts classes, and could organise and attend cultural events. The project directly dealt with issues facing undocumented migrants. Her – stated – dream was to turn the project into a real political party of migrants.

In the case of Bruguera's project it is even more difficult than in Hirschhorn's to define what the artist actually does that is different from social work. However, she does provide some answers:

Artists doing social art are not shamans, magicians, healers, saints or mommies. They are nearer to teachers, negotiators, behavior builders and social structures. Arte Útil functions directly with/in reality. Arte Útil has a different society in mind. (Tania Bruguera)<sup>16</sup>

The current tendencies within participatory art build on Rancière's analysis. They do not intend to deliver a message or to produce a pre-determined impact. On the contrary, they propose a setting within which a collective new distribution of meanings is built. This is not the creation of consensus. It does not open the roads to easy interpretation. However, within the time of its construction, it allows a multiplicity of interpretations and receptions. Artists in this current use the art project as a practice, as a way to test how this new distribution of meanings could work. They attempt to stretch our usual understanding of who is who, and of the role each person has. Through this they build

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/528-0-Introduction+on+Useful+Art.htm> [Accessed: 28 September 2019].

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/592-0-Reflexions+on+Arte+til+Useful+Art.htm> [Accessed: 28 September 2019].



complexity and dissensus. These two art projects acted within the framework defined by Rancière, not of an art that is political by its content or the exact message it delivers, but by the gaps and irregularities it creates in the usual organisation of society.

Within participatory art, a collective elaboration of the work takes place, one that attempts to challenge the hierarchies and social norms usually in place. This type of art also requires a positioning from the artist that differs from the convention of imposing a strong hierarchical differentiation between themselves and the other, but which is starts from the idea of a collaboration between people who have different skills but are willing to learn from each other. How does this relate to the Creative City? Once again, if one understands the ‘making of the city’ as commensurate with the French term ‘fabrique de la ville’, one can re-integrate the social dimension within a new concept of the Creative City. Art should not be considered for its immediate and easily quantifiable impact but for the potential it has to reorganise meanings.

### New Creative Cities models should integrate artists’ engagement with ‘making of the city’

The potential of participatory arts to contribute to (more) socially just cities relies on their capacity to propose the emergence of ‘organisations of the domains of the sensible’, which, according to Rancière, is inherently political. The cities it can help create are cities in which different narratives, voices and representations can be heard, and in which alternative hierarchies can be experienced.

Rancière’s analysis helps us re-frame our understanding of what can be expected of arts in the city. I have documented how artists since the 1960s have continuously viewed the social dimension of the ‘making of the city’ as a framework through which they have been able to challenge hierarchies, representation and understanding, from the Situationist International to Tania Bruguera. Participatory arts are the contemporary artistic form of socially engaged art, which engages with the city, with the objective of changing it.

There are artistic projects that are inscribed in the fabric of the city, without directly interacting with urban policies or without proposing to actually create community cohesion. They are involved with the ‘making of the city’ in less direct ways, by, for example, involving residents in the production of works of art which take the social fabric as its primary material and outcome. One can conclude, as Rancière highlights, that it would be a mistake to believe that arts produce what is expected by the artist. What art can produce is the emergence of a multiplicity of representations, and to create dissensus. This is quite the opposite of creating community cohesion. Given such conditions, is art able to help to create (more) socially just cities? And if so how? I have demonstrated that the way arts can work towards building (more) social justice in the city is by proposing aesthetic ways of dealing with the questions of equity, democracy and diversity. It cannot propose easy fixes or easily quantifiable social impacts, except, perhaps, as a side effect.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In this Chapter, I present my hypothesis and the attached research question, and explain the methodologies I have used to approach them.

To verify the hypothesis and answer the research questions derived from the theoretical framework, I have chosen to use case studies (Yin, 2003). The focus on three case studies, that are both comparable (same location, shared characteristics – theatre, participatory, with the objective of having an impact on the city fabric) and different (different theatre troupes, different stakeholders and funders, different relations to institutions) is explained in the following sub-chapter. In each case, the object of the case studies is the artwork in itself, the process of its production, its content, its stakeholders, its outcomes, and the expectations that are expressed with regards to the artwork. Consecutive sub-sections present the sources and the research methods used, which mix input from several disciplines, from sociology (urban sociology and the sociology of culture), ethnography and political science. I have mixed observation and semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, workshops and direct participation in order to evaluate the projects.

### Hypothesis and research questions

Here I present my research hypothesis, already partially exposed in Chapter 1, and complemented with the consideration of the arts literature discussed in Chapter 2:

1. ‘More-than-capitalist’ Creative Cities visions may already exist (Leslie and Cantugal, 2012), and they may be influenced by the political orientation of the carrier of the visions (Garcia, 2013). These visions may differ between stakeholders. These visions may take into account issues of inequalities (Jakob, 2011) and redistribution (Pratt, 2011). One needs to construct a situated and contextualised (Pratt, 2011; Prince, 2010) understanding of the way Creative City visions of different stakeholders play out in a given location.

To this hypothesis, corresponds a series of research questions aimed at investigating the reality of alternative visions of the Creative City. Do such alternative visions exist? How are they influenced by political orientations? Who are they expressed by? How do they differ between stakeholders? Do they take into considerations the three dimensions of the just City defined by Fainstein (2010): those of equality, democracy, diversity?

2. Artists may play an active role in building an alternative vision and implementation of the Creative City, Sharp et al. (2005).

A series of research questions investigates the implementation of the visions through analysis of artworks: How are these visions implemented? What are the outcomes? What is the interplay between these different visions? What are the power relationships at play?

3. Participatory arts bring in the possibility of collaboratively engaging residents and stakeholders to activate the specific power of the arts, which relies on a 'new organisation of the sensible' and the creation of 'plurivocality' and dissent (Rancière, Bishop).

Corresponding questions are: Has the making of the artwork been participatory? What form did the participation take? How may the artwork be read by the audience? Did participation make the artwork univocal or plurivocal? Did it create consensus or dissent?

### Why use case studies?

The research questions I have drawn from the literature are targeted at understanding what impact participatory art-works may have in the city, on the city fabric and on the participants. They are quite open-ended questions: 'what happens?' and 'How do the stakeholders' expectations and respective positions play a role in the process?'. As Yin (2003) highlights "the case study method is pertinent when your research addresses either a descriptive question (what happened?) or an explanatory question (how or why

did something happen?)” (Yin, 2003:5). Looking at the specific creation processes of certain participatory artworks appeared the most relevant method. Beyond theories of the Creative Cities and big infrastructural flagship project impacts, looking on the ground, at the different visions and implementations of the Creative City, with a specific attention to the visions, expectations and work of artists, would allow me to have a fine-tuned view of how different stakeholders envisage the role of creativity in the city (Edensor et al., 2010), notably with regards to the social fabric of the city.

The first hypothesis is that ‘more-than-capitalist’ visions of the Creative City may already be at play. Such examples are largely missing in the literature (Borén and Young, 2013, Markusen, 2010) just as there is a gap regarding the role of smaller sized cities as opposed to major urban centres (Markusen, 2010). I have therefore had to look at places, which may convincingly have tried to develop alternative visions of the Creative Cities. A communist-managed municipality from the Paris Red Belt seemed to offer the relevant characteristics. As I discuss in Chapter 4: Spaces and Creative Processes in the City: the Case of Saint-Denis, Plaine Commune appeared to be one of the areas in France that was the most likely to be trying to develop an alternative vision of Creative City policy for political orientation. I could find relevant previous works and analysis on the specific links between culture and arts and the Communist Party in the Red Belt (Clech, 2015, Fayet, 2011), which confirmed the ‘instrumental’ role culture and arts had been playing in the left wing, anti-capitalist communist politics of these municipalities. Additionally, while screening the different possible cases I could look at in the Red Belt, I discovered that Saint-Denis, as part of Plaine Commune, had developed a whole policy strategy to this aim, and was actively promoting itself as a ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ in the Greater Paris Metropolis. The area in which my case study analysis was to take place was therefore settled.

I still needed to further define my case study. In line with the proposals made by Rancière (2009) and even more so by Bishop (2012), I wanted to focus on participatory arts, as one of the contemporary forms of socially engaged art, which may have had the advantage of a de-multiplied ‘emancipatory’ effect through the active engagement of the audience, and the blurring of roles between actors and audience. The field itself is

wide and the two artworks I was the most knowledgeable about were in the domain of visual contemporary arts (Thomas Hirschhorn and Tania Bruguera). Nonetheless, the specific link between ‘cultural democratisation’ and theatre in France, and the analysis provided by Bishop, which revealed the specific input of theatre and performance in the genesis of participative arts, pushed me to look into theatre as an art field which could provide several cases in the area of participatory socially-oriented artistic projects.

Indeed, in France, after WWII, theatres were the main artistic medium used for the purpose of democratising access to culture. The theatres around Paris have a strong history of links with the communist municipalities of the Red Belt, and they had integrated the objective of being one of the loci of the building of democracy and citizenry in their official discourses. After the war, decentralisation of theatre was encouraged under the impulse of Jeanne Laurent, Secretariat of State for Arts and Letters and Jean Vilar, the founder of the 1950s Théâtre National Populaire, and the Avignon Festival. It is in the 60s that several theatres opened in Paris’s surroundings, such as theatre des Amandiers in Nanterre and theatre de la Commune in Aubervilliers. In most cases these were born from a strong link between a communist Mayor and an artist. (Urfalino, 1996; Miguette, Labrunie, 2016). Theatres have since been integrated into state policy and have become National Scenes (i.e. they are financially supported by the Ministry of Culture). At the same time, national theatres are one of the cultural institutions that is most pointed to as one of the ‘failures’ in terms of reaching out to new audiences, which is the focus of most of the assessments on the success of cultural policies in France. (Donnat, 2008, Denisot, 2008, Langeard, 2015).

While meeting people on the question of Plaine Commune Territory of Culture and Creation, and analysing the projects in the area that I could get in touch with, I identified three case studies that answered to the series of criteria set: 1) theatre 2) participatory 3) with a social dimension.

The three case studies are:

1. ‘The Football pitch, the Player and the Consultant’ is an urban planning consultation participatory art project, commissioned by the local authority and co-managed by a theatre collective and an innovative urban planning consultancy. The aim was to

enable stakeholders' voices to be heard in a different way, using the resources of sports and theatre, in the framework of the development of a new urban project in the Pleyel neighbourhood, close to the future Olympic Village.

2. 'Montjoie! Saint-Denis!' is an *in situ* theatre project, commissioned by an independent art institution and led by a theatre Troup called Hoc Memento which was set-up by two researcher-artists. The aim was to produce an 'in-situ' theatre play. It took place in an independently led 'third space' located on a brownfield site in the Southern part of Saint-Denis.
  
3. 'The Ephemeral Troup' is a theatre play produced with 25 young people, founded and led by Jean Bellorini, a director who is well-recognised in the world of public theatre. The aim was to produce a high-quality play, shown on a national theatre stage, within the main programme of the theatre featuring young people from the area. It aimed at bringing new people to practice and frequent the theatre and also to provide young people with an experience of theatre and of 'freedom'. It took place in Théâtre Gérard Philippe, one of the main cultural institutions of the municipality.

Below, Table 1 : The Three Case Studies' , provides a summary of the characteristics which contributed to the selection of these artworks.

*Table 1 : The Three Case Studies' Characteristics, Source: own elaboration*

|   | Artists involvement         | Relationship with Institutions // Top down bottom up | Type of participation   | Social aims?                               | Reference to the Creative City discourse?                     |
|---|-----------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| 'The Football Pitch' by Cuesta and GONGLE | Artists leading the project | Commissioned by Plaine Commune                       | Participation open to all to the teams and audience, sports/theatre competition (ab. 100 players) | Yes – involvement of new public sought for | Yes, part of the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy |

|  |  |   |   |   |  |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| ‘Monjoie! Saint-Denis!’ by Hoc Memento       | Project conceptualised and implemented by artists in residence in a ‘third space’ type of artistic space     | Independent, minimal support from research institutions (neighbourhood house)           | Volunteer actors, free shows, form of theatre that involves different relationship to the public (20 actors)        | Not specifically  | Late contacts with the strategy ‘Textual reference to Olympic Games’   |
| ‘Ephemeral Troup’ by Theatre Gérard Philippe | Main curator of theatre conceptualised the project and leads it. Also pedagogical coordinator of the theatre | Theatre funded by the state and the city.<br><br>Project financed by private foundation | Non professional youngsters – mostly from the area – participate to the creation of a professional show (25 actors) | Yes – idea is to bring young people from the area to mix up with others and get acquainted with theatre | Not directly. The place is one of the elements of institutional culture creation in the area mentioned in the strategy |

### Identification of the case-studies

I had identified the TGP and ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, on which there is some information online, as a potential case study. My first contacts with the TGP were on another educational project, which I followed as a side project; one that was planning to build a new ‘signposts system’ to lead to the theatre in the city, involving young people in its making and in an educational programme. I managed to get in contact with the project officer responsible for ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ via this channel. The project ‘The Football Pitch’ was recommended to me by another stakeholder, a cultural organisation active in the field of urban planning. Hoc Memento – ‘Montjoie! Saint Denis!’ contacted me when I was organising a seminar on the topic of ‘Co-creation in Saint-Denis’. They introduced their project and I found that it fitted with the characteristics I was looking for as a case study. More details on the methodology used for each case study is provided in sub-sections of



Chapter 5: Case studies of three participatory [theatre](#).

At the beginning of the research, I had no personal connections to any of the artists. In the course of following the projects, I have, of course, come to form relationships with some people, and have been impressed by their work, by the energy and the kindness they put into their relationship with participants. I came to wonder whether I was able to remain objective with regards to specific people I came to admire and like. However, since I was looking at their expectations and the outcomes that resulted from the process, the personal relationship to the interviewees, which never went beyond some form of recognised appreciation, did not seem to impact on my work.

### [Data collection on case studies](#)

My methodology included desk research, consultation of the literature and white papers as well as workshops, interviews, observation and participation in evaluation seminars or research seminars in two of the case studies. Below I describe how I used each method.

### [Official local authority strategies, reports and public events](#)

One of the key documents referred to in this work is the strategy ‘Plaine Commune, Territory of Culture and Creation’. This contract between the state and Plaine Commune, the Territorial Development Contract, gives the official framework of the strategy and presents a history of the emergence of the strategy. This document is available online<sup>17</sup>. I refer to it extensively and have provided translations of extracts of the document in this PhD when relevant. Throughout I refer to this background document as ‘Plaine Commune Territory of Culture and Creation Strategy’.

Some of the interviewees, notably Damaly Chum and Marie Bongapenka, provided me with publications and reports linked to the work of Plaine Commune on the strategy,

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<sup>17</sup> [https://plainecommune.fr/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Portail\\_Plaine\\_Commune/LA\\_DOC/PROJET\\_DE\\_TERRITOIRE/Projet\\_metropolitain/CDT\\_2014.pdf](https://plainecommune.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/Portail_Plaine_Commune/LA_DOC/PROJET_DE_TERRITOIRE/Projet_metropolitain/CDT_2014.pdf) [Accessed: 20 September 2019].

such as the reports on previous meetings ‘Culture la Ville’ and books published as part of the Mission Cloud. Didier Coirint, from the municipality of Saint-Denis, provided me with the framework document on Saint-Denis Cultural Policy, in French and English, which I refer to in this work.

On top of the consultation of official documents I attended the public conversations given by the stakeholders on several occasions, which informed my research. The main public events referenced here are:

- ‘Culture la Ville 2019’, which took place on 1 October 2019.
- The day on ‘Solidary Together’ organised by the Transdev foundation, one of the founders of socially oriented projects of Théâtre Gérard Philippe, on 18 June 2019.
- A public reading led by the young people of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ in the bookshop Folies d’Encre in Saint-Denis on 16 April 2019.
- A public discussion with the audience by the young actors of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, after a performance of the play, on 10 May 2019.

I recorded parts of these public meetings and used some of the speeches in this research as reference, all duly mentioned.

### Websites, online press clippings, videos and archives

The web has become a rich source of information, notably to understand the official discourses of stakeholders with regards to territorial development projects or real-estate projects, or to access to archives. I always reference websites I extracted information from and mention the date of the last visit. I paid specific attention to the verification of the sources, privileging official websites (Plaine Commune, Municipality of Saint-Denis, Theatre Gérard Philippe, Cuesta, GONGLE) and confirmed media outlets. Of course, the public face of communication around a project has to be evaluated critically, and the information available online is not taken at face value. Interviews, research and observations have provided depth to official information. Nevertheless, online resources have proved useful to access archives (such as all the speeches of former Mayor of Aubervilliers, Jack Ralite), to understand the context and other development projects in the area. Several online press articles have allowed me to access to the official messages

of by Patrick Braouezec, President of Plaine Commune, regarding the development of the area and the strategy 'Territory of Culture and Creation'.

Videos produced by various stakeholders have also been used as a source of reference, may it be to watch past performances of the Troup (for instance the performance of 1793 by the previous Ephemeral Troup is fully available online (TGP CDN de Saint-Denis, 2017), to have an overview of the official discourse of Plaine Commune on their strategy (Plaine Commune, 2019), or to see the official presentation of development projects by the real estate companies (Les Lumières Pleyel, 2017). I used quotations and visuals from some of the videos in this work, which are duly referenced.

### Workshops on creativity

Some of the stakeholders that are rarely referred to, when it comes to defining what creativity means, are the residents and users of the place.

The method I chose to engage with residents on the question of creativity was that of collaborative mapping. The cartography workshop is a way to initiate a brainstorming on what creativity means and where it happens in the city. The objective was to test the hypothesis that there are several visions of creativity at play in a territory, focussing on residents' representations.

The first part of the workshop is dedicated to introducing each other by name and introducing shortly who everyone is and what he/she expects of the workshop. The second part consists of a brainstorming around the notion of creativity. A third part includes – when possible – going to the streets, walking and exploring the places of creativity in a given neighbourhood. The final component consists of placing stickers on a big physical map of Saint-Denis while explaining to the other participants why he/she chose the place. The workshop lasts between two and two and a half hours. The output is a collaborative map of creative spaces in Saint-Denis, that will be shared with all participants via the institutions that have hosted the workshop, and with the cultural services of the municipality of Saint-Denis.

I realised five workshops of collaborative mapping, two in the context of an educational programme, with students who had to take part in the exercise as part of their studies,

three in libraries, with participants who came freely to the workshops. This represents 49 participants in total.

For practical reasons, when the workshop was organised in libraries, I had to propose variations to the initial standard workshop, which had been realised with a group of students at Institut Universitaire Technologique (IUT) de Saint-Denis. The libraries are open to all and the workshop participants mixed adults and teenagers, even children. For questions of responsibility it impossible to take teenagers outside of the library walls, so we skipped the third section of the workshop and focussed on the mapping.

Giving a practical task, that of mapping where creativity happens, helps focus energies on a small action with immediately visible results. The participants are invited to stand up around a map and to place a sticker on the map on the location of the creative activity, while explaining why they have chosen this place and why they think it is creative. This part of the workshop has always been the most dynamic and successful, the one in which those who would not speak while seating would start to open up. It is a very convenient format to change the dynamics in a room. At the beginning of the workshop, when everyone sits at the table, the hierarchies are quite clear, there are the hosts of the workshop (me and often someone who comes to help me), who explain why we are there, the context of the workshop, and the way the results will be dealt with. The round of presentations does not really break barriers, although there were no examples in this research of people who felt really shy. The groups in the library were quite small, with an average of five people. The groups in the IUT were larger, about thirteen students, but they already knew each other.

Changing positions in the room, engaging in an action, even one as simple as writing or drawing tends to change group dynamics and allows the participants to come in and speak. At the IUT, during the ‘brainstorming’ sessions, the students broke into groups of three or four to discuss the following themes: 1) what is creativity? 2) who is creative? 3) where does creativity take place in the city? This was inspired by the ‘World Café method’<sup>18</sup>, that I had experimented with professionally before in several countries and

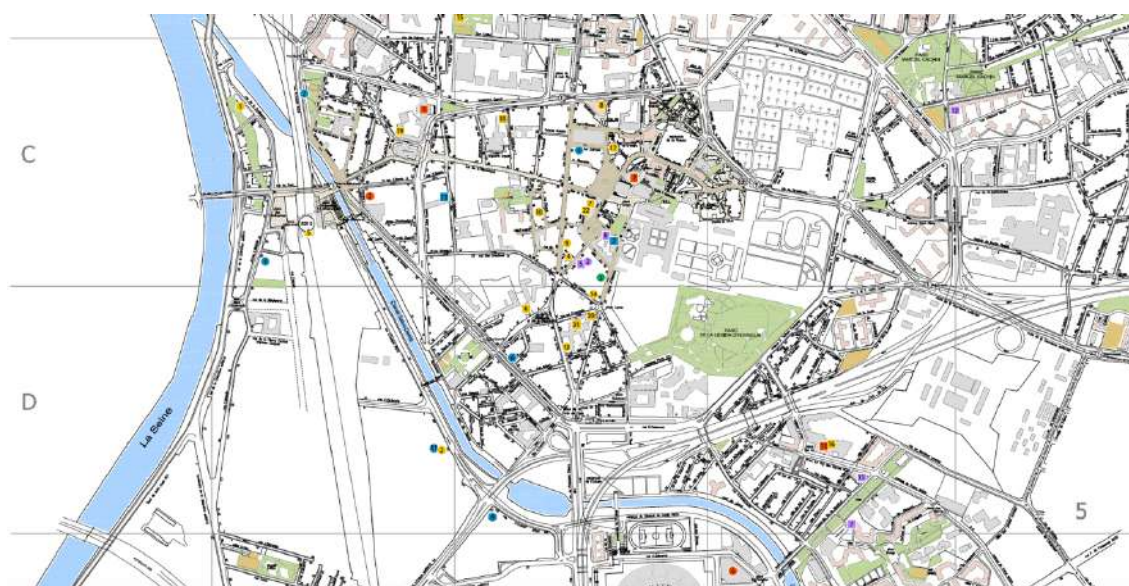
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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>  
[Accessed: 30 June 2019].

contexts. In the libraries, with smaller groups, I had to propose another format, I used small pieces of paper on which people could write words that related to 1) what is creativity? 2/ who is creative? But then next we discussed the words placed on the pieces of papers and organised them together, grouping them, on the table, before moving to the map to locate places of creativity. In all occasions, people engaged in the activity of placing the stickers on the map with enthusiasm.

I realised that the map was not a tool that was familiar to everyone, notably during the workshops in the libraries. Before going to the big map that was hanging on the wall, I had to pass via the presentation of other maps: the ones of the neighbourhood, and the ones of Plaine Commune in general, an entity that most participants heard the name of, but were unable to define. Then we would actually move to the big map. In two occurrences, the action of standing up to look at a large map was an issue, once for a mother who had come with her child and who had strong back pain, the second time with an 80 year-old-resident who was not really able to see the small streets on the map. It is via these workshops that some unexpected venues were pointed out as places of creativity: parks, nursery schools, sports venues, even churches, for their heritage value.

Figure 6 : Extract from the map realised during the workshops with inhabitants and students. Credit Olya Suslova





- Privés ou coopératifs
- Institutionnels
- ▲ Informels

## Agriculture urbaine

- 1 Parti Poétique ..... 112 Avenue de Stalingrad (A5)
- 2 Chez Basile ..... 22 Rue de la Légion d'Honneur (C3)

## Art du spectacle, cinéma, cirque

- THEATRES**
- 1 Le Théâtre du Hogar ..... 10 Rue Cristino Garci, 12 Rue de la Procession (F4)
  - 2 Le Théâtre de la Belle Etoile ..... 14 Rue Saint-Just (G3)
  - 3 Le Chapiteau Rajganawak ..... 3 Rue Ferdinand Gambon (C2)
  - 4 La Chaufferie ..... 10 bis Rue Maurice Thorez (B2)
  - 5 Théâtre Gérard Philipe ..... 59 Boulevard Jules Guesde (B2)
- CINEMAS**
- 6 Cinéma Gaumont ..... 8 Rue du Mondial (E4)
  - 7 L'Ecran cinéma ..... 14 Passage de L'Aqueduc (B3)
  - 8 Cité du Cinéma ..... 20 Rue Ampère (E1)
  - 9 Studios de Lendit ..... 6 Rue Andrie Campra (F3)
- EDUCATION**
- 10 Ecole de la Cité ..... 20 Rue Ampère (E1)
  - 11 EICAR ..... 8 Avenue des Amireurs (H4)
  - 12 Fratellini ..... 1 / 9 Rue des Cheminois (F3)
  - 13 Lycée Suger ..... 6 Avenue Leroy des Barres (D4)

## Musique, danse

- 1 Stade de France ..... Stade de France (E3)
  - 2 Festival de St Denis ..... 16 Rue de la Légion d'Honneur (B3)
- STUDIOS D'ENTREGISTREMENT**
- 3 Defmaster ..... 16 Rue du Pont Saint-Lazare (B2)
  - 4 Diane Music ..... 25 Rue Charles Michels (C2)
  - 5 Créativ Productions ..... 2 Rue Jules Joffrin (C3)
  - 6 Studio Smik Production ..... 22 Boulevard Marcel Sembat (D2)
  - 7 Re-Do Studio ..... 12 Rue Ambroise Croizat (C2)
  - 8 CLABO Studio ..... 5 Boulevard Anatole France (D2)
  - 9 CMV Production ..... 90 Boulevard Anatole France (E2)
  - 10 Loge de l'Animateur ..... 16 Rue André Campra (F3)
  - 11 Le Bruit Court ..... 112 Rue Ambroise Croizat (D1)
  - 12 DECLIC ..... 2 Cité de la Saussoie (B5)
- EDUCATION**
- 13 Conservatoire ..... 15 Rue Catulienne (B2)

## Art plastique, graffitis

### RESIDENCES D'ARTISTES, OCCUPATION ARTISTIQUE

- 1 GB ..... 6-10 Quai de Seine (C2)
- 2 Usines Cristophle (Orfèvrerie) ..... 112 Rue Ambroise Croizat (D1)
- 3 Espace Imaginaire ..... 12 Rue de la Procession (F4)

### GRAFFITIS, MISE EN VALEUR DE L'HERITAGE ALTERNATIF

- 4 Graffiti ..... 4 Rue du Jambon (C3)
- 5 Graffiti ..... Gare de Saint-Denis (C2)
- 6 La ligne 13 ..... 12 Place de la Résistance (D2)
- 7 Francade ..... 3 Rue de la République (C3)

### GALLERIES D'ART

- 8 Synesthésie ..... 8 Passage de Jouy (C3)
- 9 ADADA ..... 60 Rue Gabriel Péri (C3)
- 10 Galerie HCE ..... 7 Rue Gibault (C3)
- 11 Atelier Prométhée ..... 25 Rue du Landy (F4)
- 12 Atelier de moulage RMNGP ..... 1 Impasse du Pilier (G4)

### CAFES ET CREATION

- 13 Pointcaré ..... 20 Rue Gabriel Péri (D2)
- 14 The au Jardin ..... 19 Rue Lanne (D2)

### EDUCATION

- 15 Ecole d'art ..... 51 Rue Auguste Poullain (B3)
- 16 Lycée Suger ..... 6 Avenue Leroy des Barres (D4)
- 17 La Maison Jaune ..... 2 Place de la Halle, dalle de l'ilot 8 (C3)
- 18 Ecole maternelle Corbillon ..... 19 Rue du Corbillon (C3)
- 19 Ecole maternelle de l'Estrée ..... 6 Rue Suger (C3)

### HISTOIRE

- 20 Unité d'Archéologie ..... 8 Rue Franciade (D3)
- 21 Musée de l'Art et d'Histoire ..... 22 bis Rue Gabriel Péri (D3)
- 22 La Fabrique de la Ville ..... 4 Rue du Cygne (C3)

## Autres organisations

- 1 Maison de Sciences de l'Homme Paris-Nord ..... 20 Avenue George Sand (G4)
  - 2 Dionysité ..... 19 Rue de la Boulangerie (C3)
- MAISONS DE QUARTIER**
- 3 Maison de quartier Floréal ..... 3 Promenade de la Basilique (B6)
  - 4 Maison de quartier Sémard ..... 9/11 Rue Emile Chretien (A3)
  - 5 Maison de la Vie Associative ..... 19 Rue de la Boulangerie (C3)
  - 6 Maison de quartier de la Plaine ..... 5 Rue Saint-Just (G3)
  - 7 Maison de quartier Franc Moisin-Bel Air ..... 75 Rue Danielle Casanova (D4)
- MEDIATHEQUES**
- 8 Médiathèque Centre-ville ..... 4 Place de la Légion d'Honneur (C3)
  - 9 Médiathèque Gulliver ..... 7 Avenue de Plouich (B5)
  - 10 Médiathèque Don Quichotte ..... 120 Avenue du Président Wilson (G3)
  - 11 Médiathèque Ulysse ..... 37 Cours du Rü de Montfort (D4)
  - 12 Médiathèque Aladin ..... 2 Rue Henri Barbusse (C4-5)

The organisation of the workshops allowed me to contact and meet with a large spectrum of people. It provided the occasion for informal exchanges with the Library managers, who also shared their views and experience of the place, and of what they considered to be places of creativity. As a visitor I gathered a more in-depth understanding of the neighbourhood, in terms of how it was lived by the inhabitants. It also revealed how they perceived the cultural and artistic offerings in their neighbourhoods, and how they were using it. I discovered places, which I later visited. I realised that the places of 'creative industries', for instance TV studios, music recording studios, cinema studios, which are numerous in Saint-Denis, were out of the picture of the residents' perception of the place. Since they are closed and operate behind closed doors, the residents do not have any contact with them. So the spaces mentioned were first of all the institutional cultural spaces. Further discussion on the theme of creativity led to more discussions on

more mundane spaces of daily creativity, such as the kitchen for creativity in cooking, or the park, for the space it gave to individuals to dream, imagine and create new ideas. Creation was always associated with arts in the first place: painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, music were the first domains of creativity mentioned, then it moves to daily activities such as cooking or to sports.

## Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are best used when one knows that the opportunities to meet with the interviewees are limited Bernard (1988). The interviewer has prepared a set of questions, that will guide the discussion, knowing that the discussion remains open to additional questions being posed. Mixed with more informal discussions with stakeholders, semi-structured interviews allowed me to go more in depth in the exploration of the theme of creativity and the links between artworks and the city, which may not have come easily in a less-structured format. Semi-structured interviews also allowed a comparison between the responses provided by the interviewees.

I led semi-structured interviews with 16 stakeholders in Saint-Denis:

- The artists in charge of the project and the associated admin staff, who are often responsible for the daily relations with the participants (6)
- The local authority representatives (5)
- Participants in the theatre plays (5)

I interviewed some of them several times.

Through the interviews I was investigating the research hypothesis and therefore focussed on:

- The specific visions of creativity and art
- The objectives and aims of each person with regards to the Creative City and/or to the project they were involved in
- How the project interacted with its context, with the city in general
- The way the project unfolded, its conception, realisation
- The different stakeholders mobilised in the framework of the project

- The forms participation took in each project: who was participating? At which stage? How?
- The way the interviewee was assessing the results of the project in its social dimension

All the interviews were recorded, with the full knowledge and permission of the interviewee. I always asked before starting the recorder and left it visible for the duration of the interview, mentioning that the files would be for my own use alone. None of the interviewees expressed reservations about the fact of being interviewed.

The full list of interviews is available below in Table 2 : List of interviews realised as part of the research.

Table 2 : List of interviews realised as part of the research

| <b>Project</b>                              | <b>Name</b>               | <b>Organisation</b>     | <b>Job position or role</b>        |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Plaine Commune strategy                     | Damaly Chum               | Plaine Commune          | Director                           |
| Plaine Commune strategy                     | Marie Bongapenka          | Plaine Commune          | Strategy implementation            |
| Cultural strategy and policy of Saint-Denis | Didier Coirint            | Mairie de Saint-Denis   | Director of Culture                |
| Cultural strategy Grand Paris Express       | Pierre Emmanuel Bécherand | Grand-Paris Express     | Director of Culture                |
| The Football Pitch                          | Alexandra Cohen           | Cuesta                  | Co-director                        |
| The Football Pitch                          | Nil Dinc                  | GONGLE                  | Theatre Director                   |
| The Football Pitch                          | Pierre Hiault             | Plaine Commune          | Manager for Urban Projects         |
| Montjoie! Saint-Denis!                      | Louise Roux               | Hoc Memento             | Writer and actress                 |
| Montjoie! Saint-Denis!                      | Frederico Nepomuceno      | Hoc Memento             | Theatre Director                   |
| Montjoie! Saint-Denis!                      | Michel                    | Hoc Memento             | Participant                        |
| Montjoie! Saint-Denis!                      | Mélanie Gaillard          | Espace Imaginaire       | Coordinator                        |
| Ephemeral Troup                             | François Lorin            | Théâtre Gérard Philippe | Manager for public communication   |
| Ephemeral Troup                             | Delphine Bradier          | Théâtre Gérard Philippe | Manager for Educational programmes |



|                          |                 |  |                           |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--|---------------------------|
| Ephemeral Troup          | Jean Bellorini  | Théâtre Gérard Philippe  | Theatre Director          |
| Ephemeral Troup          | Mamou Sacko     |  | Participant               |
| Ephemeral Troup          | Maëlle Gbaguidi |  | Participant               |
| Theatre of the Oppressed | Cecilia Boal    |  | Wife of late Augusto Boal |
| Theatre of the Oppressed | Julian Boal     |  | Son of Augusto Boal       |
| Theatre of the Oppressed | Geo Britto      | Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil |                           |

### Observation of rehearsals and attendance of the plays

In two of the case studies, Ephemeral Troup at TGP and Hoc Momento ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’, I was able to attend both rehearsals and the plays. I did so from the point of view of an observer. This allowed for several more informal exchanges with the artists and participants before and after the rehearsals and also to view the dynamics at play between the artists and the participants, the way the play was built, and the form of intervention that each of the participants had in the project.

### Direct involvement in the analysis of the project

For two of the projects, ‘The Football Pitch’ and ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’, I was invited, as a researcher, by the project leaders to join analysis and research elements of their projects. This provided me with some data and theoretical reflections as well as the opportunity to exchange with other researchers on the same project. The third stage of ‘The Football Pitch’, was conceived as an after-game session (which usually involves going to the bar and drinking). It was a two-day research seminar held on 8 and 9 October 2018. The first day included visits to the neighbourhood and of the project, meeting with the Local Authority representative manager for the projects. I had to do these explorations in advance of the meeting, as I was unavailable on the exact date of first day. The second day involved a multi-disciplinary evaluation exercise, based on the discussion and production of texts. The day was curated by the Director of the artistic

project Nil Dinc. The two directors who created ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ put together a reflection day around the practice of *in situ*, contextual theatre, on 5 June 2019. These gave me the opportunity to exchange with other researchers on other *in situ* projects in Brazil and in France and on the practices of artists’ residencies and ‘third spaces’ (alternative artistic spaces) in France.

I also curated some exchanges with researchers on the topic of co-creation in Saint-Denis and held two three-day seminars on the topic in Saint-Denis with academics from France, Mexico, Brazil and the UK, one on 20-22 September 2018 and one on 23-26 January 2019. This provided me with a very good entry card to high ranking individuals in Saint-Denis and Plaine Commune, as well as an amazing opportunity to exchange with other researchers on the issues linked to participatory arts. With the full knowledge and permission of the participants, I recorded some parts of these encounters and discussions.

## Walking

As an urban planner, physical and bodily experience constitutes a big part of my understanding of a given place. Street life is not the main object of this work – that being the actual participative art works I have been studying – but since the artworks are context sensitive, understanding the context in which they are created is part of the analysis.

During the research, I used walking as a way of ‘sensing’ and discovering the territory. While these were not unique influences, the practice of the urban ‘flânerie’ (Benjamin, 1999) and of Situationist ‘urban drifts’ (Debord, 1961) justified this practice as a way of understanding an area. I always choose to walk rather than using public transport when possible. This requires dedicating enough time to trips. For instance, when going to deliver workshop in libraries outside of the centre of Saint-Denis, I always tried to walk to places rather than using the bus. I also allowed myself several goalless urban drifts to sense and discover neighbourhoods of Saint-Denis. I exchanged views on the walks and on perceptions of street life with two academic-artists I was given to

collaborate with on another project in Saint-Denis, both were Foreigners (English) and had never been to Saint-Denis before. One is a visual artist and was taking pictures, the other one is a sound artist and made recordings of the sounds of the city. We compared feelings and experiences, and during the interactions our walks were punctuated with I discovered places I had not paid attention to in Saint-Denis. They had time to discuss and interact with people I had not met, in cultural venues and in the streets, which they shared, thereby enriching my cartography of artistic and cultural spaces.

I am aware that is difficult to recount walking as a research method – notably because it requires extensive reports on precisely where and how one has walked, how long, at what time of the day, etc. In addition, one cannot be sure that one's own experience of walking would give the same results if someone else was walking. My own walking experience had obvious limitations, linked mostly to being a woman, and being unwilling to walk at length, notably at night. I therefore used walking, the observation of street life and daily interaction more as a material for building questions than for providing answers, for challenging representations and misconceptions, like those Jenny Middleton suggests (2018), rather than as a generator of sound knowledge and data for the research.

### Use of visuals in the presentation of the research

I am aware that the use of visuals as a way to report on academic research may be subject to several objections. Photos – specifically documentary photography, i.e. non artistic, propose one angle, one point of view on a place and a project. However, we know from video-elicitation projects that the same photo can be interpreted in very different ways by readers and viewers. When speaking of an art project the lack of visual illustration hinders the possibility of understanding. The photos and illustrations I use in this research are sometimes mine. Most of the time they have been produced by others, but I have selected them, and curated them to illustrate my examples. They are not used as data *per se* in the work, but as illustrations to aid understanding.

## Ethics

‘Ethics Policies’ are designed to protect the human subjects of research from breaches of confidentiality, hurt, embarrassment or other risks. Following Ethics rules is especially important if the work involves young people, vulnerable adults or very sensitive topics. My ethical approach was inspired from UK Universities’ ethical standards, and most notably UCL’s ethical standards, as presented in its website<sup>19</sup>.

There are a number of ethical standards that have been accepted throughout the academic communities, which all researchers and ethical committees are expected to comply with. First,

all participants must be fully informed of the study and what is being asked of them, including the potential risks/benefits and exclusion criteria, in order to make a fully informed decision about whether or not to participate in the research. This must be an active step on behalf of the participant and not due to any inducement, coercion or perceived pressure to participate. This is required of all participants in a research study, except where there is a justification for covert research or deception” (UCL, 2016).

In my case I always presented the objective of the study to the participants in the workshops or to the interviewees, in simple enough words to be understood. I asked the main coordinators of the theatre projects to introduce me to the participants present before I started the observation and interview process. I have deliberately chosen not to interview participants who were under 18. In the workshops in libraries and bookshops there were participants who were under 18, however, these workshops were not recorded (except when all participants were over 18, i.e. at the Institut Technologique Universitaire), and no personal data has been taken on the participants that may allow their identification. Their input was not attributed to an individual, but was recorded, under a written form as part of a collective process. Second, “all participants have the right for their participation to remain confidential in that only the researcher will be aware who has participated.” (UCL,2016) In this work, I have not anonymised individual contributions since none of the interviewees has requested it. In my work, I have also come across the principles and implementation of safe space policies and of non violent communication, which I have always attempted to respect. This means that

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<sup>19</sup> <https://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/accepted-ethical-standards.php> [Accessed: 3 January 2020].

in group work I paid particular attention to dismantling comments or actions that reinforced social structures of domination (related to gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, disability, physical appearance, body size, age, religion).

## Chapter 4: Spaces and Creative Processes in the City: the Case of Saint-Denis

“The name of Saint-Denis evokes two very different images: that of the tombs of kings and of damsels of the Legion of Honor in their park, and that of a ‘lively city’ where immigrants and their children create animation, like in Marseille.”

A. Rustenholz, *De la Banlieue Rouge au Grand Paris* (2015)

Not everything is pink there but it's a lively city.  
There's always something happening, for me it's amazing.  
I know how it works, I know its derivations,  
there's traffic all the time,  
there are plenty of undisciplined children,  
I want to write a beautiful page,  
city with a hundred thousand faces,  
St-Denis-center, my village,  
I have 93200 reasons to let you know this place.  
And you have so many ways  
of discovering all its attractions  
Grand Corps Malade, *Saint Denis* (2006)

In this Chapter, I present the context of Saint-Denis and the main policy document framing the implementation of a Creative City policy in the area, the Plaine Commune strategy ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’. It provides an analysis of the ways the vision of creativity presented by local authority actors in Saint-Denis is influenced by their political orientation and by the power relations between different stakeholders. As applied to the specific case of Saint-Denis, the research questions guiding my work became: Does a left-wing municipality such as Saint-Denis propose a different vision of the Creative City? Does it implement this differently? Who are the territory’s stakeholders? Who are the ones in a position to implement such visions? What are the balances of power between the different stakeholders, and how does that come into play with regard to the implementation of alternative narratives of the Creative City? This Chapter and the following case studies, aim to provide answers to each of these points.

Saint-Denis is emblematic and paradigmatic of the French ‘banlieues’. The stigma attached to its name and post-code –‘93’– in popular representations makes it

synonymous with poverty, violence, disregard for the rule of law and more recently terrorism. As I will demonstrate in this Chapter, however, a closer look at the social fabric and the built environment of the city – at its history and present activity – tells another, and much more complex, story.

Saint-Denis presented characteristics, which as I present below, made it a good site for fieldwork, as described below.

1. It is part of an area labelled as ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ within the Greater Paris Metropolis. The framing document of the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy claims to defend a vision of the Creative City that is focussed on culture and not only on cultural industries.
2. It is a communist municipality. The Communists in the Parisian Red Belt are known for their investment in culture as a means of creating social bonds, and for their support to public theatre with a view to creating social inclusion. It therefore seemed to be one of the places where we were more likely to find some form of conjunction between artists and politicians’ (funders) expectations with regards to the arts. I hereby strive to consider the historical context in the local analysis of Creative Cities narratives. In the case of Saint-Denis and Plaine Commune, the link to the history of cultural policies, and the specific communist stake in it, shapes today’s approach to the ideas of the Creative City.
3. As a poor, working class area, Saint-Denis has been specifically targeted to produce artistic and cultural projects which show a specific attention to social concerns. They receive funding from the state and from private foundations.
4. The area is home to some emblematic institutions of French Cultural Policy, such as the Theatre Gerard Philippe, one of our case-studies, which holds a specific position within the art world as a place open to all and acting for all.
5. There are several stakeholders who have competence in deciding and defining the future of the territory, and for leading artistic and cultural projects. Big transformations are on their way, notably the new transport system of the Greater Paris Metropolis and the Olympic Games.

The short overview of the socio-economic profile of Saint-Denis will help demonstrate the context in which the Creative City vision is built, as well as the position the city has in the Greater Paris Metropolis. While presenting the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy, I also investigate how the political orientation of the local decision makers may have influenced the vision of the Creative City developed in the document. An overview of the major urban development projects planned in the area will help demonstrate the complexity of the stakeholders at play in the territory. The reader will therefore gain an understanding of the area, of the role of stakeholders and the way the decision-making system on urban development functions, and of the role dedicated to artists by the local authority in the framework of the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy.

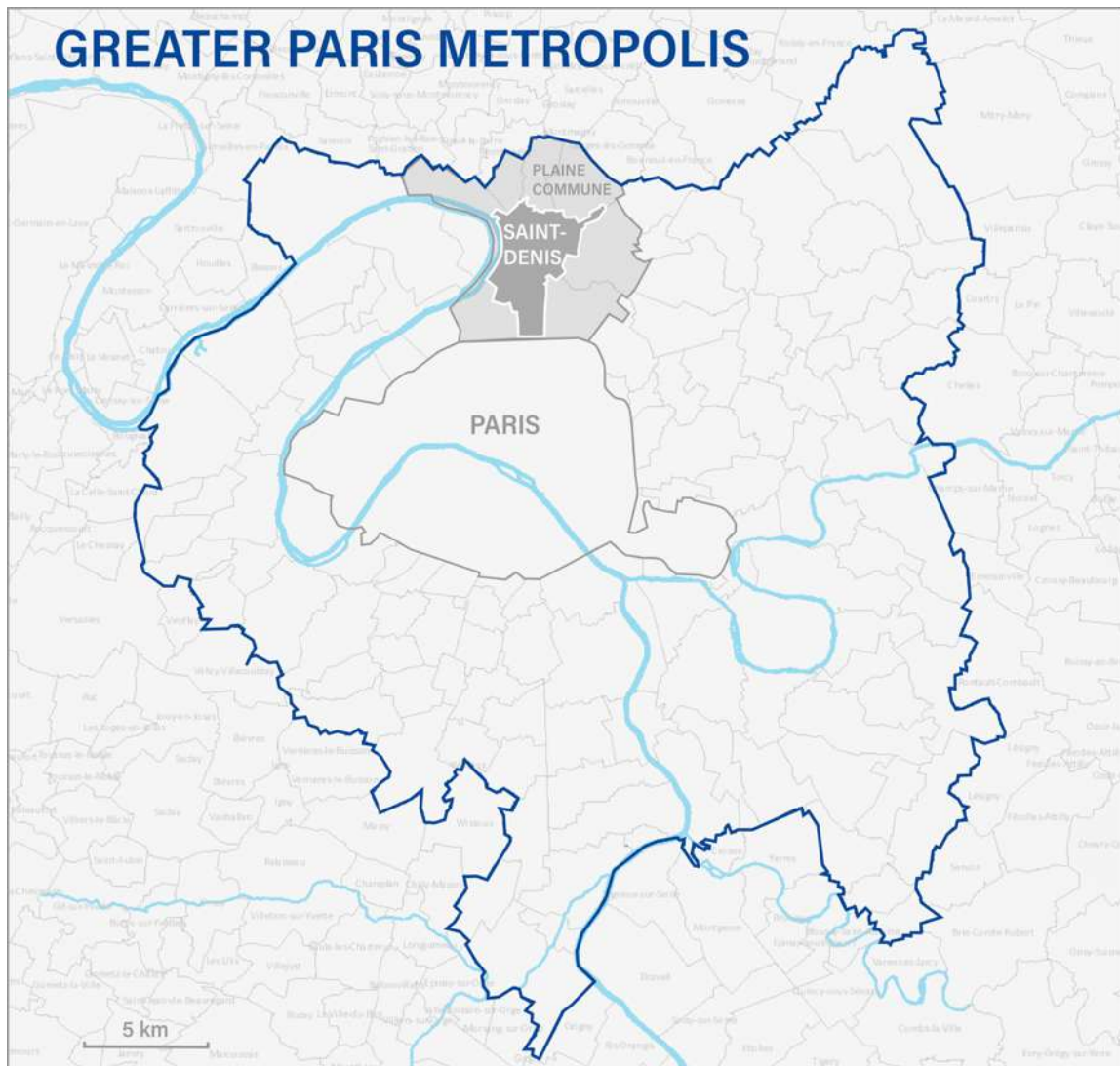
### [Saint-Denis within the Greater Paris Metropolis](#)

This section provides a brief introduction to the characteristics of Saint-Denis and its situation within the metropolitan territorial, social and institutional organisation of Greater Paris. I do not attempt to be comprehensive in the presentation of the area here. My aim is to establish the context in which our case studies are set, and which in many ways shapes their potentialities and outcomes.

Saint-Denis is located just north of Paris. In fact, the Southern part of the municipality is adjacent to Paris. It is part of the Greater Paris Metropolis, the administrative structure uniting the City of Paris and 131 surrounding municipalities.



Figure 7: Saint-Denis, Plaine Commune and Greater Paris, credit Olya Suslova



In this chapter I will refer to several administrative units that include the municipality of Saint-Denis. The data available and the existing socio-economic analyses, sometimes cover the municipality of Saint-Denis alone, sometimes a larger surrounding area, notably the department of Seine-Saint-Denis, or the grouping of the municipality itself which is Plaine Commune. It is therefore useful to provide the reader with a short overview of the administrative territorial organisation of the area.

Saint-Denis is a municipality, the smallest territorial organisation unit in the French territorial system. It is within the Department of Seine-Saint-Denis, within the Ile de

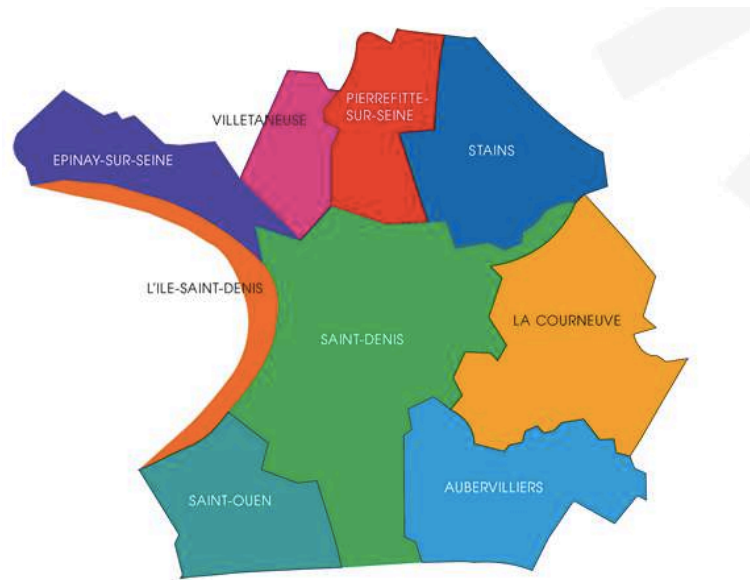
France Region. Saint-Denis (110,000 inhabitants) is a relatively small municipality compared to Paris, but the biggest municipality in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis.

Today, the municipality is also part of what could be described as a borough or 'arrondissement' of the Greater Paris Metropolis. This is a territorial organisation gathering several municipalities (Etablissement Public Territorial, ETP), called Plaine Commune. Plaine Commune is the union of nine municipalities, who have shared responsibilities and competences, some of them since 1985. Among these competences lies urban development but not culture as such. Culture is a municipal competence.

Before becoming an official borough of Greater Paris, Plaine Commune existed as an inter-communal structure, which already shared competencies in some areas. The collaboration started in 1985 between three municipalities around the re-development of the southern part of the area, the closest to Paris being called 'Plaine Renaissance'.

Political continuity between the different levels of territorial representation is strong: The former Mayor of Saint-Denis, Patrick Braouezec, is now the President of Plaine Commune, and their head offices are also located there. The other municipalities are: Epinay sur Seine, Villetaneuse, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Stains, La Courneuve, Aubervilliers, Saint-Ouen, and l'Île Saint Denis.

Figure 8: Municipalities composing Plaine Commune, Source: Plaine Commune



### Greater Paris Metropolis territorial organisation

There are 12 ‘boroughs’ in the Greater Paris Metropolis. The ‘boroughs’ have a specific legal form, that of Etablissement Public Territorial (ETP), which is a grouping of municipalities with devolution of some competences, including urban development.

Each of the 11 boroughs outside Paris (which keeps a specific status) agrees on a ‘Territorial Development Contract’ with the state. This contract aims at defining “a contractual and partnership approach for long-term development and implementation of development projects in Greater Paris' strategic territories, and in particular those served by the Greater Paris public transport network”<sup>20</sup>. These contracts are signed by the state, the municipalities and the grouping of municipalities (the borough, in this case, Plaine Commune) and if they are willing to, the departments and region.

<sup>20</sup> <https://geo.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/6b2625f2bd4d3314e17f72399ca5a803b32b5e08>, [Accessed: 3 January 2020].

Figure 9: Boroughs of the Greater Paris Metropolis (called ETP), Borough 6 is Plaine Commune. Plaine Commune headquarters are located in Saint Denis. Source: wikimedia commons



During the development of the strategy for the Greater Paris Metropolis, Plaine Commune was flagged up as ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’.

Before going into an analysis of the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy, a short overview of the characteristics of the territory is useful, for two main reasons:

1. The design of the strategy is set against a territorial background which is caught between intense poverty, a broad social mix (particularly regarding different nationalities) and increasing attractiveness of the land at the metropolitan level.
2. The advocated ‘shift’ between the initial focus of the strategy proposed by the state and the actual wording proposed is influenced by the current political orientation of the municipalities in the area, which has a long history, dating back to the strong influence of the communist party in the area.

### Population: A Social Mix of 131 nationalities

The representation of the ‘banlieue’ as a homogeneous space of deprivation and ghettoisation has been contradicted by several studies, a literature strand initiated in the

late 1990s (Bacqué and Fol, 1997). Loïc Wacquant (2006) criticises and deconstructs the parallels made between the American ghetto and the French 'banlieue', insisting on the heterogeneity of the population of the 'banlieue', and the persistence of a strong presence and commitment of the state, in the form of public infrastructure and redistribution policies. The work of Edmond Préteceille (2009) on racial segregation in Ile de France Region (2009), confirms this analysis with a sound statistical approach, which shows that most of the territory of the 'banlieues' is in fact characterised by a strong social mix of nationalities and some socio-economic diversity, except in a few hyper-localised neighbourhoods (in which the non-European migrant population is greater than 50%). It is clear that the category 'banlieue' is not a strong explanatory category. It does not tell us much about the characteristics of the place, with the exception, perhaps, of when one looks at the stigma and representations attached to it. According to Sylvie Tissot (2007), the 'banlieue' is a category constructed by a certain strand of research, which aimed at advocating for area-based public policies.

Saint-Denis is part of the first ring around Paris, the 'faubourgs', in which factories were established at the time of industrialisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The area was home to workers' housing and industrial buildings. After the WWII, Saint Denis had 75,000 residents, and two thirds of people in work were working class (Rustenholz, 2015). After the de-industrialisation, in the 1970s the area lost many of its jobs and its population. According to Braouezec (2004), this represented more than 15,000 jobs lost in a decade in Saint-Denis. In his analysis of specific estates in la Courneuve (one of the municipalities of Seine-Saint-Denis), Olivier Masclet (2005) shows how social housing corporations opened-up access to housing to poor and financially unstable populations in degraded estates in the 1970s, (at a time in which others who could afford to leave them chose to do so). The 'new' inhabitants were often large families from migrant backgrounds and part of the unqualified working class, who were unable to find housing in the private sector. This trend, linked to a large proportion of degraded private housing being used by 'sleep merchants', i.e. opportunistic landlords, explains in part how areas such as Saint-Denis have become an entry point for migrants from the poor French colonies.

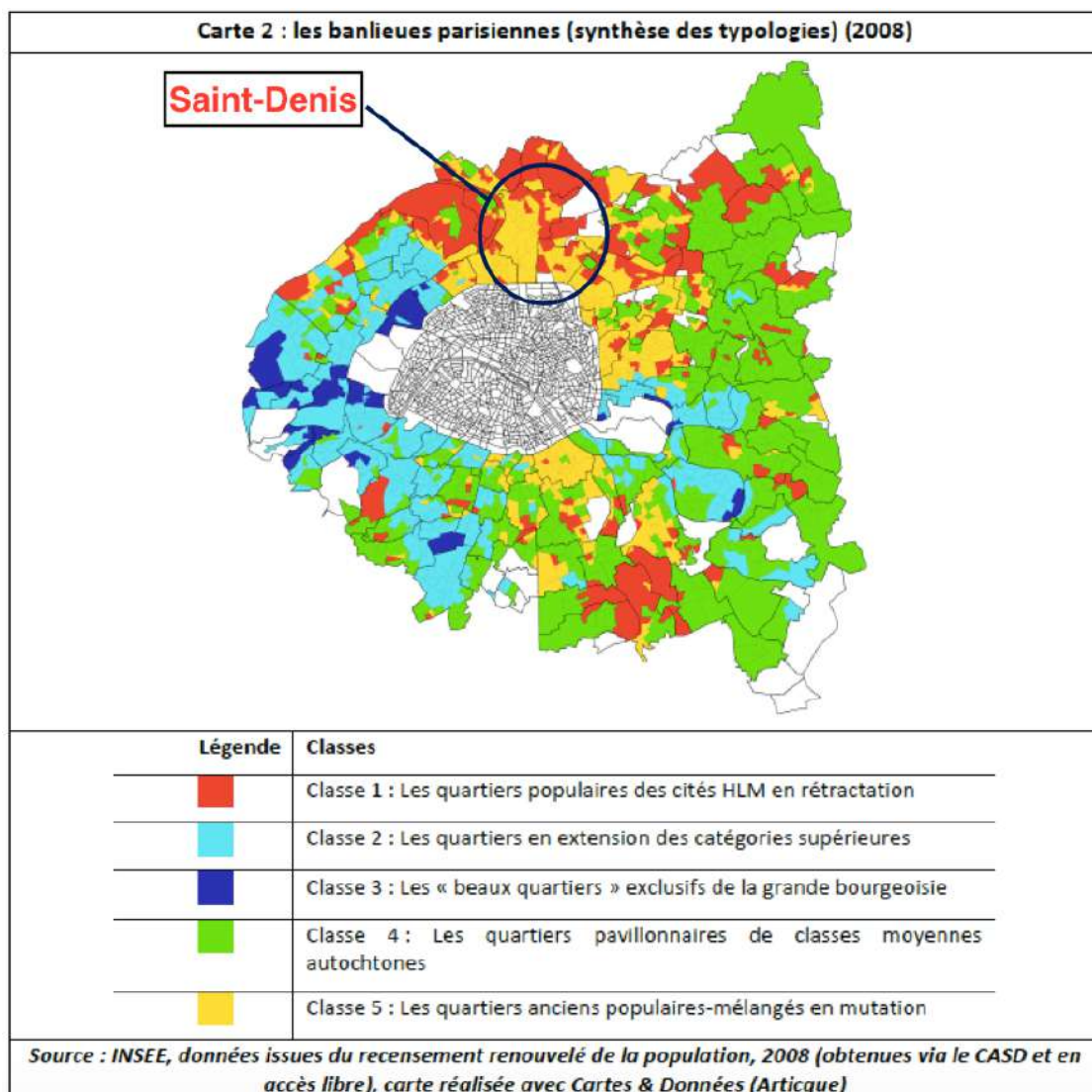
At the municipal level Saint-Denis is one of most diverse municipalities of France in terms of the origins of its residents: 40% of its population was born in a foreign country, compared with 18% in the whole Ile de France region; 30% of its population is of foreign nationality, compared with 13% in the whole Ile de France region (source: INSEE, 2013 in Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme, 2019). Today, the municipality prides itself for being home to residents of more than 131 nationalities (Saint-Denis, 2016).

Saint-Denis is presented as a 'heterogeneous urban space' according to a typology of neighbourhoods elaborated by Pauline Clech, who developed an ethnography on social mobility through culture in Paris Red Belt (Clech, 2015). Her statistical approach confirms the observations of the street life and of the built environment in the different neighbourhoods of Saint-Denis. Clech's typology integrates characteristics linked to the socio-economic profile of the population and characteristics linked to the type of housing, as well as characteristics linked to mobility. She has collected data on 'income', 'levels of education', 'type of housing, including date of construction', 'date in which people moved into their houses', and 'professional occupation'. The elaboration of her typology had the objective of deconstructing the then-dominant discourse and image of the French 'banlieue' as a space of homogeneity, characterised in public opinion by deprived high-rise social housing buildings (which are the areas in which most of the research on the French 'banlieues' is concentrated). The map below reveals the actual heterogeneity of the French banlieues, as well as the polarisation of deprived housing, notably in the area North East of Paris. As one can see in Figure 10, in Clech's typology, Saint-Denis is marked in areas corresponding to two categories:

1. 'Social housing neighbourhoods in decline', characterised almost exclusively by people with low levels of education and income, and a high concentration of people born abroad, notably in poor countries that were ex-French colonies.
2. 'Old, poor-mixed neighbourhoods in transformation', a category that is composed by the majority of inhabitants living in collective buildings (as opposed to some areas with detached housing), with a majority on low level income but with some

mix with medium and stable forms of income and with a relative mix in terms of levels of education.

Figure 10: Parisian banlieues, source: Pauline Clech, 2015:32, modif. Ségolène Pruvot, 2019

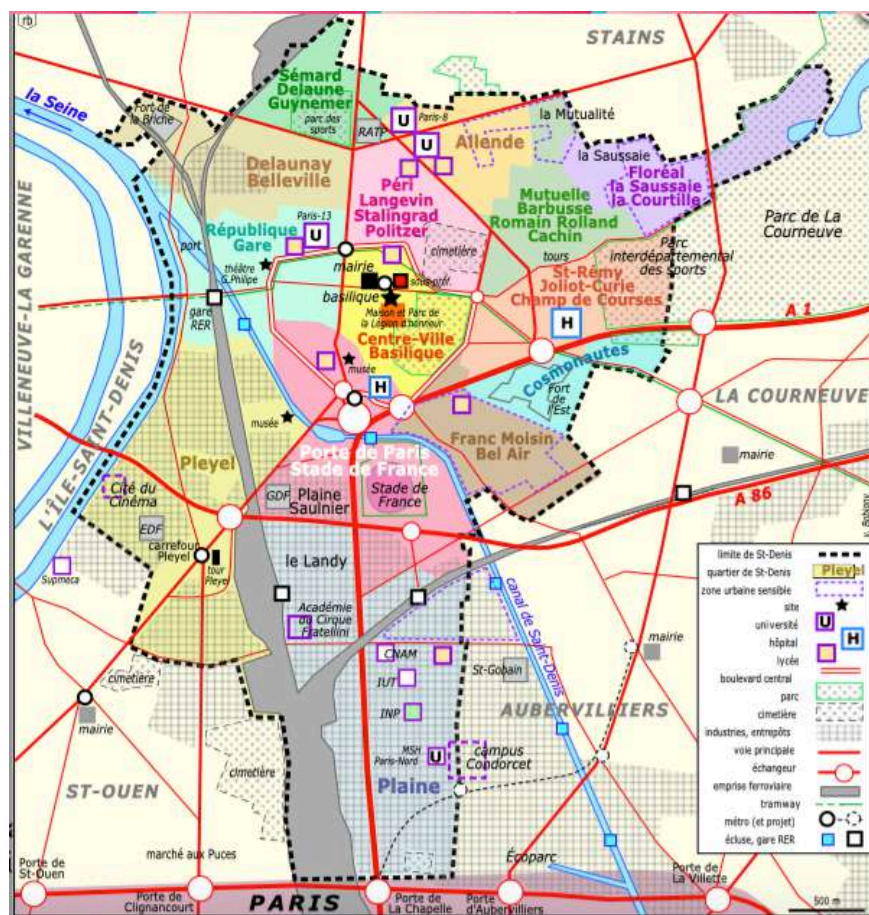


The area marked in Saint-Denis as ‘social housing neighbourhoods in decline’ in Clech’s typology appear below in the map of neighbourhoods of Saint-Denis. As shown in Figure 11 below, they are almost exclusively located in the Northern part of Saint-Denis. They are areas such as Floréal, la Saussaie, la Courtille, a part of Franc Moisin/Bel Air and Cosmonautes, Sémard, Delaune, Guynemer, Péri, Langevin, Stalingrad and Politzer.



The second category ‘old, poor-mixed neighbourhoods in transformation’ appears less useful to the external reader to grasp the heterogeneity of the place. Its South is characterised by new builds and offices which are juxtaposed with decaying small housing blocks from the 1920s and 50s, the city centre, which in some areas, notably in a small quarter around the Basilica is not dissimilar to Paris (squalid housing included), while the Northern part is characterised by high-rise buildings in the vicinity of small (often degraded) detached housing units.

Figure 11: A map of Saint-Denis neighbourhoods, Source: <https://tresordesregions.mgm.fr/Mdir.php?p=cant.php&ct=9398&region=1193>



Beyond the built environment and socio-economic profile of the population, it is important to note that the urban fabric of Saint-Denis is ‘broken’ due to very strong infrastructural obstacles: highways (A86 and A1) represented on Figure 11 above by the wide red lines, and train lines, represented by grey zones. There are very few pedestrian bridges over/under these highways and train lines. The separation between the different



areas and districts of the city is very marked. For this reason, the cultural offering of the city centre is not easily available and accessible to all residents.

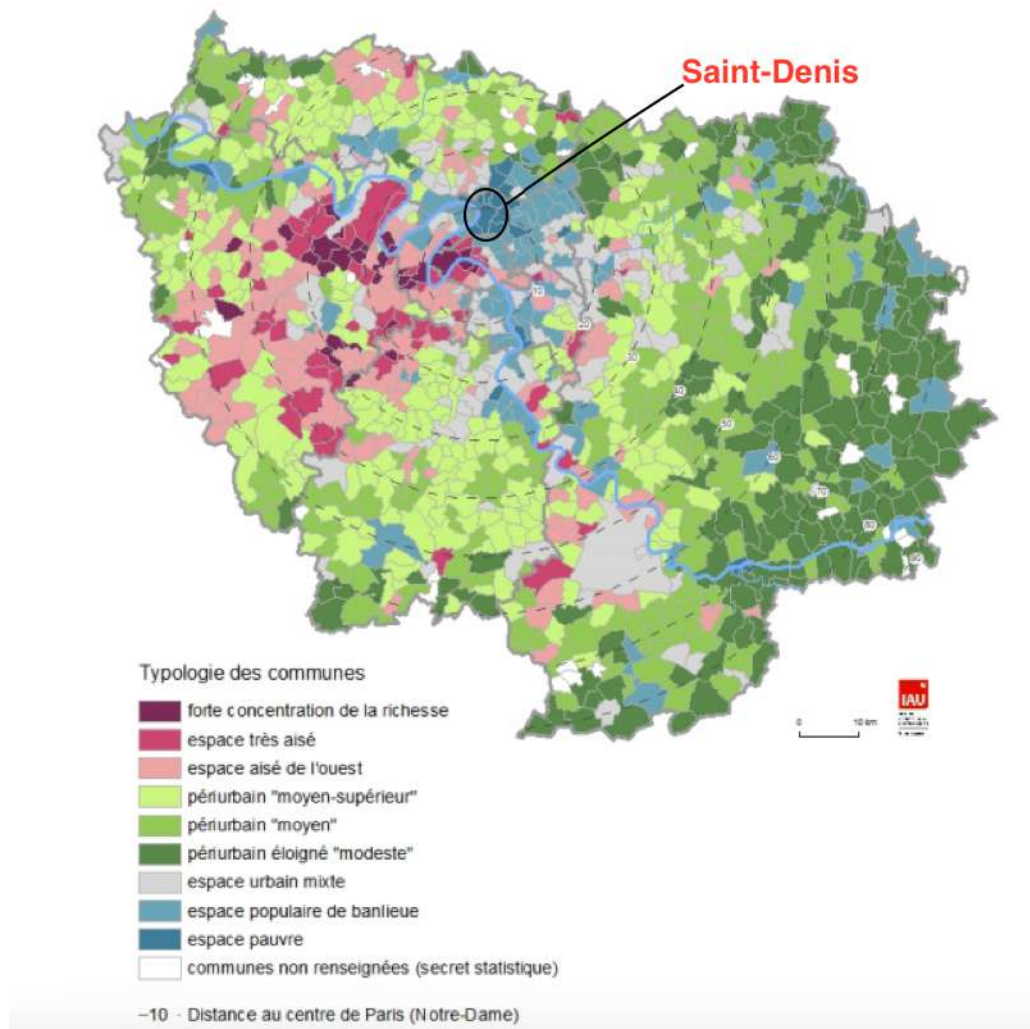
### Poverty and squalid housing

As we discussed in Chapter 2, the community artists of the 70s, socio-education movements of the 80s and some of today's contextual artists chose to work with the most marginalised groups of society in the city, in what they conceive as the most rejected and marginalised areas. Saint-Denis exhibits these characteristics, which may explain why, beyond the cheaper rental space, so many artists are involved with the territory.

Saint-Denis is one of the poorest areas in the first belt around Paris, a situation that has only been worsening in the last decade. A recent publication on 'Gentrification and Impoverishment between 2001 and 2015' in Ile de France (Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme, 2019) reveals that the department of Seine-Saint-Denis is witnessing an impoverishment of its population. Almost three citizens out of ten live below the poverty threshold (INSEE in Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme, 2019). From 2001 to 2011, the fraction of low-income renter households has increased from 41,3% to 44,6% (3,3 percentage point increase), while in the whole region it has passed from 25,8% to 27% (1,2 percentage point increase) for the same period. Social housing estates represent more than 45% of all housing in the municipality of Saint-Denis. The area is also known for its high proportion of very badly maintained co-ownership buildings within the private housing sector, which led to a recent contract being signed between the municipality and the state for a common fight against 'squalid housing' (habitat indigne) (Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme, 2018, Trabelsi, 2019). As stated above, however, the situation depends much on the neighbourhood, with the ones situated in the South (La Plaine) and the city centre being more mixed.

In the map below, one can see quite clearly that Saint-Denis appears in dark blue, as 'poor', in the lower income category.

Figure 12: Concentration of richness, Ile de France Region, Source: Filocom, 2011



## Violence & Stigma

Even more than other parts of the 'banlieue' the popular imagination of Saint-Denis, and of the Seine-Saint-Denis department, is one of deviance, drug traffic, violence and dereliction, something that is perpetuated in the media coverage of the area.

This idea has also been generated through popular culture. In the 90s, French rap contributed to further diffusing this idea. The songs of the rap band NTM, which was created in 1989 in Saint-Denis, proposed representations like: "in my neighbourhood, violence becomes an act of banality" (1991, Suprême NTM); "let down your gun, bad

boy, before something wrong happens” (1998, *Pose ton gun*) says another of the songs, denoting both a situation in which guns are present (private possession of weapons is forbidden in France) and in which at any time, the youth is on a slippery slope that can lead to prison or death. As another song puts it, “Don’t let your son stay out, if you don’t want him to slip down the slope” (1998, *Laisse pas trainer ton fils*).

Although none of the main centres of the 2005 ‘riots’ in the French ‘banlieues’ was located on the territory of Saint-Denis, many were located in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis, maintaining the representation of the ‘93’ as a problem area. Saint-Denis came back to the forefront of media attention as a ‘dangerous area’ in 2015, after the terrorists responsible for the Islamic-state-claimed terror attacks of 15 November 2015, were found in their refuge in the city centre, which led to a violent 7 hour assault of a building beginning in the early morning hours of 18 November 2015. This has contributed to a renewal of stigma. For example, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis was recently pictured in ‘Inch Allah’, a polemical book written by two journalists from *Le Monde* newspaper as one of the areas in which the ‘Islamisation of society’ was publicly visible. Saint-Denis continues to make the news for stories related to violence in high schools. Since June 2019, the story of parents who organise a human chain against drug trafficking around a school every day, in order to call the authorities into action, is a recurring feature in the local news and is an example that demonstrates how inhabitants are suffering from such trafficking rather than supporting it.

This account of the representation of violence in the area, and of the stigma attached to it, that of a parallel ‘urban culture’ is not neutral. For the researcher, the artists operating in the area, and even those familiar with the city (such as the author Rachid Santaki<sup>21</sup>) it is impossible to approach the territory without having these characteristics and the stigma attached to the place in the back of his/her mind. The authorities, social housing

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<sup>21</sup> Rachid Santaki is the author of several novels set in Saint-Denis. His first novel *Les anges s’habillent en caillera* (2012) is set in the background of petty and organised crime in Saint-Denis. The story starts when its main character goes out of prison and comes back in the city, only to take a revenge on the person who had denounced him in the first place. “I was smart enough to pass the degrees of crime, the other candidates ended up selling hard drug or weed. Some have died, others have been lost on their way back and forth to the prison. Deep down, I know that my exit is only temporary and that I will take the direction of the prison at the slightest mistake.”

corporations, the resident population have developed a certain attitude – one of defiance - towards a part of the population, notably the youth. During the meeting ‘Culture la Ville’ organised by Plaine Commune (2019), Zineb Benzekri, one of the artists with the collective *Random*, who worked-on the project *Situation(s)* in the municipality of la Courneuve to accompany citizens before the destruction of a high-rise derelict building, recalls how unsettled the social housing corporation, which was supporting the artistic process, became when the artists started to include some of the youth who were also obviously involved in drug trafficking in the area. The willingness, ability or necessity of artists to engage with those who are in a position of rupture and dissent with the authorities, those who are stigmatised because of their occupation, age or racial profile, is one of the characteristics participatory art-projects in a territory such as Saint-Denis may choose to address. A (more) socially just city may be one in which, even those who are not expected to are given a chance to act on an equal footing with the authorities. This is an example of the ‘democracy’ dimension, as covered in Susan Fainstein’s definition of ‘Just Cities’ (2010) and discussed in Chapter 1.

## Urban development

The urban development patterns of the area are key to the analysis: the strong presence of governmental and now – international – actors create strong pressures on urban development decision making.

From the middle of the 70s onwards, Seine-Saint-Denis, like the rest of the Red Belt, suffered as a result of intense de-industrialisation. However – at least in part of the territory – the area has been able to attract companies. Today, Seine-Saint-Denis is already the third biggest area in terms of concentration of businesses in the metropolitan region (after Paris and the department Haut-de-Seine). It hosts 10% of enterprises and jobs of Ile-de-France (Lebeau, 2018). As local elected representatives have pointed out (Discourse of Jack Ralite, quoted in Teboul, 2004), this amazing ability to recover the lost jobs, does not translate into *more* jobs for the inhabitants. Unemployment rate, especially for young people is extremely high in the territory, and big development projects do not necessarily benefit the population in terms of employment, as was exemplified in the case of the Stade de France development in 1998 (Lebeau, 2018).

In 1998, following the creation of the Stade de France, a new neighbourhood hosting tertiary activities was born around the RER train stations (suburban metropolitan lines). This contributed to the profound changes in the southern part of Saint-Denis, la Plaine, which now hosts a new metro station and is adjacent to the new University hub Condorcet (City of Humanities and Social Challenges), which opened up to its first students in September 2019 and aims to become an international ‘knowledge cluster’ In the next section, I will demonstrate how the area will be effected by two major infrastructural projects that are currently in development: Grand Paris Express and the Olympic Games 2024.

## Politics & Cultural policies

Over the years the communist party has defended a certain idea of culture in Saint-Denis, and in particular the close link between culture and politics, which remains influential up to this day. The name Red Belt takes a political connotation, when in 1935, 24 of the 29 municipalities surrounding Paris give a municipal majority to the socialist-communist coalition called the ‘Front Populaire’ (Popular Front’) at the national level. In Saint-Denis, the communists were already in power in 1925 and still are up to this day<sup>22</sup>. The left-wing political orientation of the ‘banlieues’ remained a constant until the middle of the 1980s. This is still the case in most of the municipalities of Plaine Commune, with the noticeable exception of Saint-Ouen. The current cultural policy in the municipalities that have been part of the ‘Red Belt’, including Saint-Denis, is the result of a long history, of a ‘love-story’ between the French communist municipalism and culture, as Pauline Clech highlights (2015). Understanding this helps us unveil the conceptions that some key members of the local elite promote with regards to the role of arts and culture.

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<sup>22</sup> Even though the actual political etiquette may have changed at times, with the affiliations and de-affiliations of the municipal majority to the communist party, see Rustenholz, *De la Banlieue Rouge au Grand Paris* (2015)

Jack Ralite's insight into the link between politics and art that developed as a result is particularly useful and interesting. It provides the background in which the current decision-makers such as Patrick Braouezec operate. Jack Ralite (1928-2017), the late Mayor of Aubervilliers, one of the municipalities adjacent to Saint-Denis, was one of the major communist political figures of the area and is referred to by the local decision makers to this day (Teboul, 2004). I witnessed a recent example of this at the meeting 'Culture la Ville', organised by Plaine Commune, when the speaker reading the text as a representative of the current Mayor of Aubervilliers, Meriem Derkaoui, said:

I think [Ralite's] spirit is still there hanging up in this place [...] art and culture were flooding his body [...] and any project he would conceive emanated from this essence he received from the artists from all disciplines, that he lived with, that he loved" (Speech, Journée Culture la Ville, 2019).

Ralite contributed to shaping the cultural policy of the communist party through his role in the communist newspaper *l'Humanité* and his positions in the official committees in the North of Paris, notably while he was in charge of 'the relationships with Intellectuals and Culture'. He participated in defining the forms of involvement of communist municipalities in the domain of culture (Fayet, 2011). "Ralite contributes to make culture emerge as a category of public action" (Teboul, 2004:144), not only within the communist party, but also at the national level, within the National Federation of local authorities for culture. Ralite was close to writers such as the surrealist Louis Aragon, or theatre directors and writers such as Jean Vilar and Antoine Vitez. He defended both the independence of the arts and the right and benefit for all to have access to the best works of human culture. Theatre was identified as a particularly privileged medium, and so in 1965 Ralite participated in the founding of the Theatre de la Commune in Aubervilliers. In Saint-Denis, the theatre was also seen as an important medium which had to be accessible to all, from the time of its transformation from a 'Salle des Fêtes' (built in 1902) to that of a theatre in 1960.

From a short overview of Braouezec's political positions, as provided below, one can easily grasp that he is a major figure of the political landscape, not only in Saint-Denis and Plaine Commune, but also at the metropolitan level. Today, one of the most influential politicians in the area is Patrick Braouezec, whose name comes up regularly

in this research. Born in 1950, he was teacher in Saint-Denis before becoming the Mayor (1991 – 2004). He was member of the communist party until 2010, which he left and then rejoined in 2017. Braouezec has also been an elected representative of the French National Assembly since 1993. He has been President of Plaine Commune since 2005. Since March 2018, he has been President of the National Council of Cities, which advises the state with regards to its ‘Politique de la Ville’ (area-based policy in support of derelict areas). Since July 2018, he has been President of the Surveillance Council of Société du Grand Paris. He is Vice-President of the Metropole du Grand Paris, the political administrative entity which brings together the 131 municipalities of Greater Paris. Braouezec has published numerous books and is also known for his interest in participatory democracy. As part of the political left, he was influenced by the experiences of Porto Alegre (Braouezec, 2004), and Saint-Denis hosted the European Social Forum during the time in which he was Mayor. Braouezec is one of the leading people behind the formulation of the Plaine Commune ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy. The visions he claims to have of the role of arts and culture are therefore key to understanding the intentions of the municipality. Braouezec recognizes a “political link, such as the one of a son to his father” (“filiation politique”) between himself and Jack Ralite, “all the elected officials of Plaine Commune try to be worthy of this human adventure” (Bureau, 2005). They were close and worked together during the construction of Plaine commune (Ralite, 2005), notably at the time of the construction of the Stade de France (Braouezec, 2014). On the role of culture, he says “culture in its diversity is the most unifying element, it is what assembles a local and a national society” (Braouezec, 2004:175). He notably refers to "The Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil, who became minister of the Lula government, (which) gives this magnificent definition of cultural exchange: ‘culture forges self-esteem, establishes citizenship, cements life in community, so many things that are ramparts to violence, to misery.’” (quotation from Le Monde, November 8, 2003 from Braouezec, 2004). In the recent videos presenting the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy he says:

What is common to all, we will only build it starting from culture, this is one of the main challenges we have on this territory [...] How can one build something in common, with all the stakeholders, inhabitants, employees? (Plaine Commune, 2019)

## A rich cultural offering and a network of local associations

The theatre projects that constitute my case studies do not operate in a cultural void. On the contrary, Saint-Denis is characterised by a very rich cultural offering, a large variety of events of all genres and styles, and is also home to a very dense network of NGOs and local associations.

The Foundation TransDev, which finances cultural and social projects, organised a day of reflection on its activities at the Theatre Gerard Philippe in June 2019, under the title of ‘Solidary Together’ (“solidaires ensemble”). At this event, the individual in charge of choosing the cultural projects to be financed highlighted that, although in some areas they had not received many requests for funding, it was not the case in Seine-Saint-Denis, where in fact they were receiving dozens of requests. This shows that aside from being numerous, the local associations have developed a good capacity to search for funding opportunities.

Within the variety of cultural and artistic manifestations present in the territory of Saint-Denis, and more generally of Seine-Saint-Denis (93) it is the strong association with the rap and hip hop that stands out (the area is home to the second most important hip-hop scene in the world after the US). Saint-Denis is known for being the birthplace from some of the most famous French rap bands from the 90s. The municipality has long been a supporter of popular culture, notably in the domain of music. The cultural centre called ‘La Ligne 13’ also supported the development of Rock’n’roll in the previous decades. This identity is still foundational in the rap scene, as the production of a whole album called “93 Empire” in 2018, or of a song called “Grand Paris” in 2017 testify. Interestingly in the ‘Grand Paris’ song, in which several rap artists from all departments around Paris participated, the singers explicitly take ownership of their role, and that of the banlieue, in the process of metropolitan development. As the chorus goes, “*The ‘banlieue’ influences Paris, and Paris influences the world*”. Rap and hip hop are a strong component of the local identity, perhaps particularly so because they have been recuperated and supported by the local actors in such a way as to valorise the territory.



For instance, Plaine Commune has recently begun work on the creation of a graffiti walk: the so called ‘street art avenue’<sup>23</sup> by the industrial canal.

The ‘Cultural Orientation Plan of the Municipality of Saint-Denis’ unveils the main priorities of the current cultural policy. The ongoing ‘Cultural Orientation Plan’ (2016) calls for an “Inclusive, collaborative and conscientious cultural policy” (2016:5). It inherits from this vision of arts for all and of arts as a means of creating social cohesion. It claims that cultural activities have to be accessible to all and be produced by the many: “The cultural orientation plan has given itself the objective of recognising and involving its population, in all its diversity, in its cultural activities” (2016:7). Fittingly, the first priority of the plan is that of “Cultivating Democracy”.

According to the Deputy Mayor in charge of Culture and Heritage, Sonia Pignot, the municipality wants to base the cultural policy approach on a ‘cultural rights approach’:

From now on the main question is not about accessing culture [...] the starting point for this new policy is based on the recognition of people, their richness, their intelligence, and their ability to develop their resources with others”. “This paradigm shift has significant consequences [...] it rebuilds the principles of public action, introduces new forms of participatory and inclusive governance [...] questions the content as much as the process and how it is implemented. The work must be collective and continuous”. (2016:8)

Here one can see a vision of art and culture that insists on participation, collective effort, inclusion of all influences and insistence on the process, perhaps more than the outputs themselves. These themes are found at the core of contextual and participatory art projects, which may find particular support in the area of Saint-Denis.

Beyond cultural policy, which is mostly developed either at the municipal level or by the state<sup>24</sup>, the borough of Plaine Commune has made it a priority to valorise arts and culture that is being developed on its territory. This is presented in the next section.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.tourisme-plainecommune-paris.com/decouvrir/destination-creative/street-art-et-la-rue-devient-musee/street-art> [Accessed: 19 July 2019].

<sup>24</sup> The Ministry of Culture funds activities across France.

## The Plaine Commune ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ Strategy

The ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy is the document which frames the priorities of urban development within Plaine Commune. It places arts and culture at its core, as specifically applied to the area of the Greater Paris Metropolis. A close look at its content and its genesis reveals much about the conception of the Creative City that is at play on the territory.

In the Greater Paris Metropolis, each borough defines a development strategy for its area, in conjunction with the state, as part of the metropolitan development. This is called a ‘Contract of Territorial Development’. The Plaine Commune ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy is the text of this particular contract. Its creation involved input from the state, the municipalities and the borough. The contract covers the period 2014 – 2030 and was officially signed in January 2014.

Analysing the genesis of the strategy, as well as its texts, provides an insight into the way the local authority conceives ‘Culture and Creation’, notably, how from an initial focus on creative industries, it has moved to larger conception which is mostly implemented in the field of urban development.

In 2010, a moment in which institutions started to think in detail about the Greater Paris Metropolis, the state proposed that the local elected representatives work to specialise the area as a creative industries cluster. The proposal was based on the existing creative industries that had already settled to the South of Plaine Commune, La Plaine, and which were active mostly in the domain of cinema, audio-visual activity, special effects and TV. At the time, the film director Luc Besson was setting up a huge cinema studio facility in the neighbourhood of La Plaine called ‘Cinema City’. According to Marie Bongapenka, from the communication and cultural partnerships unit of Plaine Commune, many of the elected representatives were satisfied that the area was recognised as a place for creative industries (Interview with Bongapenka, 2019).

Bongapenka highlights that it is thanks to one particular artist that the approach moved from a focus on creative industries to one that was able to recognise a larger role for artists. As she explains, at that time, Nicolas Frize a musician and artist from Saint Denis called the elected representatives to tell them that creative industries are only relevant for a few people in the area, and only in a specific neighbourhood. He asked how one might integrate the northern municipalities of Plaine Commune (Stains, Villetaneuse, Pierrefitte, that are quite far from Pleyel), and how this could be made relevant for the whole of the territory. He asked how the strong presence of artists on the territory could be valorised in another way than through industries. (Interview with Bongapenka, 2019).

Bongapenka is quite clear that the initiative came from his intervention:

It is he who started to work with cultural actors and artists from the area on how the artist is working on the city, and how he/she works on cultural issues, and also on how policies, which are not cultural as such, like road making, are in fact cultural". (Interview with Bongapenka, 2019).

When asked who welcomed his remarks, she says that there was a pre-existing willingness of the local elected representatives to listen to artists from the area, but

It was also the elected representatives from the Northern part of the territory, which said 'how are we going to work with the proposal focussed on creative industries in our municipalities?'. (Interview with Bongapenka, 2019)

In Bongapenka's account the initiative turned into the 'Mission Nuages' (Mission Clouds), which was commissioned to Frize and a specialist of cultural policies called Marie-Pierre Bouchaudy. Their objective was:

to accompany and sensibilise the services and elected officials of Plaine Commune, in the affirmation of the cultural dimension of the territory, but also to bring together and stimulate artists and cultural actors to seize metropolitan subjects"<sup>25</sup> in writing up the Territorial Development Contract.

According to Bongapenka (Interview), the main question asked to them was 'How does culture become the red line in the development of the territory?'. 'Mission Nuages' mapped the cultural places in Plaine Commune and made recommendations as to how

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<sup>25</sup> <https://arteplan.org/initiative/mission-nuages/> [Accessed: 19 July 2019].

to stimulate arts and creation in the area. The mission lasted two years. The artists contributed to writing the first calls for tenders for artists to develop such actions. One of the first was the involvement of three groups of artists (dance and theatre) in the production of a 'walkability diagnostic' of the area. After that, Plaine Commune created two job positions, including Bongapenka's job, to include artists in the framework of urban development projects. From that point on, they started working with those artists, who are working on the city, with the territory, in the frame of 'contextual arts'. Marie's mission is still to support the other services into the implementation of the strategy and to help them frame the way they can involve artists in different urban development projects they are following.

Patrick Braouezec tells another story, more focused on the role of elected representatives:

To understand the principles of this label, it is not useless to return to the origin of the approach, as it was initiated in 2009 by Christian Blanc, then Secretary of State for the Development of the Capital Region, because it illuminates the differences in approach. For Christian Blanc, the objective was to promote a 'cluster of creative industries.' In short, Plaine Commune was to be to culture and creation what Paris-Saclay was to technological innovation. This prospect did not please us. Firstly, because we wanted to claim the term innovation as well - Plaine Commune has since become part of the Innovation Arch<sup>26</sup>, created with a view to rebalancing the east and the west of the metropolitan area, by encouraging in particular methods of urban innovation. Above all, we did not recognise ourselves in the terms 'cluster' and 'industry' (Allemand, 2017).

He continues:

For my part, I considered that it was not only for its industry that our agglomeration could be considered as a territory of culture and creation. Outside the audiovisual sector, Plaine Commune has many other creative and artistic places, some of which are of national and even international importance. I'm thinking of the Fratellini Academy, the Zingaro-Bartabas Equestrian Theater, the three National Dramatic Centers [in Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers], the Saint-Denis Festival [which offers classical and world music concerts, and operas], etc. I add that many artists reside on our territory and maintain a special relationship with it: I think of the painter and sculptor Rachid Khimoune, of the slam poet Grand Corps Malade, the video artist Sylvie Blocher, etc. Not to mention all the visual artists, graphic designers, sculptors, painters,

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<sup>26</sup> <https://arcinnovation.fr> [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

choreographers etc. And also all these craftsmen who make Plaine Commune a territory of culture and creation. (Allemand, 2017).

The strategy itself mentions the role played by local elected representatives in shifting the focus of the strategy. The text suggests that Plaine Commune took the state's proposal to concentrate on creative industries seriously but then turned it into a territorial project which better reflected the political interest of its elected representatives.

From an urban development project limited to perimeters around the train stations, accompanied by the ambition to structure on the territory a 'cluster of creative and cultural industries', the partners have gradually evolved into a much broader project, covering the entire territory [...] Culture and creation have been identified as some of the main characteristics of the territory but also as a tool that has a transversal leverage power to strengthen its development. (Plaine Commune, Territorial Development Contract, 2014)

It states that, from the beginning, the territorial development project linked the objectives of creation and culture with social justice:

The objective is to act for a city that is more participatory, more united and more ecological through culture and creation [...] The agglomeration contributes to the development of the social bonds and 'living-together' through culture and creation. Plaine Commune relies on its structural cultural facilities (such as theatres, libraries, the circus school...) and emerging facilities to encourage collaborations and develop cultural projects that encourage the participation and integration of all publics. It accompanies local artistic approaches with a particular focus on urban cultures, such as hip-hop. (Plaine Commune, Territorial Development Contract, 2014)

Co-creation and participation on the part of the population is also one of the aims of the strategy:

Plaine Commune makes culture and creation a medium to develop the participation of inhabitants and citizens in projects of renewal and urban transformation. This call to the artistic dimension promotes the co-construction of the project by a better exchange, which ultimately contributes to the appropriation of places by all." (Plaine Commune, Territorial Development Contract, 2014)

In policy documents, this objective is closely connected to issues of sustainability and specifically to the implementation of AGENDA 21 the United Nations plan for sustainable development (United Nations, 1992). This recalls Kagan and Hahn's claim (2011) that inclusive Creative City strategies, would also be more sustainable.

The strategy can be considered as an alternative vision to neoliberal Creative City narratives. It clearly chooses to look beyond the creative industries. It does not propose any new flagship cultural project but rather proposes to valorise existing cultural spots, including less institutionalised ones. From its beginning the strategy was born from a debate with local artists. Finally, the strategy envisages a role for the artist that is closely tied to the idea of stimulating such figures' contribution to the 'fabric of the city'.

According to the authority the dialogue with local artists remains essential during the implementation phase. For example, Bongapenka's job includes the task of animating a network of artists, which are called upon to be in discussion with civil servants on several occasions each year. Bongapenka says that her mailing list comprises 200 addresses and about 40 artists are active (in that they come to meetings and engage in dialogue with the local authority).

The implementation of the strategy is currently organised around artistic projects that accompany specific urban development projects. The five projects currently showcased by the local authority include one of my case studies, 'The Football Pitch'. A closer look at this project will allow us to identify the potentials of this collaboration between the local authority and the artists, as well as its limitations.

Before we do this, though, we shall look at the two major infrastructure projects developed on the area, which demonstrate the scale at which the strategy can be implemented, and about the other stakeholders active in the area, who may be developing different visions of arts, culture and creation.

## Urban development in Saint-Denis: two major projects change power relations between stakeholders

Within the next 10 years, the Southern part of Saint-Denis is due to change dramatically, due to the pressure on land and the mega projects of the Paris Metropolitan Area. The scale of these development projects and their ‘metropolitan or even national’ importance implies that Plaine Commune is not the main organisation in charge of their development. This limits the possible influence of the vision of arts and culture developed in the strategy and makes space for competing ones. Developed within a tight timeframe, and by other operators, these competing notions of the Creative City, do not necessarily match that of Plaine Commune.

To date, the two main driving forces for change in the area are: the construction of the Grand Paris Express (new transport infrastructure for Greater Paris, for which the main interchange point in the North of Paris will be located in Saint-Denis), and the Olympic Games, which will entail the construction of two major infrastructure projects (the Olympic Village and the Olympic Swimming Pool) both of which will be located in the Pleyel neighbourhood or its immediate vicinity.

Grand Paris Express is the urban railway system designed to serve the Greater Paris Metropolis. It aims at remedying many issues faced due to the centralisation of the current system which is based on connections from/to Paris, and does not provide interconnections between secondary hubs within the metropolis. At its core is “a model of polycentric development”. Grand Paris Express is presented by the authorities as “the largest transport project in Europe”<sup>27</sup>. The development plan foresees the creation of four new metro lines, 200 km of new railway lines and 68 new interconnected stations. One of the main interconnection hubs of this new transport network, Gare Saint-Denis-Pleyel, also connected to the suburban railway lines (RER) is located in Saint Denis, in

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.societedugrandparis.fr/info/grand-paris-express-largest-transport-project-europe-1061> [Accessed: 25 July 2019].

the vicinity of the new infrastructure planned for the Olympic Games and of the existing Stade de France. Works on the new railway station Saint Denis Pleyel are ongoing.

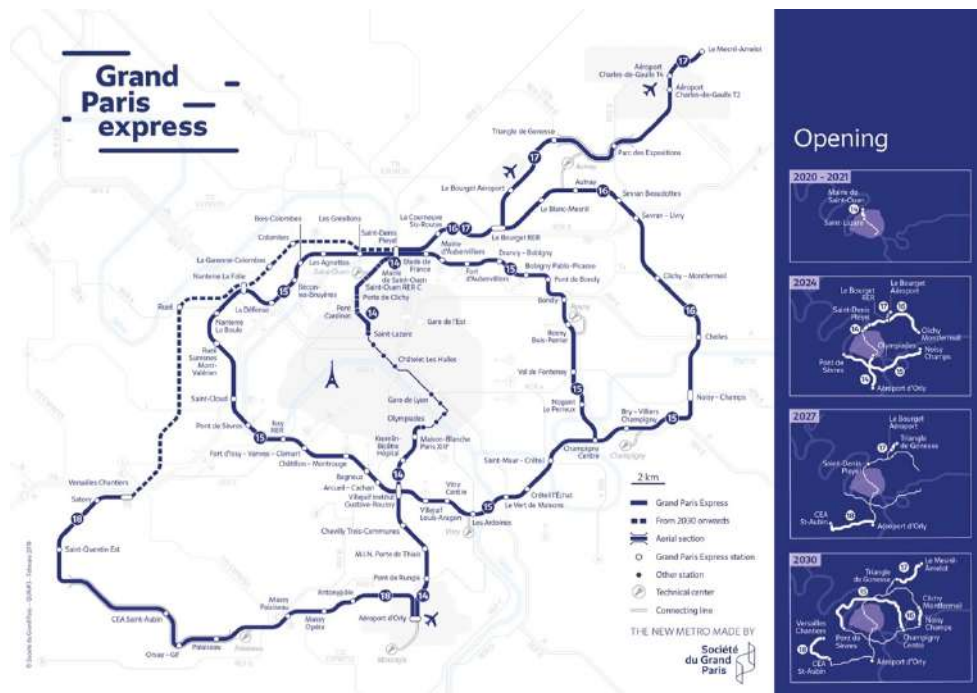
The infrastructure development is led by the Société du Grand Paris<sup>28</sup>, a public company which was created in 2010 to take charge of the development of the new transport infrastructure. Société du Grand Paris has developed its own strategy on culture and on engagement with residents along the new lines, specifically during the construction of the train lines. As a way to promote appropriation of the new transport infrastructure (and acceptance of the disturbances created by the work) a cultural strategy has been developed which is led by a curating team that was previously in charge of an artistic and cultural centre in a deprived neighbourhood of Paris (the CENTQUATRE). The strategy has been developed in parallel to that of Plaine Commune and Saint-Denis, but does not seem to have any interconnection with it.

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<sup>28</sup> Here I review very briefly the composition of the Directory of SGP in order to understand the links that exist between the SGP and Plaine Commune: Thierry Dallard is President of the executive entity. Patrick Braouezec has been President of the 'Surveillance Council' since September 2018. The Surveillance Council controls the executive body and meets three times a year. This is the decision-making entity for strategic orientation. The Surveillance Council is composed of 21 representatives, among which are 11 representatives of the state. The other members represent local authorities, the department and the region. Competences of Société du Grand Paris are defined in the law that created Greater Paris (law no: 2010-597 of 3 June 2010) The SGP is also in charge of assisting the state in building coherence between the development contracts (see section 3). It can lead urban development and construction operations.



Figure 13: Grand Paris Express, source : Société du Grand Paris



The Greater Paris Metropolis is hosting the 2024 Olympic Games. This will result in two major infrastructure projects being built on the territory of Saint-Denis. Two other existing locations (the Stade de France and the Inter-departmental sports parc- Marville) will host OG activities. Here we concentrate on the two major building sites that are located in Saint-Denis: the Olympic Village and the Olympic Swimming Pool.

The Olympic village will be located in the Pleyel neighbourhood, the location of one of our case studies. Pleyel is separated from the rest of the city of Saint-Denis by two major transportation axes, the highway on one side and the train lines on the other. At present this is a low occupation area, with a few small housing units. It hosts large employers such as EDF (the previous national electricity company), which employs 3,000 people on site. Today the neighbourhood hosts 7,200 inhabitants and over 13,000 employees.

The Olympic Village, which is also called the ‘Pleyel Bord de Seine’ redevelopment is destined to host 14,000 athletes and officials during the Games. It is built jointly on the cities of Saint-Denis, Île-Saint-Denis and Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine.

After the games, it is anticipated that the village will become a new district of the city, close to the Grand Paris Express Saint-Denis-Pleyel station. This would include 2200

units for family housing, 900 units for student housing, 131,200 m<sup>2</sup> of activities, offices and services, two hotels, 3,300 m<sup>2</sup> of shops, two school areas, with two new parks representing seven hectares of green space.

Its realization will be accompanied by the redevelopment of the banks of the Seine and a bridge linking Saint-Denis and L'Île-Saint-Denis reserved for active mobility (buses, cycles and pedestrians), but also the construction of sound protections along from the A86 motorway.”(Paris 2024 website<sup>29</sup>)

The project claims to be built with an “ambitious level of environmental requirements, particularly in terms of mobility, energy performance, water management and respect for biodiversity”.

Figure 14: Olympic Village Project, Source: Paris 2024



The actual development of the Olympic Village is not in the hands of those usually responsible for urban development in the area. The task has been delegated to an ad-hoc public enterprise, the SOLIDEO.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.paris2024.org/fr/village-olympique-paralympique-images/> [Accessed: 1 September 2019].  
Translation by author.

The Olympic Games Delivery Company SOLIDEO is a public industrial and commercial establishment (EPIC). Its statutes were fixed by decree on December 27, 2017. Its mission is to ensure the delivery of all the permanent works necessary for the organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024 and the conversion of these works and operations after the Games. To this end, SOLIDEO finances the building owners responsible for the construction of the equipment necessary for the organization of the OG 2024 and is itself responsible for the project management of some infrastructures, i.e. from the outset of the Olympic and Paralympic Village” (SOLIDEO, website)<sup>30</sup>.

Some of the characteristics of the future of the Olympic Village have been developed in cooperation with the authorities in charge of urban development in the area. Notably the Olympic Village plans are inherited from two ‘eco-quarter’ projects that had been developed by the municipalities, called Ecoquartier Fluvial and UniverSeine. (Plaine commune and Vinci Immobilier website<sup>31</sup>)

However, the introduction of a new operator dedicated to the Olympic Games on the territory of Saint-Denis creates de-facto spaces of urban development which are outside the domain of competence of the authority usually responsible (Plaine Commune). As a result, these spaces may be disconnected from its strategies.

The Olympic Swimming pool will be located in Saint-Denis on the site of Plaine Saulnier, opposite the Stade de France. The aquatic centre should consist of two facilities, one of which will be perennial, as visible in Figure 11. The major operator in charge of the development of the area around the new swimming pool, Plaine Saulnier, is the Metropole du Grand Paris.

The site is said to

allow both to host major international competitions and to respond daily to the basin deficit in the territory. It is the only equipment totally built for the Games, it carries with it the ambition to develop the practice of swimming inhabitants of the territory, and the youngest of them.” (Plaine Commune website, accessed on 5 September 2019)<sup>32</sup>

After the Games, the Aquatic Centre shall be at the heart of a larger development project

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ouvrages-olympiques.fr/notre-raison-detre/> [Accessed: 1 September 2019]. Translation by author.

<sup>31</sup> <https://plainecommune.fr/projets/grands-projets-urbains/lecoquartier-fluvial/> accessed on 5 September 2019 and Vinci Immobilier, <http://www.vinci-immobilier-entreprise-commercial.com/programme/universeine/> [Accessed: 1 September 2019]. Translation by author.

<sup>32</sup> <https://plainecommune.fr/paris2024/> [Accessed: 5 September 2019]. Translation by author.

for Plaine Saulnier. The site should host about 500 new homes, shops and business premises and other equipment.

The project claims to aim at the

development of a neighbourhood of life freed from the isolation linked to major highway and railway infrastructures. It is also the opportunity to reclaim one of the last post-industrial sites in the area and to promote the link between the Plaine Saint-Denis and downtown. A bridge will be built over the A1 and President Wilson Avenue. It will link the district of the Stade de France and the Plaine to downtown Saint-Denis. (Plaine Commune, accessed on 5 September 2019).

Plaine Commune is therefore not the major operator of development in some very important parts of its territory: The Greater Paris Express Transport system and the Olympic Games development.

Table 3, below, summarises the authorities in charge of urban development on the territory of Saint-Denis. It outlines the relationship between Plaine Commune and each separate authority. This will help with our analysis of the impact of the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy presented in the case studies. The objective is not just to give an overview of the potential for implementation of the principles of the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy, which in theory should also be implemented by the state in all development projects, but also the potential of divergences and interpretations of the strategy, and the role of each authority in the final implementation on the territory.

Table 3: Summary table of the authorities in charge of urban development on the territory of Saint-Denis, Source: own elaboration

| <b>Authority</b>   | <b>Competences</b>  | <b>Main project area</b>   | <b>Connection between Plaine Commune and the authority</b> |
|--|---|--|--|
| Saint-Denis Municipality   | Local Urban Plan – development and implementation   | All municipal area   | n/a  |
| Plaine commune   | Territorial strategy – the goal of which is to “promote the territorial project to all stakeholders in the area, as well as to neighbouring communities and external partners.”<br><br>Urban planning (steering role) | Pleyel<br><br>Landy Pleyel<br><br>Porte de Paris<br><br>Gare confluence (train station in the city centre) | synonymous   |
| Metropole du Grand Paris   | Urban development operator  | Plaine Saulnier  | Consultation and influence via elected representative      |
| Société du Grand Paris   | Urban development operator<br>(incl. own Cultural strategy)   | Gare Saint-Denis<br>Pleyel   | Influence via its surveillance council                     |
| SOLIDEO – Public enterprise in charge of the development of the Olympic Game sites | Urban development operator  | Village Olympique  | n/a  |

Plaine Commune does not have any direct competence in the field of cultural policy. Cultural policy is defined at the municipal level. Some cultural and artistic institutions receive funding in the framework of national cultural policy too (such as the theatre Gerard Philippe). Plaine Commune, like the Société du Grand Paris (The Grand Paris Express), develop cultural projects only as an element of urban development projects.

The diversity of stakeholders in charge of culture and of urban development on the territory appears as a possible issue when it comes to the implementation of the Plaine Commune 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy. If nothing else it indicates that several understandings and interpretations of the strategy's objectives are likely to be at play.

## Chapter 5: Case studies of three participatory theatre projects in Saint-Denis

In this Chapter, I will detail the three cases I have analysed as part of this PhD research, with the objective of answering my research questions. I recall them below, as applied specifically to the analysis of the artworks.

A first set of questions investigates the reality of alternative visions of the Creative City. Do such alternative visions exist? How are they influenced by political orientations? Who are they expressed by? How do they differ between stakeholders?

A second set of questions looks at how these visions are implemented. How were they implemented? What were the outcomes? What was the interplay between these different visions? What were the power relationships at play?

The third set of questions interrogates the role of participatory artworks more specifically. They aim at identifying how participation happens and what the outcomes of this participation might be. The subsequent questions are: Has the making of the artwork been participatory? What form did the participation take? How may the artwork be read by the audience? Did participation make the artwork univocal or plurivocal? Did it create consensus or dissent?

Consequently, I present the following elements for each of the case studies: an introduction to the art project; a presentation of the context specific to the project; a short section giving information on how I came across the case and how I followed the implementation of the project; a description of the implementation of the art project; a review of the process of participation, which informs the way the participants have related to the process of making the artwork; a section on the objectives of the project for the different stakeholders (I have paid attention to naming the most important stakeholders in the course of the presentation of the case study. In the ‘objectives’ section I mention only those whose expectations have shaped the implementation of the project); a review of the relation with the Creative City, to understand how the case relates to the theoretical framework of this work, namely, does the case have formal

relations to the Creative City Strategy of Plaine Commune? Or does it show another form of Creative City proposal, more in line with what was described in Chapter 2?; and a section on the outcomes of the project, as well as a brief review on the lessons to be drawn from it. The order of the presentation of these sub-sections vary slightly from one case study to another to allow a highlight on the most relevant characteristics of each case study.

Even though they all fall into the category of ‘participatory arts’, the three projects analysed here are of a very different nature in terms of their scale, objectives, funding structures and how they related to the issue of the role of arts in the city. Below I provide a brief overview of the three cases:

1. ‘The Football pitch, the Player and the Consultant’ is an urban planning consultation participatory art project, commissioned by the local authority and co-managed by a theatre collective and an innovative urban planning consultancy. The aim was to enable stakeholders’ voices to be heard in a different way, using the resources of sports and theatre, in the framework of the development of a new urban project in the Pleyel neighbourhood, close to the future Olympic Village.
2. ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ is an *in situ* theatre project, commissioned by an independent art institution and led by a theatre Troup called Hoc Memento which was set-up by two researcher-artists. The aim was to produce an ‘in-situ’ theatre play. It took place in an independently led ‘third space’ located on a brownfield site in the Southern part of Saint-Denis.
3. ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ is a theatre play produced with 25 young people, founded and led by Jean Bellorini, a director who is well-recognised in the world of public theatre. The aim was to produce a high-quality play, shown on a national theatre stage, within the main programme of the theatre featuring young people from the area. It aimed at bringing new people to practice and frequent the theatre and also to provide young people with an experience of theatre and of ‘freedom’. It took



place in Théâtre Gérard Philippe, one of the main cultural institutions of the municipality.

## The Football Pitch, the Player and the Consultant

‘The Football Pitch, the Player and the Consultant’ was a two-year long arts project mixing sport and theatre, commissioned by Plaine Commune to an artistic team. ‘The Football Pitch’ was designed to mobilise the current residents and users of the Pleyel neighbourhood to respond to the major transformations of the neighbourhood, using games and sports commentary.

### Detailed description of the project

The project was commissioned by Plaine Commune via a tender, within the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy, to a grouping of two organisations: one, an artistic collective called GONGLE, the other a cultural operator called Cuesta. I will refer to them jointly as the ‘artistic team’, since the two organisations worked closely together as a group to realise the project.

Plaine Commune’s tender described the framework of the project in the following terms:

Plaine Commune wishes to implement a co-constructed artistic and cultural project, to involve the inhabitants and users in the definition and implementation of the urban project, as full-fledged actors. This approach will feed the programming of the future district and some aspects of local life”. (La Centrale des Marchés, 2016)

Of particular note here is the fact that Plaine Commune defined the process as “co-constructed”, and that they wanted to involve residents and users of the neighbourhood “as full-fledge actors”. The final objective was to inform and help shape the urban development of the neighbourhood.

The artistic proposal, on the other hand, was a process “based on the practice of sports commentaries”. The artistic team proposed to use ‘games’, “to grasp and invent possibilities” for the Pleyel neighbourhood. Games and commentary were “supports for a collective writing that [...] would describe the neighbourhood, the people who live in it, their daily activities”. It would record “anecdotes of the past and imagine the uses and upcoming activities, to recount the neighbourhood in all its plurality”. (La Centrale des Marchés, 2016)

The project mixed several techniques, originating from theatre and sports, as well as workshops which presented a large range of activities to the participants. The public highlight of the project was a theatricalised football tournament, which took place in June 2018.

### Objectives of the local authority and of the artists

The call for proposals issued by the urban planning department of Plaine Commune asked for an “artistic and cultural approaches towards the urban projects in Pleyel and the implications for the inhabitants”.

There are 3 objectives for this artistic and cultural process:

1. To tell the story of the neighbourhood and to project oneself into the neighbourhood of tomorrow.
2. To Feed the urban project through an experimental *in situ* approach.
3. To contribute to strengthening the links between the inhabitants, the users and the actors of the district and to creating attachment to the district and the city. (La Centrale des Marchés, 2016).

The local authority was looking for an artistic *in situ* participatory project that would mobilise residents around several objectives. It was about getting residents and users to tell a story of the past of the neighbourhood, and at the same time inviting them to look at the future. It was about sourcing concrete ideas and proposals that could inform the design of the urban planning project. It was conceived to come at the very beginning of the process, at the time of the genesis of the urban development project. The second objective called the artists into the process in order to propose new ways of engaging with citizens, since the usual forms of consultation of citizens and residents are thought not to work, neither for the Local Authority (which is put in the position of defending a project rather than to listening) nor for the residents who either do not take part, or, as Pierre Hiault confirmed in an interview with me, feel frustrated by the process. The last objective was to create links between the different stakeholders and attachment to the neighbourhood.

The call was aimed at

artists, artists' collectives, plural collectives (artists, architects, designers, scenographers ...), with know-how on projects of this type. They can possibly associate skills in terms of cultural engineering and participatory democracy. The presence of one or more artists was thought as mandatory.” (La Centrale des Marchés, 2016)

According to Pierre Hiault Plaine Commune were clear that they did not want a group based around the ‘usual suspects’ of young architect collectives that frequently engage with the city by proposing temporary structures.

The first call for tender was unsuccessful and so a second call was published. It was then that GONGLE and Cuesta proposed the project ‘The Football Pitch’. GONGLE is a small artistic collective, created in 2016. The artistic director of the collective is Nil Dinc who is a trained theatre director. The other members of the team are assistants or temporary collaborators. GONGLE presents itself as specialised in theatre and social experiments. Its objective is

to rethink the functions and methods of fabrication of theatre. We wish to turn the theatre into a space of confrontation and dialogue around the activities, products and aspirations of different actors in our society. This dynamic is important to us as a way of rotating the roles of responsibility, power and spaces of representation between different groups in our society. (GONGLE, website)<sup>33</sup>

Cuesta is a cultural cooperative. It professes that it “mobilizes arts as a way of intervening on space and societies” and “carries a project of social and cultural innovation” (Cuesta, website<sup>34</sup>). According to the way they present themselves on their website, Cuesta is characterised by the great attention it plays to the context and the implementation collective approaches. The approaches they propose aim to “create new modes of investigation, action and co-production of knowledge and to renew representations” (Cuesta, website<sup>35</sup>). Alexandra Cohen and Agathe Ottavi are the two founders of the cooperative. They are supported on specific projects by interns and temporary officers.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://gongle.fr/le-groupe/> [Accessed: 22 September 2019].

<sup>34</sup> Cuesta, <https://cuesta.fr>, [Accessed: 28 September 2019].

<sup>35</sup> Cuesta, <https://cuesta.fr>, [Accessed: 28 September 2019].

The proposal of ‘The Football Pitch’ did not get unanimous support among the selecting committee. Since it was based so heavily on process and since the final outputs were not easily readable or tangible, it sounded like a risk to the local authority, notably to one of the political decision makers. In the end, though, they selected it.

‘The Football Pitch’ objectives are presented by the artistic team in the following terms on the website of the project<sup>36</sup>:

1. to collect narratives on the space and the urban development project from various stakeholders (from residents to architects, from local authority civil servants to social actors).
2. to inform the urban development project.

What the artists propose are techniques to get a plurality of narratives (rather than the story of the neighbourhood as the call for tender had initially defined) from the stakeholders and to inform about the development project. Here one can observe the move from the singular ‘story of the neighbourhood’ envisaged by the local authority to a plurality of voices. Also of note is that the artists do not promise to create bonds between the different groups.

The programme set by the local authority seemed very ambitious. This list of objectives tells us much about the scale of expectations attached to a creative project to which a relatively low budget – EUR 76,000 for two years – was allocated.

### Context

This short overview of the neighbourhood’s characteristics and of the urban development plan provide a more detailed insight on the context in which the artistic team was operating.

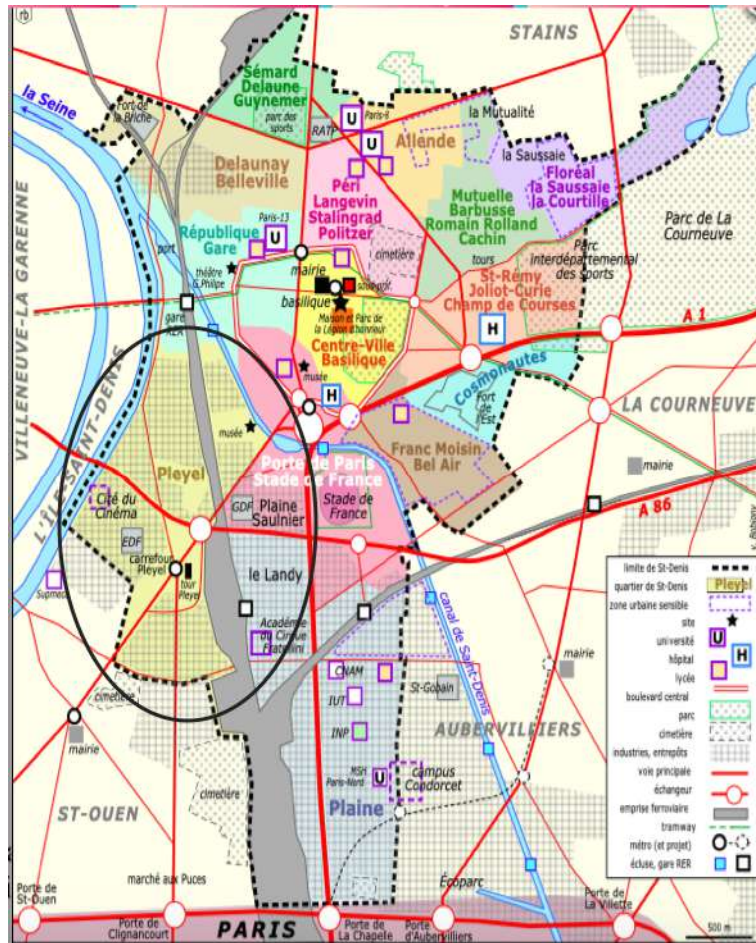
Pleyel is separated from the rest of the city of Saint-Denis by two major transportation axes, the highway on one side and the train lines on the other. At present this is a low occupation area, with a few small housing units. It hosts large employers such as EDF (the previous national electricity company), which employs 3,000 people on site. Today

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<sup>36</sup> TUMBLR, The Football Pitch, [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

the neighbourhood hosts 7,200 inhabitants and over 13,000 employees. In the map below Pleyel is represented in light yellow:

Figure 15: Map 4: Neighbourhoods of Saint-Denis



The neighbourhood is to be almost completely re-developed, with a new highway interchange, a new train station and a new development project, Pleyel lights, which will host 143,000 m<sup>2</sup> of offices, including 45 % new constructions, of which 10 % have been flagged up for the cluster ‘creation’. Saint-Denis Pleyel, a station in which four metro lines will meet, will be the most important new hub of the Grand Paris Express. It is at the centre of the new project to build a multicentred transport network. The new station will be built with the explicit aim of reducing the load on what is the main interconnection platform in Ile-de-France today, Châtelet - Les Halles. Saint-Denis Pleyel will host an estimated 250,000 users per day. The current train station plans have been designed by the Japanese star-architect Kengo Kuma. In the vicinity of the new

train station, a new neighbourhood Pleyel Lights ('Les Lumières Pleyel') is being developed. It includes the building of a new 'inhabited' bridge over the train tracks. This bridge will notably link the Olympic Village to the Stade de France. After the Olympic Games, the Olympic Village will host up to 2,400 housing units and 119,000 m<sup>2</sup> of offices. The redevelopment means that 40,000 additional inhabitants are expected to move into the area, that is to say more than five times as many as the number of current residents. It therefore has a scale way beyond the existing structure of the neighbourhood.

Figure 16 below shows the existing physical structure of the Pleyel neighbourhood

*Figure 16: Current street view in Pleyel*



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Figure 17 and Figure 18 below show the spread of the new development project and the design of the new bridge to be built in order to connect Pleyel to the neighbourhood of the 'Stade de France'.



Figure 17: redevelopment plans for the Pleyel neighbourhood, Source: Plaine Commune

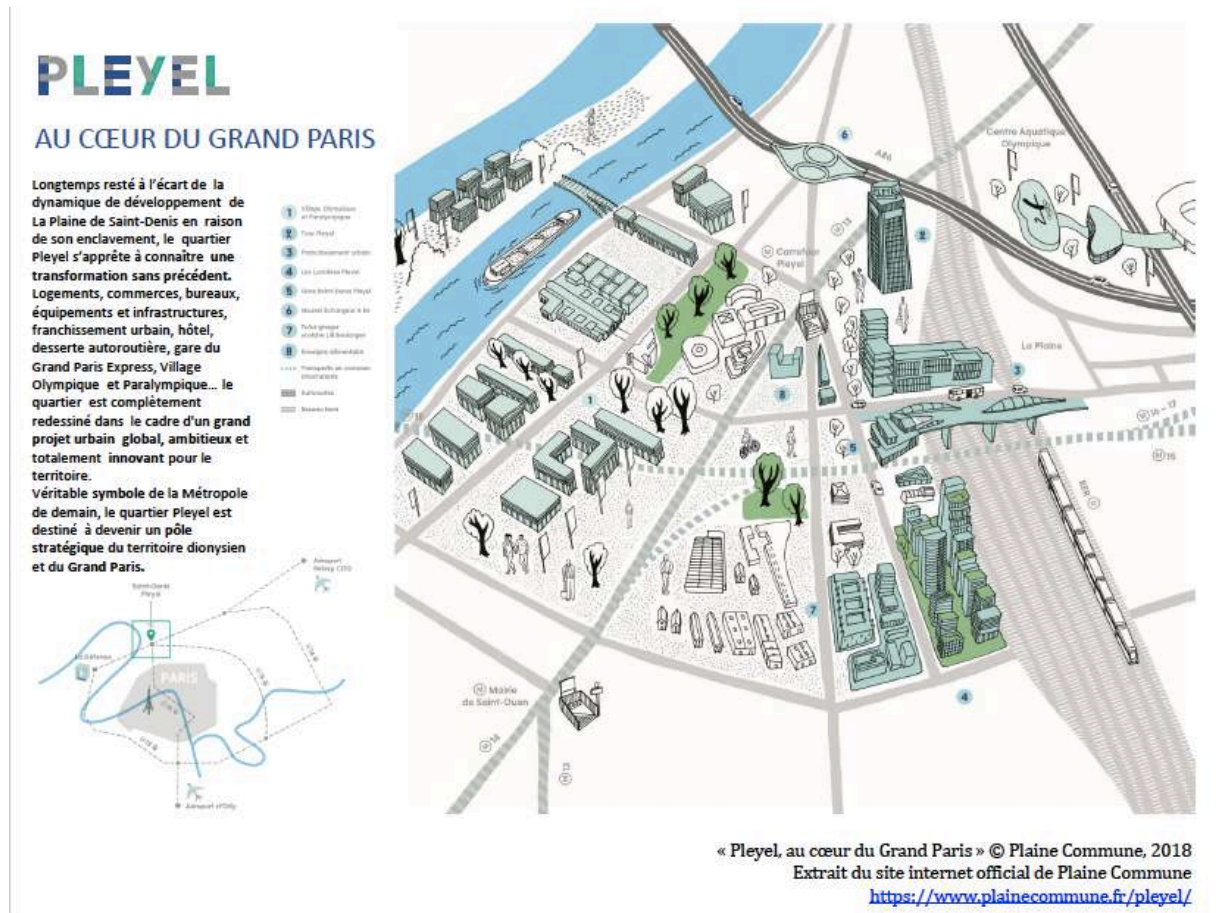


Figure 18: Les Lumières Pleyel, a new bridge over the train tracks, Source: Plaine Commune





## My insights on the project

I was put in contact with Cuesta by another organisation called ESOPA<sup>37</sup>. The first contact I had with Cuesta was in the context of a research seminar I had organised in Saint-Denis, when an employee of Cuesta, who was involved in ‘The Football Pitch’ came to present the project in September 2018 (so after all three first stages of the project had been realised). Based on our common interests, Cuesta invited me to take part in the evaluation stage of the project. From this point on, I conducted interviews with several stakeholders of the project and analysed the outputs of the project.

The people I interviewed directly related to the project were: Nil Dinc, artist-director, Alexandra Cohen, project leader at Cuesta, Pierre Hiault, Manager of the Urban Development Project at Plaine Commune, Marie Bongapenka, Manager for the implementation of the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy, and Damaly Chum, her boss. I also had several exchanges with other researchers during the evaluation workshop and exchanges, notably with Lea Donguy, a PhD student in the field of art geography who is following the work of both Cuesta and ESOPA.

## The artwork: Implementation of ‘The Football Pitch’

The whole project was conceived as a choreography, a theatre play, and a “social and theatrical experiment”, in the words of the artistic team (GONGLE website<sup>38</sup>).

The artistic project ‘The Football Pitch’ was organised in different stages. The first stage, called ‘Writing the Rules of the Game’ (Nov 2016 – Jan 2017), had the objective of building an understanding of the specificity of the place. This was preparatory work by the artistic team. During this period, the artistic team met with more than 200 local actors on the territory. In order to ensure the rootedness of the process in the neighbourhood, many of the project’s events were organised to coincide with existing

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<sup>37</sup> ESOPA means ‘et si on prenait l’air’, ‘and if we took to the air’. It is an actor specialised in ‘cultural urbanism’. It is a small consultancy, which supports local authorities in their willingness to engage with arts and artists for their urban development strategies. The structure was created by an ex-theatre Director, accompanied by two project officers and an intern. ESOPA has worked with Plaine Commune, notably to organise days of reflection on the implementation of the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy in June 2018.

<sup>38</sup> <https://gongle.fr> [Accessed: 22 September 2019].

initiatives, such as the traditional start-of-the year cake eating (*'la galette des rois'*) the neighbourhood festival, and other events organised by local associations.

The second stage, which was called *'Get trained on the Football Pitch'* (January 2017 – June 2018), consisted of 67 workshops. The purpose of these workshops was initially to collectively discover the *'field'*, then they were oriented towards the preparation of the football teams, their songs and their outfits. The *'home'* of the project was the Youth Centre<sup>39</sup>, located on one of the neighbourhood's main squares. There were two main phases, one that was focussed on listening to the stakeholders and getting feedback on the daily life of the neighbourhood and its future development. A second phase, more concerned with preparing the *'Big Encounter'* was focussed on the teams themselves, and information about the project. During stage two, phase one, the workshops proposed several types of activities. For example, there were postcard-making workshops, during which the participants were invited to comment on images, to imagine what the people could be thinking and then stick cloud-shaped post-it notes on them (like those in comic books) suggesting what the people said. Some of these suggestions were printed and distributed later on as *'designed postcards'*. Further workshops invited participants to send letters and postcards to various stakeholders such as the Mayor or – more poetically – the sun. There were several writing workshops, including one that was focussed on describing the *'limits of the neighbourhood'*. During another workshop, the team and the youngsters from the Youth Centre distributed *'table cloths'* they had previously created. The *'table cloth'* invited clients of restaurants to share internship opportunities with young people.

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<sup>39</sup> *'Antenne Jeunesse'* in French. The Youth Centre provides a space for young people (11 to 17 years old) to meet outside of school hours, and activities. The project's main home was in the centre of the Pleyel Neighbourhood, close to the metro station, on the Place des Pianos.

Figure 19: postcard making workshop. Source: TUMBLR Le terrain, Le joueur et le consultant<sup>40</sup>



During stage two, phase two, 12 ‘football teams’ were created. They represented various stakeholders in the neighbourhood. I list them below, giving their names and explaining the group of people they represented. The order is that which was used during the presentation of the teams in the final tournament.

1. ‘Public Authority’, composed of municipal employees and employees from Plaine Commune.
2. ‘Pleyel Lights’, which represented the team of a developer called ‘les Lumières Pleyel’.<sup>41</sup>
3. ‘Pleyel Neighbourhood’, a team from the Youth Centre.
4. ‘Pleyel’, another team from the Youth Centre
5. ‘Big School’ (name in English), the team of one of the primary schools in the neighbourhood (Anatole France).
6. ‘QLF’ (Only Family, translation of ‘Que La Famille’), a neighbourhood team

<sup>40</sup> TUMBLR, Le terrain, le joueur et le consultant. <https://leterrain-lejoueur-leconsultant.tumblr.com> [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

<sup>41</sup> The developer is called SOGELYM DIXENCE. Lumières Pleyel refers to a bridge development, and that of several buildings. Website: <https://www.sogelym-dixence.fr/fr/projet/les-lumieres-pleyel> [Accessed: 20 October 2019]. A description of the Pleyel Lights project is provided later in this section.

7. 'Ampère Jamais'<sup>42</sup> made-up of employees from the electricity company.
8. 'The Small Bakers' (Les Petits Boulangers), from the name of a school being built on the street of the same name.<sup>43</sup>
9. 'The Disenchanted', the Citizens' Council team.
10. 'Anniina Ja Muut', from the circus academy, Fratellini.
11. 'Barca Saint-Denis', which represented the neighbourhood of La Plaine and ex-residents of Saint-Denis, who had left the neighbourhood to go and live in other areas of the metropolitan region. This team is an existing football team, which regularly trains in the stadium Aimé-Lallement, which hosted the 'Big Encounter'.
12. 'The protectors of the Hill', this team represented a group of people living in a small relatively affluent protected street composed of semi-detached houses, the peace of which is threatened by the transformation of the highway interchange.

Each of the teams met individually with the artistic team to participate in workshops, which took place in different venues, from the Youth Centre to the Fratellini Circus Facility or simply outdoors. There were team workshops for writing songs (each team made its own song) and for preparing the team strips. There were actual trainings for the tournament, including rehearsals of songs and dances outdoors in public space. Several 'Club Houses' were created in different venues across the neighbourhood. They were decorated by big red wallpaper sheets, designed by the artistic team and were locations in which teams could meet. This phase included several press conferences (which were in fact encounters between the different teams), sport commentary workshops, and communication within the neighbourhood to other audiences by means of a very imposing poster-installation, just outside the main metro station. All the workshops were documented by texts and photos on the project blogs. These reports were regularly posted in the 'Club Houses'. As a result, access to data (curated by the artistic team) was relatively easy.

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<sup>42</sup> This is a word game combining 'Ampere', the base unit of electric current and the word never, which together sound like 'one never loses'.

<sup>43</sup> At the time the children were still having class in pre-built units, while waiting for the building to be finished. This came out in the songs they wrote.

Here is the record of one of the song making workshops (#49) of the team ‘Pleyel Neighbourhood’<sup>44</sup>:

Every day, between 16:00 and 18:00, on Place des Pianos, the Youth Centre opens, the only gathering place for young people in the neighbourhood. Accompanied by their host and coach Dabi, we meet them just before their football training. Around the table, ideas and jokes fuse. Together, they paint a living, fair and hopeful portrait of a changing neighbourhood and of its young players.

Figure 20: Workshop #49 at the Youth Centre, Writing Team Songs



Workshop #58 which was dedicated to the design and actual making of the team’s t-shirts is presented<sup>45</sup> as follows:

Today no wake up call at 6am for the Barca Saint-Denis team! It is with the family that these Dyonisians<sup>46</sup> by heart arrive this Thursday afternoon at the Académie Fratellini to paint their t-shirts. Unsurprisingly, they will be blue and white, like the t-shirts of the Antenna Barca Saint Denis, with a blazon’s shape paying tribute to the legendary Barca team.

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<sup>44</sup>TUMBLR, Le terrain, le joueur et le consultant. <https://leterrain-lejoueur-leconsultant.tumblr.com/https://leterrain-lejoueur-leconsultant.tumblr.com/post/174178766598/atelier-49-hymne-de-l%e9quipe-pleyel> [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

<sup>45</sup> TUMBLR, Le Terrain... [https://www.cjoint.com/doc/18\\_07/HGsnzGjAipW\\_180507-CR-ATELIER-58-NB-HD.pdf](https://www.cjoint.com/doc/18_07/HGsnzGjAipW_180507-CR-ATELIER-58-NB-HD.pdf) [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

<sup>46</sup> Dyonisian in this context means ‘a resident of Saint Denis’, the plural form of the noun is Dyonysians.

Figure 21: Workshop #58, Making T-shirts



*Atelier #58 - Barca Saint-Denis - Mai 2018*

The third stage was the ‘Big Encounter’<sup>47</sup> which was the highlight of the artistic project. The ‘Big Encounter’ was the moment that aimed at gathering all the people involved together. It was imagined as an artistic, sportive and festive moment. It took place in on a Saturday morning on 23 June 2018, at the period in which the neighbourhood festivities usually take place<sup>48</sup>. It was a ‘theatralised tournament’, and at the same time a celebration. A commentary was provided by various speakers.

The game played was a variation of football, but with its own rules. The name given to the tournament was ‘To Goal or not to Goal’<sup>49</sup>. Each Game lasted for 8 minutes. There were also choreographic additions to the rules. When the speaker said ‘Slow Motion’, the game had to be played in ‘slow motion’. Each time a team scored, the teams did dances to celebrate, or represent defeat. Each team had invented their own celebration and defeat dances. ‘Prediction’ was a moment during which one of the players took over the commentary: she/he became the theatre director and players were required to follow his/her orders. The sequence was written in advance by the team as a collective and includes references to the urban planning project. Questions from one team to another

<sup>47</sup> TUMBLR, Le terrain, le joueur et le consultant. [https://www.cjoint.com/doc/18\\_10/HJwm73edUiQ\\_180925-CR68VF.pdf](https://www.cjoint.com/doc/18_10/HJwm73edUiQ_180925-CR68VF.pdf), [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

<sup>48</sup> The neighbourhood ‘fête’ did not take place that year, so this is why this particular date was selected for the tournament.

<sup>49</sup> The exact title was ‘To But or not To But’; a word game on the famous ‘To be or not to be’ line from Shakespeare’s Hamlet (‘But’ in French is translated as ‘Goal’ in English).

were prepared, to be discussed on the sidelines. They also made reference to the urban project, and took the form of interrogations such as “Will you manage to reconcile neighbourhood life and metropolitan dimension?” or “What are your plans to avoid that Pleyel Tower becomes like La Plaine or La Defense?<sup>50</sup>”. Teams had also chosen songs which they dedicated to each other.

They were 10 teams participating in the tournament “like 10 points of view on the urban project, on the transformations that will take place in the Pleyel neighbourhood”<sup>51</sup>. Two teams could not be present at the tournament.

Points given on the field were both sport-related and artistic. There were winners, but each team received an award, such as the “Award for commitment”, “Award for self-organisation”, “Hospitality Award”, “Award for the Slow Motion Exercise” and the “Prediction Award”.

Figure 22: The Big Encounter, Credit : GONGLE



<sup>50</sup> La Plaine is the new business district of Saint-Denis which consists of rows of office buildings by the suburban train stations; la Défense is Paris’s regional Business District. The renovation of Pleyel Tower is based on its refurbishment as a luxury hotel.

<sup>51</sup> Nil Dinc, commentary during the Big Encounter, 23 June 2018, Recording - [https://www.duuradio.fr/mp3/La%20Grande%20Rencontre\\_180623.mp3](https://www.duuradio.fr/mp3/La%20Grande%20Rencontre_180623.mp3) [Accessed: 22 September 2019].





The fourth stage was an ‘after-game’<sup>52</sup>. The ‘after-game’ stage took place from July 2018 to December 2018. Here the artistic team worked on the evaluation of the project, inviting researchers to engage in a critical analysis of the project. I was involved in a two day long workshop. I could only attend the second day, but had done the preliminary walks and interviews in advance of the workshop. During the workshop the researchers were to write on the spot texts that were planned to be published in a final publication. The workshop

brought together researchers from different disciplines to ask them to shed light on what had been produced, by mobilizing their theoretical resources and their own references [...] The second day was envisaged as a writing workshop, with the goal of each researcher being to produce a text during the day, from her/his point of view, on the project. This corpus of texts is there to help clarify the purpose of the project and what has been done. The productions resulting from the workshop are intended to be published within a wider editorial project bringing together the productions and ‘lessons’ collected during the project. (Cuesta, unpublished document, 2018).

The researchers gathered for the workshop included people from various academic fields: ecology, dance, art, geography, theatre studies, geography and sociology.

There were several outputs, some of which were used as tools within the art project rather than stand-alone outputs:

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<sup>52</sup> In French, the name ‘La troisième mi-temps’ refers to the third part of the game, during which the players usually go to the pub to celebrate victory or recover from a defeat.



- Sound postcards<sup>53</sup>, which recorded comments made by participants during previous workshops, at the occasion of a collective walk. They give a sound snapshot of specific locations in Pleyel.
- 34 Postcards<sup>54</sup>, which present areas and moments of life in the neighbourhood and that made things and spaces speak,. 14 were created at the project's launch by the artistic team, and a further 20, in the course of the project, with residents and employees from the Pleyel area. They were designed by the project's main designer.

Figure 23: Postcard, Disagreements



### Disagreements

*"I love the landscape",*

*"I don't like it too much"*

*"I agree with the blond lady"*

- Minutes of all workshops and meetings, available online, which have been gathered into a document nicknamed *'The Thesis'* by the artistic team, mostly on account of its length. It also includes extensive photo-documentation.
- The recording of the Big Encounter, which recorded the commentaries during the meeting
- The *'Book of Songs'*, which gathered all the team songs in a designed, printed format

<sup>53</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/user-443668747/sets/cartes-postales-sonores-1-telechargement-ouvert/s-0mOzp> [Accessed: 22 September 2019].

<sup>54</sup> <https://leterrain-lejoueur-leconsultant.tumblr.com/tagged/cartespostales> [Accessed: 22 September 2019].

## Participants and forms of participation

According to the artistic team, there were about 100 people involved directly within the 'teams' and as supporters during the 'Big Encounter'. The artistic team met another 200 stakeholders on the territory. There were many residents involved in the project: young people and children, parents and educators from the Youth Centre and surrounding schools, members of the resident's council (composed of about 30 people), members of the citizen's mobilising against the new highway interchange development ('The Defenders of the Hill team'). From the local authority, the people involved directly in the project were the urban planners in charge of the neighbourhood's development, Pierre Hiault and Benoit Quinsart, as well as the team in charge of the implementation of the strategy, Valentine Roy and Marie Bongapenka. Their director Damaly Chum is also very involved in the implementation of the strategy. The municipality of Saint-Denis was also directly involved in the project. The Mayor was represented at several events and municipal employees took part in both the workshops and in teams. The involvement of the developers remained limited. The 'Pleyel Lights' team, composed of urbanists and architects, took part in the artistic process. The actual team participating to the process was small (three people). The main 'users' (the term 'users' here designates people who work in Pleyel but do not live in the area) involved were a very small team of people working for the main electricity company (three people). According to the artistic team it proved very difficult to mobilise the company employees. Their team was led by a few people who were already looking for opportunities to play football in the neighbourhood during their lunch break. Important stakeholders in the neighbourhood were notably absent during the duration of the project: The main absentees were some big developers involved in the urban development of the area. They may have been part of the group of people informed about the project, but were not directly involved. These are: the Société du Grand Paris (The Grand Paris Express) and SOLIDEO (The Olympic Village). Finally, several people were indirectly involved in the project, such as those who would have received, seen or read communication about the project, either in the Club Houses, in the streets, by means of posters and postcards, as well as the table clothes in restaurants, social

media or word of mouth. Beyond the direct audience in Saint-Denis, the project was presented to urban planners, developers and other artists during a workshop at the Venice Biennale of Architecture 2018. It was also presented during the public meeting 'Culture la Ville', which was organised in October 2019.

The forms of involvement were multiple, from participation in one of the numerous workshops to active participation in the teams and the final tournament. The theatre director and the artistic team curated the whole process. They proposed the rules of the game and the dynamics of the tournament. However, there were several spaces for co-construction, lead by voices and and by mobilising the body (a specificity arising from the use of theatrical techniques or techniques from performance arts). The project enabled a plurality of voices to be expressed as well as facilitating the exchange of reflections about the urban development project. The 'Book of Songs' demonstrates 12 narratives about the neighbourhood. The numerous workshop reports, sound postcards and postcards are full of comments and ideas about the neighbourhood, its daily life, ideas and concerns about its future. The project seems to have captured a multiplicity of voices, to have created spaces for reflection by residents and young people on the development project. The project also created several different mediums so that the 'voices' of the different parties could be expressed and listened to in unusual formats. The workshop reports, stuck to the walls in the Club Houses, and certainly consulted by the public authority representatives, record and present fragments of discussions and quotes, though not in a comprehensive or administrative manner. Changing body positions allowed new forms of participation and exchanges between participants. One of the characteristics of performance art is that it mobilises the body. In a meeting room, body movements are strictly controlled. This also impacts on the way people talk to each other. In theatre bodies have to change, and are often used in unusual ways. As a result hierarchical positions may be transformed. Pierre Hiault, the employee in charge of the project on behalf of Plaine Commune, highlighted to me that the displacement and physical commitment asked to take part in the process, such as the need for instance to sit on the floor in a sports facility, in sports outfits at equal footing with the youngsters

from the local animation centre, enabled him to hear and listen to voices that he would not have been able to hear otherwise.

The projects allowed participants to become the main speakers. The technique of ‘commentary’ created occasions for speakers and the audience to swap roles. The press conferences were one of these occasions during which the members of the audience became the speaker, and the speaker became a member of the audience. This changes the hierarchy inherent in the question of who occupies the stage. In a ‘classic’ consultation meeting about a development project, the public authorities team and the developer present the project on stage – or in a separate area of the room – while the residents would sit in the ‘audience space’ to comment and discuss from there. Here, the urban development project was discussed in many different settings and on many occasions while those who occupied the stage changed. During the press conference each team was at an equal footing with the representatives of the public authority, whether they were children or the employees from big companies.

The use of commentary also blurred the boundaries between groups and de-personalised messages. For instance, at the ‘Big Encounter’, when one of the teams did not have enough team members present, a player from another team was able to read the team song.

## Outcomes

Here I provide a short review of the outcomes of the project with regards to its objectives.

The project aimed at involving ‘unusual suspects’. It managed to involve a greater variety of residents than usual urban planning consultation processes but had limited success in involving the developers and people working in the neighbourhood.

One of the considerations behind the willingness of the Local Authority to reach out to ‘unusual suspects’ of public concertation via an artistic project, was that of reaching out to people who would represent the diversity of inhabitants and residents of the area, beyond the middle-aged, educated (often white) participants that one would usually meet in the urban planning consultation exercise. The local authority, in veiled words,

was interested in involving people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This was captured particularly by their request that they also wanted to reach people whose language skills in French would not be perfect. During my exchanges with the artists I did bring up the question of diversity, asking questions about the composition of the group. There are no statistics on the project's direct participants, in terms of age and diversity of origins, but the artists insisted that there within the group of 100 direct participants there were people from various backgrounds, age and socio-economic status, a statement that can be, at least informally, verified by reading the workshop reports. This seemed to be confirmed by other participants during evaluation workshops; During the mid-term evaluation workshop in May 2017 one of the participants from Plaine Commune said "I know that this project brought an inter-generational mix". (Cuesta, 2018 :210) The project allowed participants to listen to each other differently. I have already mentioned how the project officer, Pierre Hiault, had felt he got to listen to other stakeholders in a different way. This is confirmed by other stakeholders, who also mention this effect.

One teacher stated it in the following terms:

I participated in the workshop and one of the things that particularly pleased me was that I was able to see pupils completely different from the picture that they carry in high school. I was very happy to share that moment with them, and to see them serene, zen, able to express themselves clearly and curious, which I did not doubt was possible. I quickly hurried to the staff room to report it. (Cuesta, 2018 :210)

Hiault highlights some new elements he took onboard from the process, in terms of understanding of the territory, such as the significance of the Pleyel Tower (considered originally as an outdated asbestos filled tower) for its inhabitants, many of which mentioned it as a landmark of the area. Participants in the workshops said:

I'm against (destroying the Tower) because it is our emblem, when the young take pictures, there is always the tower in the background, when my children were young when we were coming back from the countryside, they saw the tower, they used to say "We are at home".

Another reports: "I can tell you that in Portugal people know the Pleyel tower. (Cuesta, 2018 :112)

Hiault also mentions that, in the short term, the local authorities would be more attentive to the expectations of the resident population during the urban transformation instead of only looking at the final output of the urban project. "What amenities during the development work? And when it'll be finished: how old will our children be?" (Team

song Anatole France, 2018:336) said one of the songs. Hiault emphasised that the message was heard.

The project created several occasions for the residents to meet with the public authorities and with the developers. This was also one of the purposes of the 'Big Encounter'. As one of the commentators on the day put it:

1 minute may be enough for Pleyel Lights to score. I have the impression that the reinforcement of Pleyel's youth has helped Pleyel Lights to raise its level of play, it may be interesting for the future [...] the Pleyel Lights team says 'do not hesitate to come to us to talk', we recognize them in their yellow t-shirts, they want to discuss the project they are putting in place behind the rails. Where and when can one talk to them? Today, during this tournament. (Big Encounter, Commentaries, 18 June 2018).

This was a direct invitation to the people present to take the opportunity to speak directly to the team, which may, on other occasions, be more difficult to reach. It also expressed the difficulty for the participants to have a say on the actual development project and the feeling that the developer's team was difficult to reach.

Several participants in the mid-term evaluation workshops highlighted that the project animated the neighbourhood and created spaces for people to speak to each other, beyond the urban development project issues.

This project allowed people to meet. Before, people said there was no sociability, that nothing was happening, that there were no meetings between each other. This project has allowed the liberation of speech. Even though participative instances had been created, these do not always allow people to speak, to give one's point from view. (Cuesta, 2018:210)

Another participant reported: "I live and work in Saint-Denis but I did not know the neighbourhood at all. This has allowed me to discover the neighbourhood" (Cuesta, 2018:210).

The feedback given by the children on the spot, after the workshops at the Youth Centre, were, on the whole, positive. They used words related to happiness and fun to describe what they felt about the project. Many pointed to the postcard making workshop as one of the highlights.

Beyond the effects mentioned above, the artists built-in practices that created not only collaboration but also allowed dissent to be expressed. The game enabled confrontation and criticism to be heard. The teams took the project as an opportunity to pass-on messages to each other. This can be seen in the team songs, that deal directly with the urban project, but also in the songs the teams dedicated<sup>55</sup> to one other. Some of the songs are directly critical of the project, such as the song '*Let's unite, join us*' with its lyrics:

The project proposed by the public authority team destroys classified landscaped areas. The hubbub of the world, chaotic traffic, our eyes are tired of all of this [...] let's get together, join us, we will change the terms of the debate! (Team Defenders of the Hill, Cuesta, 2018:342)

They also expressed cynicism: "how long will we wait for metro line 16? We will see the winners and the losers [...] buildings, a football pitch, barbecues, hotels. Tomorrow, no more problems, we have villas' (Team song, Pleyel, Cuesta, 2018:384).

Some songs also expressed positive comments: "there will be dust but for a good cause. Solid, pleasant, beneficial for children" (team song, Anatole France, 2018:336). Positive comments were pointed to by the civil servants as an unusual outcome of consultation processes. Even the local authority representatives felt free to express their doubts and hopes: "working today to go towards tomorrow, without being overtaken [...] do we have the means to realise our ambitions? Associating, consulting and building bridges. Are we all there for this new challenge?" (team song, Public Authority, 2018:333).

Confrontation also came up, in a more playful and indirect way, in the songs the teams 'dedicated' to each other during the 'Big Encounter'. For instance, the 'Public Authority Team' dedicated 'The Eye of the Tiger' by *Survivor* (1982) to the 'Defenders of the Hill' team. If one reads the lyrics, it seems to be a clear reference to their conflictual positions:

It's the eye of the tiger, it's the thrill of the fight  
Ris'n' up to the challenge of our rival  
And the last known survivor stalks his prey in the night  
And he's watchin' us all with the eye of the tiger  
Face to face, out in the heat  
Hangin' tough, stayin' hungry

They stack the odds 'till we take to the street

For the kill with the skill to survive

Ironically, 'The Disenchanted' dedicated the song '*Should I stay or Should I go?*' by *The Clash* (1982) to the 'Pleyel Lights' team. The titles say everything. There may be several interpretations for the choice of this song. It could be an invitation for the 'Pleyel Lights' team to leave, or it could voice worries about gentrification and the fact that the new developments do raise questions about the ability for the current residents to stay in the neighbourhood that is to become 'of metropolitan relevance' according to the urban planning projects.

Since it allowed forms of organisation to express dissent, Nil Dinç felt that the project may have acted as a space for formation of political ideas, by creating groups that identify and articulate ideas, which are not in line with that of the local authority, or with her own views.

The artistic project 'The Football Pitch' has become a new medium for the confrontation of ideas. According to Nil Dinç, the main artist-curator, she took on a role as 'mediator' between the different teams. Dinç highlights that being engaged in playful artistic projects allowed ideas to be expressed and to be listened to differently by all parties. The teams take part in the game on equal footing and the dynamics of power are transgressed at least temporarily due to the change of setting and the different use of the participants' bodies.

### Learning, limitation and obstacles

There was a disconnection, in terms of timing, between the urban planning study and the artistic process, due to the failure to recruit an artistic team at the end of the first call for tender. There was, in the end, little space for the needs expressed by residents and users to be taken into consideration in the preliminary urban development study. In our discussions, the artistic team did mention on several occasions that they were doubtful of how much of the process would actually get through to the final development. The local authority insists that the documentation of the project will be attached to the documents passed on to the final teams realising the urban projects. Its actual take-up



will depend on the interest, intentions and obstacles met by these teams. Pierre Hiault, who as previously stated was a very enthusiastic participant in the artistic process, has since moved on to another position within Plaine Commune and is no longer involved in the follow up of the project.

From the very beginning the deadline imposed by the Olympic Games and the scale of the redevelopment have severely constrained the potential of the artistic project. The communication channels with the developers of the large projects that will ultimately influence the future of the neighbourhood seem to have been virtually absent. In the ‘Big Encounter’ commentaries, Nil Dinc highlighted that:

The Public Authority team has written on its t-shirts ‘are we all there?’ Who would be absent? The Société du Grand Paris, which deals with the development of the Pleyel train-station, but also the state, which deals with the changes on the highway, and Paris 2024, which implements the Olympic village between Pleyel and Saint-Denis. Plaine Commune and the city of Saint-Denis are sewing a patchwork between the different projects and we see that on projects of such magnitude it is difficult to mobilise the actors and create a cohesion and readability. (18 June 2018)

The Olympic Games development was not confirmed at the beginning of the project in 2016, even if it had already been planned-for as part of the bid. The Olympic Committee’s decision to allocate the Games to Paris dates from July 2017; that is, in the middle of the project. The deadlines for actually delivering the development in time for 2024 are short. Construction deadlines were such that there was little time for teams working on such a big development to engage in a long-term artistic process.

It seems to me that there was little the artists - and even Plaine Commune - could have done to influence this process, which involved powerful and complex actors such as the state, the Olympic Games Committee and a major developer. The final project *Pleyel Lights*, as presented on the website of the developer, looks closer to a ‘neoliberal’ Creative City development with expensive ‘beautiful’ landmarks and buildings, than a space in which alternative processes will be taken into consideration. Simulations made by the developers show an imagined city that does not cater for the existing population of Saint-Denis but which is directed towards attracting a new population (mostly young

and white). Further contact with the developers would be needed to explore that particular issue in more depth.

The reference to 'different' Creative City concepts, presented by Plaine Commune in policy documents in the context of this project, seems to have had limited impact on the actual content of the urban development. From the available public documents, Pleyel Lights appears to be a quite classical neoliberal revenue-making development, in which culture is treated as a cool and beautiful accessory. The project includes two glass 'bubbles', one of which is to be used for cultural and artistic events. A group of artistic institutions and collectives is developing an artistic project for the space, yet no reference is made to the process of co-creation or co-construction, despite it being at the core of the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy.

This case study confirms that different visions of the Creative City are at play and that stakeholders do not have the same power or influence over major urban development projects. The pressure of the Olympic Games deadlines, and the involvement of powerful and complex stakeholders such as the state (which is concerned with the Grand Paris Express and the development of the new train station), make this particular artistic project one of secondary importance. The limited impact of the participatory process on urban development here remains an issue and the legacy and usefulness must be thought through in the long term.

Within Plaine Commune, there were several obstacles to making the artistic project a full component of the urban development project. Lack of political commitment is one of them. According to the artists one elected representative came to the 'Big Encounter' but they did not stay for long, nor did they seem to listen to the participants. The relationship with and involvement of other stakeholders is also a key issue. It may have been possible to involve the developers and state actors in a more profound manner. The low budget allocated to the project was another limitation as was the question of the instrumentalisation of artists. In this instance despite low financial return, the project allowed the curator to pursue her own artistic research, so she accepted the terms of the contract.

Finally, the involvement of the artists was inevitably limited in time, due to the contract period of two years. In this time, the curation and animation of the project was largely left to them (even if they benefitted from the organisational back-up of Plaine Commune in terms of access to facilities and use of the local authority contact book). Once the artistic team had finished the project, they would leave the neighbourhood. What next? What happens after they leave? One might well ask. Will the channels for discussion survive or will they die? It did not seem to me that the local authority had adequately thought through the ‘continuation’ of the process.

### Conclusions of the case study ‘The Football Pitch’

Of my three case studies, ‘The Football Pitch’ is the only one that was directly linked to Plaine Commune’s ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy. It is one of the first projects they commissioned as the implementation of the strategy, and the only one in Saint-Denis. It is now presented as one of Plaine Commune’s five ‘flagship projects’ and was discussed as part of the day of reflection on the role of arts in ‘making the city’, organised in early October 2019, ‘Culture La Ville’.

The willingness of local authority planners to change the way they plan cities in the future may be one of the most interesting prerequisites and outcomes of ‘The Football Pitch’ and of the experiment as part of ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ implementation. With ‘The Football Pitch’ the local administration took a risk. It was process-based and left no physical trace – no new artistic space to promote, no new public space installation, no major street level activity. The most interesting outcomes have been intangible and difficult to measure: participants from the local authority have mentioned that it changed the way they were now leading urban project development processes, that it gave them the feeling “for once” to be really in touch with the area, and to be able to listen to the people. They felt that the process gave “meaning and humanity” to the planning process. The local authority has tried to address the difficulty of transferring such experience from one person to another and from one project to another. The civil servants involved in the project have made several presentations to

their peers to share their learning. The local authority has a team dedicated to the transversal implementation of the strategy and organises regular sectoral training. The objective is to reach out beyond the civil servants who are the most inclined to change their own practices. Plaine Commune has, after this experience, changed and adapted the way it issues calls targeted to artists. The local authority has started a collective reflection process on these issues, that led it to organise a workshop in the Architecture Biennale in Venice in 2018, which gathered artists, developers, promoters and local authority representatives.

In this case study, the actual impact of the artistic process on the urban development plan remains uncertain and the local politicians and most powerful actors, such as the state, have been relatively absent. In many ways, these pitfalls are similar to those of a more traditional ‘resident consultation’ and participation on urban planning developments. However, the case study also provides an example of how involving artists can change the dynamics of listening within a given area, can disrupt the relations of power – at least temporarily – and can have a strong impact on how civil servants approach the practice of urban planning. This example has shown how art can provide the seeds of innovation, and how artists can act as mediators between stakeholders.

## Montjoie! Saint-Denis!

### Detailed description of the project

‘Montjoie! Saint Denis!’ is the title of a participatory theatre production led by the artist collective, Hoc Memento.

The group introduces itself as:

an artistic collective bringing together theatre artists, visual artists and researchers around ‘in situ’ theatre productions. It is specialised in performing theatrical performances in vacant spaces in urban areas (according to the principle of ‘in situ’ creation). (Hoc Memento, Facebook page<sup>56</sup>)

Hoc Memento “creates ephemeral collectives to artistically live these abandoned places” (Hoc Memento, Facebook page<sup>57</sup>). The collective is mostly composed of two people, Louise Roux, actress and dramaturge and Frederico Nepomuceno, theatre director. Both of them are also researchers and teachers in the theatre department at the University Paris 8<sup>58</sup>. The collective is involved in research-creation and they question “the possibility of art to transform the world and try to think these transformations”. Mains d’Oeuvre, an independent cultural centre, based close by in Saint-Ouen, invited the collective to propose a play in the context of a temporary “co-constructed and co-managed ecological cultural centre”<sup>59</sup> on a brownfield site called ‘Espace Imaginaire’. The project began in January 2018 and finished in June 2019.

‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ has two characteristics that make it a relevant case study:

1. The project is a participative theatre production, which engages with the social dimension of the place it inhabits. Its objective is to mix different groups: We create ephemeral collectives to artistically live these abandoned places. We form mixed groups [...] we bring together amateurs from the local population, students, researchers, and invited artists”. The audience itself plays an active role in the play. The artist is not only seen as a creative subject, but also as a

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<sup>56</sup> Hoc Memento, <https://www.facebook.com/hocmemento/> [Accessed: 3 September 2019].

<sup>57</sup> Hoc Memento, <https://www.facebook.com/hocmemento/>, [Accessed: 3 September 2019].

<sup>58</sup> Paris 8 is the University located in Saint-Denis. It is based to the North of Saint-Denis, quite far from La Plaine.

<sup>59</sup> Mélanie Gaillard, during the day of research on theatre and space, 5 June 2019.

“transmitter”, a “sewer of relationships with other artists, other social dimensions and cultures” (Mélanie Gaillard, 5 June 2019, translated by author)

2. It is directly engaged with the urban environment and the ‘making of the city’. The play itself is conceived as a way of inhabiting and narrating the city, “The neighbourhood of Montjoie becomes the protagonist of the theatre play [...] The artistic residence proposed does not last only for the duration of a play. It is a new life that takes the city” (Hoc Momento, 2018:9)<sup>60</sup>

‘Monjoie! Saint-Denis!’ was very different from ‘The Football Pitch’ and the ‘Ephemeral Troup’, in that it represented a small production with a very low budget. The conditions of production and diffusion were much more precarious. The budget was around EUR 12,000. The artists were largely unpaid. The participants were volunteers<sup>61</sup>.

### Context

The project took place in the context of the temporary occupation of an unused brownfield area. ‘Espace Imaginaire’<sup>62</sup> is a 5,000m<sup>2</sup> industrial site in the neighbourhoods of La Plaine. ‘Espace Imaginaire’ defines itself as a “Third Space”<sup>63</sup>. It was launched in 2016 as a temporary space, initially for 2 years. The site was occupied and built with 80% of materials collected in the neighbourhood. ‘Espace Imaginaire’ is located a few streets away from the new area around the metro station Front Populaire and the new University campus, Condorcet. The area is part of a neighbourhood defined for ‘priority action’, in French urban policy jargon means one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the area. It is located between the south of La Plaine, a gentrified area surrounding the metro station, and the poorer north of the neighbourhood, which is more linked to the Stade de France. According to mobility maps of the neighbourhood that ‘Espace Imaginaire’ created together with local residents, the divide between the two areas of the neighbourhood is clear. The brownfield area is in the middle of a kind

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<sup>60</sup> Residence report by HOC Momento Jan-July 2018, p.9.

<sup>61</sup> Some small financial help was provided to some participants and some catering offered at the end of the rehearsal.

<sup>62</sup> “With the idea that all that can be imagined can become real”, according to Mélanie Gaillard.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Tiers-lieu’ in French.

of empty “buffer area”<sup>64</sup>. According to the background analysis made by ‘Espace Imaginaire’, there is also little in terms of cultural offering in the neighbourhood<sup>65</sup>.

Figure 24: ‘Espace Imaginaire’, June 2019, Source:  
<http://imaginaireetjardin.blogspot.com/2019/06/lespace-imaginaire-un-espace.html>



‘Espace Imaginaire’ started with the support of the municipality of Saint-Denis, which made the space available and selected a cultural operator to animate it through a call for tender. The municipality gave a small financial dotation of EUR 14,000 to help cover the set-up costs. The space hosts several types of activities “economic, social, ecological and cultural”. There are “beehives, a small hairsalon, an auto-managed daycentre for welcoming migrants, as well as artist residences and a canteen”. (Mélanie Gaillard, 5 June 2018) In June 2019, there were about 53 co-managers, of which 30 were actively involved.

Behind this space, there is another key actor of Greater Paris cultural life, called Mains d’Oeuvre. Mains d’Oeuvre is an independent arts centre, based in Saint-Ouen which was founded in 2001. It is one of the pioneers in France in terms of third space independent art venues. Its productions have a good reputation in the art world. In the

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<sup>64</sup> Melanie Gaillard, 5 June 2019, quoted.

<sup>65</sup> I got similar feedback from residents who participated in the workshop on the Creative City which I organised in the neighbourhood library.

field of music in particular, it has helped some artists emerge that have gone on to become famous (Beauvallais, Marella, 2019)<sup>66</sup>. Mains d'Oeuvre also participated in the creation of 'Espace Imaginaire', notably by financing a part-time coordinator job (Mélanie Gaillard), for the first two and a half<sup>67</sup> years of the project, and by recruiting young people doing civic volunteering.

Within its first three years of activity 'Espace Imaginaire' hosted about 15 artist residencies and 46 public events. The Hoc Memento residency was quite informal. It opened the possibility for the artists to put together artistic projects in the space. It offered the possibility to access one of the 'containers' on site to store material and find refuge on rainy days. It provided access to the local network of associations the collective has built. For its scenography, Hoc Memento used the structures built on 'Espace Imaginaire'. Mélanie Gaillard, the coordinator of 'Espace Imaginaire', was also working as project manager in the department of 'arts and society' for Mains d'Oeuvre. It was she who wrote the first funding request to the municipality for 'Montjoie! Saint Denis!'.

My own experience of the space is one of a space that offers precarious conditions. A few structures have been built. They are called 'containers' by the artists of Hoc Memento. These units offer relative protection from the rain for indoor activities. The containers offer a relatively large amount of space and are heated thanks to mobile electric heaters. There is access to water. On rainy days, however, water leaks inside from holes in the roof. There is also one inhabited caravan, which hosts the only permanent resident, and a roofed workshop to repair bikes. The area is fenced-off and there are two entrance doors. In my experience – and that of Hoc Memento - the space is mostly useable when the weather is dry. It is more convenient during summer than during winter.

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<sup>66</sup> Beauvallais, Marella, Libération, Expulsion de Mains d'Oeuvres à Saint-Ouen: un immense gâchis, 8 October 2019, [https://next.liberation.fr/culture/2019/10/08/expulsion-de-mains-d-oeuvres-a-saint-ouen-un-immense-gachis\\_1756276](https://next.liberation.fr/culture/2019/10/08/expulsion-de-mains-d-oeuvres-a-saint-ouen-un-immense-gachis_1756276) (accessed 8 September 2019).

<sup>67</sup> After the first two and a half years Main d'Oeuvre and Espace Imaginaire split. Mélanie Gaillard left Mains d'Oeuvre. According to Louise Roux from Hoc Memento, there had been little investment on the part of the rest of the team of Mains d'Oeuvre with regards to 'Espace Imaginaire'.



## My insight in the project

I met Frederico Nepomuceno, one of the two members of the Franco-Brazilian collective, thanks to a workshop I organised in Saint-Denis in September 2018 on the theme of co-creation. He contacted me, saying he was interested in the topic and asked if he could join our group of researchers. I invited him to introduce the project to our group. Nepomuceno came with another member of the collective, Louise Roux. At the time, they told us more about the project they had been working on in Brazil in Barra do Pirai<sup>68</sup>, that of an *in situ* creation of a theatre play in an abandoned train station. In Saint-Denis, Hoc Momento was facing new challenges which they then introduced to us.

I did not follow the first and second stages of the project, which had started before I met the members of Hoc Momento. I followed it from its third stage on. In the autumn 2018, just after I met them, Hoc Momento was preparing a re-staging of the play. I attended two rehearsals and one of the four performances of the play given in the autumn. I also met Louise Roux and Frederico Nepomuceno for an interview on the 'Espace Imaginaire' with the two of them and one local resident, who was also taking part in the play. In the spring of 2019, rehearsals started again and a new version of the play was presented to the public in June 2019. I attended one of the three performances of the play.

After each show I had the opportunity to exchange with the actors and the audience as people gathered to have a drink outside or get warmer in the container. I went on several other occasions to 'Espace Imaginaire'. to observe the activity in the space, and also twice to meet with Mélanie Gaillard. Hoc Momento gave me access to their research papers on Barra do Tirai and to the report they wrote at the end of the initial residency. I met Louise Roux for a final interview in October 2019.

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<sup>68</sup> Presentation of the project available online : <https://www.univ-paris8.fr/A-Barra-do-Pirai-au-Bresil-la-gare-reinventee>

## The art work

‘Montjoie! Saint Denis!’ is a collaborative process of co-creation of an ‘in-situ’ theatre play.

Hoc Momento presents the project as both a theatre and an educational project. According to Hoc Momento the project aims at “getting the population and institutions to look at the Montjoie neighbourhood and at its potentialities” (Hoc Momento, 2018:6). through collaborative creation. Second, the project aims at “de-compartmentalizing the institutions of the same territory, at bringing together participants from different social backgrounds, at promoting cultural democratization and education through theatrical art” (Hoc Momento, 2018:4). Hoc Momento’s approach is really influenced by the French theatre Context. They want to participate in the process of ‘cultural democratisation’. Mains d’Oeuvre on its website<sup>69</sup> say that Hoc Momento placed the focus on the idea of “theatralising the city” and were attracted by the promise to involve local residents. From the side of the institutions, the limited funds that were made available came from the Youth department, signifying that the project was conceived as a form of artistic action that offered activities for young people in the field of arts.

The project started with a first stage of exploration of the neighbourhood from January to March 2018. It mixed research into the neighbourhood, exploratory walks, using methods inspired by the Situationist ‘urban drifts’ (see Chapter 2), and improvisations that were designed to nourish the dramaturgy. Nepomuceno and Roux reached out to their seminar groups at the University, a total of 60 students, and involved them in the project. This first exploratory stage revealed the importance of Saint-Denis’s history and the significance of key landmarks such as the Basilica and the Stadium of France.

The second stage took place between March and June 2018. A more restricted group of actors was composed following the issue of a call for participants, distributed on flyers across the neighbourhood. The group rehearsed every weekend for 3 months in order to create the play. The process involved a mix of improvisation and the use of a text, written by Roux. The actors were fully involved in the process and welcome to propose

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<sup>69</sup> <https://www.mainsdoeuvres.org/Hoc-Momento.html> [Accessed: 3 October 2019].

ideas and give feedback. There was an extremely convivial and playful atmosphere. At the end of this stage, in June 2018, there were six performances of the play.

A third stage was organised around a repeat run of play in October 2018. Between these two sets of performances the actors involved changed. Roux and Nepomuceno report that it was difficult to remobilise after the summer, notably because students had entered a new dynamic with new projects, or had moved, and so on.

After the winter 2018-2019 the fourth and final stage of the project began. Hoc Momento organised a new session of work on the play. This time they planned for a lighter commitment on the part of the participants. The rehearsals were spread across just one month and four week-ends, with four hours of work each day of the weekend. Three new performances took place in June 2019. The final performance of the play took place within the context of the annual festival of the neighbourhood, 'Crusade on the Plain', on 22 June 2019, in front of a crowd of 200 people.

In October 2019, Hoc Momento organised a photo exhibition, responding to an invitation by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (House of Human Sciences), one of the research institutions present on the territory.

The text of the play 'Montjoie! Saint-Denis' is grounded in the history of the place. The title of the project is composed of the name of the neighbourhood but is also a direct historic reference to the medieval roots of the name. The cry "Montjoie-Saint-Denis" was the battle cry of the Kingdom of France during the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was used during the times of the crusades. It subsequently became one of the slogans of the Kingdom of France. In my opinion this play may be seen as a conscious attempt to reclaim this history. Today the only (other) organisation using it as its name is an extreme-right wing choir of men.

Saint-Denis is one of the main historical figures referenced in the play. The bodies of the Kings and Queens are excavated during the action. Both of these are a reference to the past of Saint-Denis. After Charlemagne decided to be buried there in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Saint-Denis Basilica was the burial place of most of the Kings and Queens of

France.<sup>70</sup> According to legend the Basilica's location was chosen by Saint-Denis himself. Saint-Denis was the first bishop of Paris. He had been tortured and killed by non-Christian groups (the gaulois). The legend tells the story of how, after his head was cut off on the hill of Montmartre, Saint-Denis stood up, took his head, and carried it a distance of about seven kilometres to the location that is now the seat of the Saint-Denis Basilica.

Figure 25: Saint Denis, Sculpture from the front of Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris



The play mixes history and contemporary references. It tells the story of the cancellation of the Olympic Games by the head of the Olympic Committee Organisation. One of the main characters, called Denis Fertangué, has a name very similar to that of Tony Estanguet, the President of the organisation committee for the 2024 Olympic Games. During construction work on the Olympic Sites, the workers accidentally wake up the old Kings and Queens of France who naturally ask who the monarch is. Denis is the new self-proclaimed King. After his encounter with the Kings and Queens of France, however, he has a moment of doubt and decides, in the middle of a press conference, to cancel the Olympic Games. Instead of the Olympic Games Denis proposes a huge collective dinner, a buffet and a collective deliberation on what to do with the money. At first this is supported by the cheers of the crowd and the situation is quickly inverted. However, Denis refuses to make decisions in the name of the people and insists on them

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<sup>70</sup> 42 kings, 32 queens and 63 princes and princesses were buried in the Basilica.

deciding collaboratively after a debate. He is soon disowned by the crowd, which cannot decide on what to do and is not interested in debating further. Without realising it, Denis becomes what will be the main piece of the buffet. He is sacrificed. At the play's close, he picks up his head and walks off.

I saw two versions of the play, one in October 2018 and one in June 2019. Although there were several differences between the two versions in terms of the scenography and other elements, the main aspects of the plot remained the same.

Figure 26: 'Montjoie! Saint-Denis!', June 2019, Credit : Hoc Memento



The shows took place outdoors on the brownfield site and used elements of the existing structures built on the space<sup>71</sup>. In the first version, for instance, one of the characters was placed on the roof of one of the containers at the beginning of the performance. In the second version of the show, one of the structures used for the press conference scene

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<sup>71</sup> Some elements of structure were also built on-site by the collective, with the assistance of the residents of 'Espace Imaginaire'.

had disappeared, so it was set-up in a different area of the brownfield site. For the most recent version of the show, a big empty square-shaped structure which had been brought-in for another project, was used as an element in the play.

There was no entrance fee to attend the play. The actors had promoted the work by going around the neighbourhood in costumes, standing at the doors of the schools and going to the youth centres. The first time I attended there were a significant number of local resident families who came to see the play, mostly consisting of children and mothers. The audience was composed of a mix of friends and relations of Hoc Momento and of students and local residents. The second time I watched the play it was raining, so the audience was mostly composed of friends and acquaintances. Three groups of children from surrounding primary schools were supposed to come as part of their after-school activities however their participation was cancelled because of the poor weather conditions.

The *in situ* theatre technique Hoc Momento uses proposes an ‘itinerant dramaturgy’. It works to immerse the spectators within the play. They “become part of this moving scenography” (interview with Louise Roux, 2018). There is no physical delimitation between the actors and the audience, all are at the same level on the ground. The action moves from one scene to another, from one location to another and the spectators follow the action, placing themselves on the ground where it pleases them. There is often one main centre of attention to be drawn to, but this is not always the case. Sometimes the actors are in several locations and the audience has to choose which side it goes close to, and therefore which character she or he will pay more attention too. Some of the scenes are designed in a way in which the actors mix up with the audience, making the audience actually part of the scene, part of the represented crowd for instance. These actors are dressed up in ‘normal clothes’, meaning that they wear contemporary clothing and could be part of the audience. This decision is made with the objective of allowing the audience to step in and modify the scenography. The first time I attended the show, Denis walked in at the end alone in order to get to the point where he would rest in peace. The children, most probably touched by this torso-naked man walking in the cold

alone after having been disowned by his people, got close to the actor, gave him their hands and accompanied him gently to his destination. It was a very beautiful moment, totally unexpected by the dramaturg and the theatre director. Recalling this scene, Louise Roux told me that “the children changed the end of the show [...] they made the ending” and that “creation in public space allows such action to happen”. On 22 June 2019 the space was crowded for the first time, which, according to Roux, established the perfect conditions for the play. The people were sitting on structures that actors needed to use as part of the play, forcing them to invent ways to make the public move.

Figure 27: ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ Children give a hand to Denis, credit: Hoc Memento



### Local support and networking

Most of the support Hoc Memento received was very local, at the neighbourhood level. Several local NGOs participated in supporting the project. The association ‘Live Memory of La Plaine’ helped with the discussion on the past history of the city. The association ‘Arts Waste’ (Déchets d’art) lent material for the scenography, the local



NGO ‘Dust’<sup>72</sup> facilitated two workshops for the creation of lanterns for the show, without remuneration.

Schools and the local Youth Centre collaborated with Hoc Momento, bringing children and young people to the shows and to the lantern production workshops. A few residents were directly involved in the play, two in the first version as presented in June and October 2018 and one in the second version of the play, presented in June 2019. Residents were mostly involved as an audience or for the scenography and the construction of elements of décor.

The Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (MSH) also supported ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ MSH is a research institution, which has been located in Saint-Denis, in La Plaine, since 2001. It is supported by the national research centre (CNRS) and the Universities Paris 8 and Paris 13. MSH Paris Nord works on its rootedness in its territory, notably by collaborating with its multiple stakeholders. It has long-term partnerships with the cities of Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers, with Plaine Commune and the Seine-Saint-Denis Department. The MSH awarded Hoc Momento a small grant (EUR 1500) that allowed access to the space for research workshops, the organisation of a photo exhibition and the provision of catering to the actors after rehearsals and shows.

## Participation

The creation process was participative in many ways. Although the final text was composed and structured by Louise Roux, the participants fed both the research and the building of the content, via improvisations during the rehearsals, and even – within a strict framework – during the show. The actors were also invited to come up with ideas and proposals for the scenography. The décor was also built in a participatory way, people could come and bring-in ideas, objects, materials, and even come to build some of the artefacts that would be used during the play, such as the lanterns.

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<sup>72</sup> Les poussières: [www.lespoussieres.com](http://www.lespoussieres.com), based in the vicinity in Aubervilliers.



The audience participates. Improvisation happens because the spectators are standing; they are on the stage and one cannot know how they will act, “it’s destabilising and creative” as Frederico Nepomuceno put it to me. The audience makes a real difference on how the play evolves. This is true in theatre in general, but even more so when the audience is on the same ground as the actors and free to choose where they stand and even to step in at points. Since access to the show was free and all rehearsals and shows were open air, some children and local residents attended the performances several times. Roux reported to me that she considers them “experts of the performance”, they knew it and felt in a position to comment on its evolution. She felt it was an interesting and unexpected form of participation.

With regard to social mix and the numbers of participants, in September 2018, Nepomuceno and Roux reported some frustration. They found out that the availability and willingness of local residents to engage in such a project seemed difficult in Saint-Denis, a territory that according to Roux is “saturated with offers from NGOs”. People were not as ready as they had been in Brazil to engage in an unpaid time-demanding process. Rehearsals were taking place every weekend for three months. Roux highlighted for instance that if the migrants present in the space were happy to give a hand they were also – rightly in their opinion – expecting to receive some money or formal contractual relations. Nepomuceno and Roux’s own availability was more limited than it had been while they were staying in Barra do Pirai in Brazil. There they were able to stay for three months in a row without any other commitments. In Saint-Denis, they only came to the space during weekends, and sometimes with students in the context of a class.

According to Roux there was a “very small number of very active participants” (interview with Louise Roux, 2019). in the first stage of the project. She reported that there were about 16 participants on top of them, so 18 people as a whole, within which about ten were students from Paris 8, three were professionals, one resident who was a retired actor-amateur, one high school student, and one musician from the project in Brazil who had travelled at his own cost but was hosted by Nepomuceno. Roux reported

that there was a bigger group that helped with scenography. She explained that it was difficult to keep up the momentum and to keep a stable group involved in the long term.

It's very difficult because when one forms a group at the time of the creation, the participants are really motivated, when it's time to re-start after a while, not to create but to go deeper into the topic, it is less rewarding and therefore more difficult to stimulate people. After the summer, it was not the same dynamic, not the same people available. There is a small core of students, which stays, but others have gone on to different activities. (Interview with Louise Roux, 2019). Since participation is at the core of their project, Louise reports that they asked themselves "how could they reach more people? How could they communicate to them in new ways" and "how could they create a greater social mix?"

In the fourth stage of their project, for a new start in the spring 2019, Hoc Momento opened workshops for children to help build the décor. They say they realised that children really liked the play, despite the fact that it had not been created for children.

In order to adapt to people's rhythm in Saint-Denis, Hoc Momento made an attempt to make the commitment on the participants lighter. They decided to propose rehearsals for just four week-ends in a row. Nepomuceno, who is very attached to the idea of a strong commitment, told me "it's not the way I like to work, but I need to adapt, so I am open" (Nepomuceno, 2019). Proposing real participation in the project despite a lighter time commitment was also an issue for Hoc Momento. It was really important for them not to misuse participants, not to offer them just token roles in the play. As a result, most of the actors in this new version of the play were semi-professional actors, friends and acquaintances of the members of Hoc Momento, who had no specific preliminary relationships with the neighbourhood.

The impact of the project built up with time and experience. In the first round of creation, the involvement of the local community was limited to a few people within the creation process. The local population came in primarily as an audience. In the second round, the artists changed their practice to offer a project that fitted better with the resident's lifestyles; they managed to have a few more people take part to the play, and also to have more people take part in the creation of the scenography and the décor. Finally, the

engagement with the local community continued with a new performance of the project, which involves educational institutions. The play is finished now, but a collaboration with a high school in the neighbourhood has been set up and Hoc Momento have been commissioned to organise workshops and create with the students within the grounds of the high school.

### Relation to the City and to the Creative City Policy

Unlike ‘The Football Pitch’, ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ had no initial relation to Plaine Commune or to the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy, beyond its location in a space made available for temporary use. The project was supported with a small grant from the municipality under the ‘socio-education action in deprived neighbourhoods’ budget (Contrat de Ville, 2015) from the ‘Youth’ department to support the theatre project, within the framework of the support to socio-cultural activities (Contrat de Ville, 2015). Hoc Momento met the Director of Culture of Saint-Denis, but have not received any funding from the Culture department itself.

The connection with the strategy was made at a later stage. From the start of its residency, Hoc Momento – as well as ‘Espace Imaginaire’ - were supported by the local neighbourhood house (‘Maison du quartier’), and by the elected representative of the municipality, Martin Rault Le Gunehec. His role was to follow the issues related to the neighbourhood of La Plaine. The neighbourhood unit of the municipality services, and notably the monthly professional encounters it organises, notably in accessing the local networks of associations and the education institutions, provided good access to other associations and organisations within the neighbourhood. Le Gunehec did come to attend the first performance of the play, which he enjoyed. In September 2019, Le Gunehec proposed that Hoc Momento perform the play as part of a professional encounter of Plaine Commune on the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy, which took place on 23 November 2019.

The project could be described as an artist-led endeavour that engages very directly with the physical and social context of the city. The artists use creation to change the city. This is not part of a municipality strategy. The artists engage with the city and its people with the objective of changing it via the production of a collaborative piece of art. This also differs from community arts in that the idea is not to celebrate and stimulate everyone's creativity regardless of the quality of the output, but to mobilise people within a creative process with the objective of creating a high quality piece of art. The process and the play interact with the 'site' and its people in order to bring change to it. The change is mostly ephemeral (during the duration of the play) and aesthetic. The artists do claim they have a role in changing the city and ask the city to recognise that role as an artistic one. The artists tried to get funding from the Culture department of the municipality and to link up with recognised cultural institutions, such as Theatre Gerard Philippe, but this did not lead to anything.

Montjoie! Saint-Deins! was hosted in a cultural space that was created with the support of the municipality; a third space, the objective of which was to lighten up the neighbourhood and give some life to a deserted brownfield area<sup>73</sup>. Considering the context of the neighbourhood, the risk of instrumentalisation of artists is more linked to the space, than to the actual project. The municipality supported the creation of the third space as a way to animate the neighbourhood, to participate in the re-valorisation of the neighbourhood, and to bring an acceptable occupation to a brownfield site that had been left vacant. The occupation of brownfield areas for artistic activities is one of the proposals within the strategy 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy and was one of the key priorities for the period 2014-2018 (2016:224) .

### Learning and conclusions of the case study

The artists do have an opinion on how to use creativity to 'make the city'. They have developed an aesthetic and practical approach to 'changing the city'. Their action is limited in time, ephemeral in the sense that it mostly happens during the play. A less

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<sup>73</sup> Nepomuceno and Roux told me that at the beginning of their project there were conflicts about the occupation of the space relating to the presence of dogs.

tangible impact of their action to the ‘making of the city’ may be linked to the way the ‘Espace Imaginaire’ has been inhabited and poeticised, the way the local residents see and envisage the place, the memories they have created in the place and the way they may have appropriated the history of Saint-Denis. Although every child who went to school in Saint-Denis will have gone at least once to visit the Basilica, seeing and hearing the Kings and Queens of France as characters of a play may create different memories than those caused by seeing some tombs. In the ‘Espace Imaginaire’ the Kings and Queens of France are there, real, among the audience.

With regards to their own objectives, Hoc Momento were able to build the creation collectively. They managed to involve a few participants for whom the impact was considered to have been very high, notably for the one high school student who participated to the two versions of the play (outside of this context this individual experiences quite serious family issues). Roux highlighted that, with such projects, the changes are qualitative, on just a few people, rather than quantitative. She was also happy with the way that Hoc Momento was able to ground itself within the territory and of the project’s late inclusion within the work of Plaine Commune as part of the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy.

Returning to the theoretical framework on participatory arts (outlined in Chapter 2), this case study confirms a new form of engagement with the play’s participants. It also demonstrates an approach to the relation between art and politics that is grounded in the theories of the 70s and which owes much to ideas like those of Jacques Rancière.

The play is ambiguous, it does not provide a story of the territory, a single narrative or understanding of the issues at stake. The plot of the play does not tell the story of the neighbourhood, does not directly give a voice to the residents, as documentary theatre might do. At the same time the plot has been constructed based on inspirations from the past and the possible future of the real place. The story is a bit strange, and even after watching the play several times I could not totally understand it. I engaged with beautiful scenes rather than with a linear a story, the ellipses in-between the scenes are left vacant

for the audience to build their own understanding, and their own reflection on the matters presented. There is the historic background with the Kings and the Queens, whose presence on the territory is actually revived during the play. There is the background of the Olympic Games. The play does not give answers but raises questions. The play is an open process with undefined results. In its form it is open to being changed by the audience. It is both a process and an output, always in the making, always ready for transformation.

The artists have an explicit political reading of the issues at stake in the territory. Roux, for example, sees the Olympic Games as the manifestation of neoliberal policies. That is why the play poses the questions such as: ‘would it be a good idea to cancel them?’ Then there is the question of power and of deliberative democracy, ‘When does it work? When does it not work?’.

With regards to its relation with the Creative City, the main learning from the process was that in order to have an impact, even to be able to achieve their own goals and process, artists need to use local networks of organisations, but not only. In this case, they also needed the institutions. During the process it appeared that the most efficient way of engaging participants in a demanding process – to achieve a certain numerical representation of people - was to go through the education system (students and later high school students). Even though the plays were free in order to build up the audience in a relatively unknown new brownfield area, Hoc Momento had to go through the institutional structures already in place, such as the Youth Centre and the Neighbourhood House. This collaboration with institutions does not mean inclusion in the ‘map’ of actions that are undertaken by Plaine Commune. The connection is done at the municipal, rather than at the borough level.

## The Ephemeral Troup

### Detailed description of the project

‘The Ephemeral Troup’ was a one-year long project, set up by Jean Bellorini, the Director of the Théâtre Gérard Philippe (TGP). 25 young people, recruited on the basis of their motivations rather than on their theatre skills, were directed by the professional team of the theatre for the creation of a production which was presented in June, on the main stage. The group was composed of a mix of local residents and young people from the Ile de France region between the ages of 11 and 25-years old. The show was included in the theatre’s regular programme. It was simultaneously a professional creation and an educational programme for amateurs. According to Bellorini it was one of the key pieces of his work within the TGP. It was one of many activities that have attempted to create long-lasting bonds between the theatre and the territory, to make the theatre a welcoming place for the residents.

Figure 28: Ephemeral Troup, Mai 2019. Photo produced by the TGP



## Context

The TGP is situated in the centre of Saint-Denis at the end of one of the main streets, the Rue de la République, which extends from the Basilica and the town hall. It is equidistant from the metro station of the City Centre (Saint-Denis-Basilique) and the RER train station Saint-Denis. The TGP is a national theatre (Centre Dramatique National). This means that part of its budget comes from the state, the department and the municipality. The history of the theatre and the ‘mission’ that is expected from it is typical of the politics attached to the theatres located around Paris and other major French cities. It puts a lot of emphasis on the role of the theatre to give access to a large number of people to culture (‘cultural democracy’).

The TGP was created as a municipal facility, which included a theatre room, in 1902. From its start it has been a ‘popular theatre’, which sold cheap tickets at prices that were adapted to the spending-power of the local workers. The location has hosted many types of performance over the years: from cinema to sports galas to political meetings. The building became a theatre at the end of the 1940s, but the quality of the infrastructure was poor, and major renovation works were needed. It was at the beginning of the 1960s that the space was restored as a theatre thanks to the commitment of one of the elected representatives of the municipality, René Benhamou, “who want[ed] to make of the theatre, with the municipal library, the core of the municipal cultural policy of Saint-Denis” (Miguette, Labrunie, 2016:40). The first Director of the restored theatre in the 1960s was Jacques Roussillon, who predicted, at the beginning of his work that, within four years “the municipal theatre would have become a familiar place for the population” (Miguette, Labrunie, 2016:51). This was very much within the zeitgeist of French cultural decentralisation. In Saint-Denis, from the 60s onwards, each Director has come with their own vision of the territory. One very strong objective remains however: that of bringing-in the people of Saint-Denis, of making the theatre a place open to the people. Today ticket prices remain low and a special effort is made to build strong links with local associations, notably in the most deprived areas. The theatre organises several activities ‘outside of the walls’ in some of the areas of Saint-Denis.



The theatre remains at the core of the municipal cultural policy. The recent Mayors of Saint-Denis such as Patrick Braouezec, Didier Paillard and Laurent Russier have been close to the directors of the theatre, as well as regular visitors and spectators. In 2013, the Mayor Didier Paillard put it quite clearly, that “city and theatre creation mutually feed one other” (Miguette, Labrunie, 2016:263).

### My insight into the project

Getting to follow the work of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ was not easy. It took quite a lot of time to get in touch with the relevant people at TGP. Finally I managed to get in contact thanks to the help of François Lorin, Director of Public Relations at the theatre, who was happy to present one of their key programmes, one that was focussed on the collaborative creation of new signposting to the theatre within the city of Saint-Denis, which I will refer to in this work as the ‘street signposting project’ (this project was extremely interesting and I did get to analyse it, but it was more directly an educational project and not a theatre creation project). Lorin put me in contact with his colleague Delphine Bradier, in charge of the pedagogical programmes of the TGP and who was one of the coordinators behind ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ that year. By the time contact was made, and Bradier had the time to confirm with the Director of the Theatre, Jean Bellorini, that he was open to me working on the process, the activities of the Troup were already well under way. At the beginning of my work, I presented my research project to the young people of the Troup and explained how I would intervene in their process. I chose to concentrate on observation and off-stage discussions as well as on interviews both with the young actors and with the team that was directing the process: Jean Bellorini, Delphine Bradier, the assistant of the director on this production, and the playwright, Pauline Sales. I also took part in public events organised around the work of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, such as the first reading of the play in a local bookshop, and in moments for socialising after these public moments. I was therefore identified as a ‘companion’ of the Troup, even if at the end of the process I realised that some of the actors remained a bit uncertain of who I was. I had access to the information gathered by the theatre during the recruitment of the young people, in terms of their motivation,

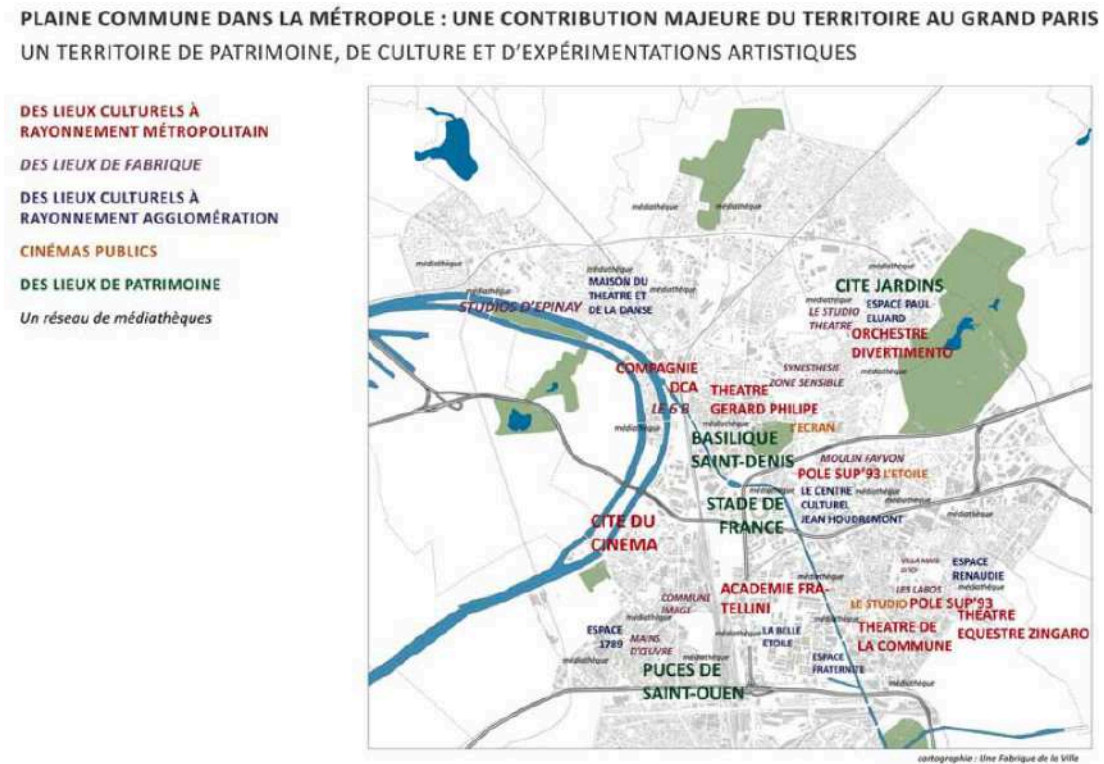
experience of theatre and background. I attended some of the rehearsals and then two performances of the play as an observer. There were two occasions during which the young actors spoke in public about their experience, once after the reading in the bookshop, the second time after one of the performances.

#### Context: TGP, one of the leading cultural institutions of Saint-Denis

TGP is one of the leading cultural institutions of Saint-Denis. Of all the workshops I have created alongside residents it is clear that this is the institution that is on everyone's map. It is one of the key elements of the cultural policy and key institutions of Plaine Commune. Its history is that of a theatre, which has attempted to be both connected to its territory and attractive for the metropolitan area.

On the map below (Figure 29) one can see the key cultural institutions included in the strategy (p. 14). The TGP appears as one of the nine "Cultural spaces of metropolitan relevance" for Plaine Commune, as signalled by the red colour.

Figure 29: Main Cultural Infrastructures, Plaine Commune Strategy, p14



The TGP is mentioned in the Plaine Commune ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy: “The challenge of cultural democratization is all the more important. The cultural offering of the territory is rich and diverse but often badly-appropriated by the residents, especially from one city to another.” (CDT, 2014: 243)

In the strategy one finds mention of the creation of “mobile scenes”, which would be “a place of art, culture, conviviality, debate, which moves from one neighbourhood to another, from one city to another.” (CDT, 2014: 243) Such mobile scenes have been conceived as part of the ‘street signposts project’, led by the TGP. They were presented in the TGP, in the presence of the Mayor of the City in October 2019.

The role of existing infrastructure on the territory is also mentioned as a “tool to boost social cohesion and individual and collective emancipation” (CDT, 2014: 90). Plaine Commune assures that it will “encourage collaborations and regular exchanges between social structures and cultural facilities of the territory, to develop ambitious cultural projects, promoting the participation of all publics.” (CDT, 2014: 90).

As we can see the educational activities undertaken by the theatre take place in the context of a municipal and a borough policy which is very focussed on developing links with the territory, and in stimulating participation. Several of these elements are visible within the project of 'The Ephemeral Troup'. Although this particular project has not been officially tagged as element of the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy, it is clear that Bellorini's concern with 'social orientation' was one of the elements that made his application to the position successful when he stepped up to the director role in 2014 (Miguette and Labrunie, 2016:267).

### The artwork: The artistic process and the play

According to Bellorini, 'The Ephemeral Troup' is at the core of his project for the TGP, it is "its heart" (interview with Bradier, 2019). The total budget of the project is EUR 55,000, excluding salaries of the permanent employees of the TGP, such as the coordinator Delphine Bradier and the Theatre Director himself.

For the 2018-2019 session, which I followed, the work began in October 2018, with the selection of the young actors. The process included four hour long workshops every Saturday during the school year and an intense week of creation in May 2019, shortly before the performances in June 2019. The first stage of the project was mostly led by the Bellorini's artistic assistant, Melody Amy-Wallet and by Delphine Bradier. The writer Pauline Sales also attended. Bellorini, who had been fully leading the work in the previous years, was unable to attend the Saturday workshops as frequently as in the past. I noticed, however, that he had been very attentive to the young people involved, and that they felt close to him. It was clear to me that the young people considered Bellorini to be the one directing the process. It was Bellorini who led the intensive working week in May 2019 and made the strongest scenography proposals, bringing in, for instance, the idea of using table tennis tables and balls, which were an extension of the first lines of the play, in which a mother speaks about a her child's participation in that form of sporting competition. At the same time this was, as I saw it, a physical representation of the games the different characters were involved in.

It was Bellorini who came up with the idea of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ in the first place. The idea was influenced by his experience with the project ‘Adolescence et Territoire’ (Teenage and Territory), led by Odeon Theatre, where he had been the Director for a year. The project was one oriented towards art creation<sup>74</sup>, “the idea was not to train actors, nor to transform the project into a school, but really to have ‘amateurs’, people who love theatre, [...] and make a creation in a professional framework” (Interview with Bradier, 2019). The first edition of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ project took place in 2014-2015. The 2018-2019 edition is the fourth edition. There was no ‘Ephemeral Troup’ *per se* in 2017-2018 but a project with a similar mix of young amateurs, who worked on Shakespeare’s sonnets.

The selection of the young people takes place at the beginning of the year, in October, during a weekend, a few days after the information session, which is held in a local bookshop. The TGP promotes the project within their network, their ‘relays’ on the territory (professors, neighbourhood facilities, NGOs, etc) throughout the year, and also during short-term educational workshops, when they are in places in which they feel that they could reach out to people who would not have heard about the project via other means. The information is also disseminated through the activities of the project’s previous participants. There is deliberately little information online, in order “*not to attract more Parisians to the project*” (Interview with Bradier, 2019).

In 2018-2019, the TGP recruited 26 young people. The group was composed of a mix of local residents and ‘Parisians’<sup>75</sup>, of complete amateurs and young people who had already been acting, of very young teenagers and of young adults. The young people paid a subscription fee of EUR 100 for the whole year. The participants were allowed to take part in the project two years in a row maximum, so the Troup is not entirely new each year. One individual dropped out for family reasons at the beginning of the process. The selection committee was composed of Jean Bellorini, Delphine Bradier and Pauline

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<sup>74</sup> as opposed to theatre classes for instance.

<sup>75</sup> more well-off people who have more opportunities to do theatre or who may already be in theatre training.

Sales. They saw 50 people and so had to choose half of these. Bradier told me how difficult it was for them to make a decision, since they meet the individuals very briefly and since they weren't judging on specific skills but on motivation. She explained that it was more a matter of an encounter between them and the young candidate. Bradier did report how the 'geographical origins criteria' (Interview with Bradier, 2019) came into the decision-making process. In a couple of cases, for example, Bellorini had a preference for someone, but , taking into consideration characteristics such as socio-economic and geographical origins, and the absence of previous theatre experience, she insisted that another participant be selected. The 2018-19 group is diverse in terms of age (ranging from 11 to 21 years old) and geographical origins (12 are from Saint-Denis, six are from other municipalities in Seine-Saint-Denis, five are Parisians and two are from other 'boroughs' of Greater Paris). Their previous experience with theatre and cultural activities also diverge a lot: 13 of the young people had never taken part in a previous project with Jean Bellorini (i.e. a previous 'Ephemeral Troup' or the Shakespeare sonnet sessions), four of them had never practiced theatre before entering the 2018 'Ephemeral Troup', two had a very limited experience (a two-week-long initiation, or workshops at primary schools for instance). The number of people new to theatre rises to 11 in total if one includes those whose previous experience was actually within the same project at TGP. five young people did not practice any other cultural activity. One 18-year old participant reported that he had never seen a play. Only four participants envisaged a career in theatre at the beginning of the process. One participant had a physical and mental handicap. The group was not equal in terms of gender: there were 7 young men and 18 young women.

The beginning of the Troup's work started with a relatively long phase of Saturday afternoon workshops, designed to familiarise the young people with being on the stage as a group. According to the participants this included a lot of "walking" (Actor's public presentation, Simon, June 2018). The workshops did not provide a technique, the idea of the artistic team is not to train actors, but to help young people to make a play.

When I started to attend rehearsals, the young people had been learning their lines and where exploring the possibilities of the text within different contexts. The work was

based on movement, on interaction of the bodies on stage, trying to see what were the possibilities within the script. The participants were either standing and moving on stage at the same time, or sitting on the stage in a semi-circle while a few of them rehearsed their lines. The group was extremely quiet and respectful, and concentrated for long periods of time (the rehearsals were at least 4 hours long, sometimes more). I felt that the group had constructed a positive dynamic – one of the key elements mentioned to me later by the participants during interviews – and that they were comfortable with one other. The most intense phase was the ‘creation week’, which was concentrated over eight days in early May, not long before the performance at the end of that month. This timeframe engendered a climate of intense concentration, as well as the feeling of a collective effort. In the end, there were four performance dates on the main stage of the theatre, which has an audience capacity of up to 400 people.

2018 was the first time that the Troup worked with a new text written for the show. The play was written by the author Pauline Sales. She had chosen a storyline – based on a true story set in Japan – about a company renting out actors to play a role in people’s real lives. The play starts with a discussion between a teenager and her father, and one progressively comes to understand that the father is actually an actor, rented out by the mother to play the role of the father under a long-term contract. The actor-father has a form of nervous breakdown because he cannot stand the relationship he is required to play out with the young girl, who he finds unbearable, and his role of perfect father (who never gets upset and never raises his voice) . The play also shows a same sex couple which separates after one of them fakes a heterosexual wedding with a rented actress in order to please his parents. The same actress who plays the wife at the wedding is shown in another situation in which she falls in love instantly with a man, but refuses to believe that her encounter with a ‘perfect man’ is true (she hypothesises that the man must have been hired by her father). The play presents other unusual situations: in one scene an actor plays an angel coming to say farewell to an aged mother who does not want to die. Meanwhile this mother’s daughter rents out a baby to try and convince the old woman that she has seen her grandchild and can therefore ‘leave in peace’. The play also shows the state of the father-actor’s company which is put under stress by the breakdown and

disappearance of their leader, (resulting in their organising of five fake funerals, and then closing up). Finally, the father and the teenage daughter are reunited, with the actor-father telling the young girl that he actually does consider her his daughter and loves her as such. At the play's close he asks her whether she'd like to continue their child-parent relationship, even now that she is aware that he is not her biological father.

The plot is complicated. It is a '*mise en abyme*' of actors playing other actors, and playing fake real-life characters. I have outlined the plot above mainly to convey the issues that it addressed - parental love, abandonment, the confusion between truth and illusion, absence, deceptions and death – which may have resonated specifically for teenagers. Some issues such as homosexuality were not easy to handle in front of a local audience in Saint-Denis. The final play appeared as a succession of short scenes which unveiled the plot rather than as a linear narrative.

At the end of the final performance, I also attended a small celebration among the actors and the artistic team. There was a very positive and happy atmosphere as well as the traditional 'gift-giving' and the exchange of thank you messages.

I attended the play twice out of the four performances. On both occasions the 400 seats were fully occupied, by a very diverse audience, which seemed very local. It was made up of families, young people (some of whom came with their teachers) and the theatre's older, regular audience.



Figure 30: Troupe Ephémère, TGP, Mai 2019, credit TGP



### Objectives & Stakeholders expectations

According to Delphine Bradier questions of “transmission and artistic education” are very important for Jean Bellorini,

It is a structural element of himself [...] He discovered theatre while in high school, and it's been a real encounter, something that has transformed him and accompanied him until today [...] Jean always says that art is something that transforms, that's why he felt like giving this possibility to young people. (Interview with Bradier, 2019).

Bellorini wants to make the theatre a space of freedom and emancipation. During my interview with him, the word freedom came up at least ten times within an hour, in reference to the young people and to the process. It seems that for Bellorini, the objective is to open a new field of possibilities on a personal level for the individuals involved, and not simply as a way of opening new doors towards a professional career for the young participants.

There were no specific expectations expressed by the funders of the project. Its main funders, the state and the municipality, contribute to the regular activities of the theatre. They did not specifically fund ‘The Ephemeral Troup’.

Nevertheless, some expectations were implied by the mission statement of the theatre or by the working guidelines of the funders.

Théâtre Gérard Philippe is a National Dramaturgy Centre (CDN). Such theatres have three types of missions, ‘production’ (creation), ‘territorial responsibility and responsibility towards the audience’ and ‘professional responsibilities’ (training). The second set of responsibilities is connected to the territory and the public<sup>76</sup>.

According to the ‘Mission Statement’ of all CDNs, this means: diversification of audiences and artistic education.

The CDN contributes to the social and geographical diversification of audiences”:

- by developing forms of artistic action to raise the awareness of the population who do not frequent the venues, whether it is for social, geographical, cultural or economic reasons;
- by experimenting with new techniques and formats, strengthening the links between the works and the public, in particular in favour of priority audiences (specific, hindered, etc.)

‘The Ephemeral Troup’ was part of the proposal Bellorini put forward when he applied for the position of Theatre Director. In this sense we could say that it was one of the selection criteria for the job. In explaining its decision to nominate Bellorini for a new position, starting early in 2020 in Villeurbanne in the banlieue of Lyon, the Ministry of Culture highlighted his key strength as being, “his attention to the young audience, his actions within the city, his ethical willingness to create an intimate link between the theatre and all classes of society” (CDN, website, accessed 10 September 2019)<sup>77</sup>, which were certainly the initial motivations behind his nomination in Saint-Denis in the first place. Bellorini is clearly a rising star in the French theatrical milieu. He is only 38 and yet this will be his second position as Director of a major theatre.

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<sup>76</sup> [http://www.asso-acdn.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/cahier\\_missions\\_CDN-4.pdf](http://www.asso-acdn.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/cahier_missions_CDN-4.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> CDN, <http://www.asso-acdn.fr/nomination-de-jean-bellorini-a-la-direction-du-theatre-national-populaire-cdn-de-villeurbanne/>, accessed 10 September 2019

Local politics play a role in the programme of the theatre. The TGP is a major institution within the city of Saint-Denis cultural policy. I have already commented on the orientations of the municipal cultural policy in Chapter 4. Patrick Braouezec was one of the regulars of the TGP during his years as a Mayor and the current Mayor, Laurent Russier, still is. I attended an event for the launch of the street signposting projects in the TGP, where he was present, behaving like someone who comes regularly and is in regular contact with the Director.

The production of the play is financed within the main general budget of the TGP but money is also provided by foundations, notably the SNCF Foundation.

The SNCF Foundation (the public train company) financed the project from the first edition and has given grants of between ten and twenty thousand euros. The TGP responds to a call for tender put out by the SNCF Foundation each year. According to the Foundation's website, their conception is that

Culture is the lever of openness to the world. It gives common benchmarks and brings together and anchors individuals in a vision of a shared and plural society. The SNCF Foundation introduces those who are far away from it to cultural expressions that awaken the senses and open the mind [...] Culture opens the mind, but it still has to open its doors, to give a chance to a greater number of people. (Fondation SNCF, website, accessed 11 September 2019)<sup>78</sup>

According to Delphine Bradier (Interview, 2019), the most important element of 'The Ephemeral Troup', in the eyes of the Foundation, is that it works young people from the local area, who were not necessarily close to this type of culture and that "it changes something in their life choices, in their professional orientation". The concept of 'living together' is important too. The SNCF Foundation has not made any specific request in terms of the geographical origins of the young – since it is already part of the objectives of the TGP to recruit from within the local area. They have not been difficult in terms of the reporting, because they are more concerned with seeing the results, the plays themselves. The fact that the young people come from different background is something that is quite obvious looking at the stage.

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<sup>78</sup> <https://www.fondation-sncf.org/fr/thematique/culture/> [Accessed: 11 September 2019].

Finally, the DRAC (Regional Direction of Cultural Action) finances up to EUR 30,000 of the project under the heading of ‘Cultural Practices outside of School Time.’ In 2019 specific funding was allocated from the Region to finance the writing of the play.

The expectations of the funders seem to be influenced by two main motivations:

1. Improving the theatre practice of young people and the rootedness of the theatre in the territory.
2. Contributing to harmonious ‘living together’ in the area; and therefore community building.

### Forms of participation

The young people involved in the project did not participate in the writing of the script, nor in the decision-making process with regard to some of the major scenography proposals, which they may not have understood<sup>79</sup>. However, according to the Director, it is the young people who make the play and his proposals “emanate” from their work, from their being on stage. The young people are there to learn, and Bellorini wants to make them “learn to be free”. Based on my observations I would emphasise that the project was not participatory in the same way as the other two projects I looked at. While there was no clear teacher-student relationship there remained a hierarchical order in the distribution of the roles. Although everything was made and said in a very considerate and attentive manner, there was a clear professional differentiation between the actors and the Director. Yet while the young people did not bring in ideas of scenography they did actively take part in the project and participate by engaging in a creative process that required their full commitment and which was responsive to their actions. Bellorini insists on the poetry that emanates from the young people when they act and the fact that each individual engaged in the project feels part of a collective creation. This positive energy and the very strong ‘group’ feeling were visibly reinforced by the attitude of the artistic team towards the young participants. In fact, Bellorini is convinced that it is by demanding expectations for a high-quality creation that this

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<sup>79</sup> In our interview one participant named Maëlle explained that she did not understand, nor like the fact that Bellorini decided to use pingpong tables in the scenography.

energy and positive experience is made possible for the young people involved. Despite the hierarchy between the professional Director and the young people, the participants felt comfortable and free to ask questions, to speak and react, on equal footing with the artistic team. There was a professional differentiation of the tasks and authority, but the young people's interactions with the artistic team were friendly and comfortable.

### Outcomes and learning

The impact of such a project is difficult to quantify and qualify. The number of young people involved is relatively limited. However, those I interviewed highlighted that the project did make a lot of a difference to them. For Maëlle, one of the elements she was the happiest about was that she found the energy and courage to act on stage. For Mamou, who had arrived in France, 5 years before, aged 11, the main impact was related to the language and to her ability to act in French. For Maëlle, being part of a professional creative process and the fact of working directly with Bellorini felt like an incredible chance and opportunity. Both Mamou and Maëlle highlight that for them, the best element of the experience was the group, the way that the group functioned in a positive manner, without major disagreements, and acted as a support network. Being able to interact with people from different background and age was also highlighted as a key positive outcome. Some unexpected friendships appeared, people who didn't necessarily see each other much outside of the TGP but within the project found a nest in which they felt comfortable to act.

The impact on the audience, at least in terms of attendance was clear. On all four nights of the show, the 400 seat room was full. I have never seen such a diverse audience in my many years of frequenting the theatres of Greater Paris. On the Friday evening, when there was a round of discussion between the Troup and the audience, it was clear that the young members of the audience – many of whom were friends or acquaintances of the actors – felt at ease to ask questions and enter in discussion with the members of the Troup. The questionnaires, which Delphine Bradier distributed to the participants at the end of the process, highlight the positive feedback they received from the family and friends they brought to the theatre on those nights. Some of them brought up to 30 people to see the play, others just one friend.

The participatory element of the project succeeded in bringing new people to the theatre and to making it more accessible, even if just for the short-term.

The impact of such a project is more qualitative than quantitative, although for a certain period of time it managed to bring to a crowd to the theatre that would not usually have come through the doors. 'The Ephemeral Troup' is part of a larger set of educational and participative activities the TGP has proposed. There are several other projects – within the walls of the theatre, or outside, in some of the 'cités', such as 'Les Francs Moisins', which bring local residents within a creative process. In 2018-2019 two other flagship projects were directed at galvanising involvement from the local residents: an inter-generational dance project run by the famous choreographer Maguy Marin, and the street signposting project, which connected residents to the theatre by other means than acting (but still as part of a creative process). Beyond their involvement in a creative process, some key practical elements remained with the participants. One of the individuals involved in the Street signposting project told me how the initiative had made it possible for him to settle in France. He was a new arrival and felt part of a group, had amazing opportunities to meet professionals and discover new places, such as the roof of the Basilica, but above all, he mentioned the practical support he received from the theatre team, including help in finding housing. It is certainly true that the team mobilises high levels of energy to accompany and help the participants in their daily lives beyond the creative process, such as the access to legal and bureaucratic assistance, and employment opportunities.

How, though, does this initiative fit into the Creative City strategy of Plaine Commune? The link between existing institutions with their public, their anchorage in the space and the development of experimental participative projects to work with the residents are all elements mentioned as part of the strategy. None of these are new tools developed in the context of the strategy, but existing ones that are valorised, and fully included.

One of the key notions employed by the artistic team has been to make people feel 'at home' when they are in the theatre. According to François Lorin, the people who

participated in ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ or the other participatory projects have an almost unlimited access to free plays. However, this is an opportunity that only a few individuals take advantage of. I have other concerns too: what happens when the Director and the administrative team changes? Who maintains the link with these people?

The gesture of the theatre opening-up to its surrounding community is definitely a powerful one. The TGP is part of Saint-Denis, symbolically somehow like the Basilica and the RER stations. These are strong elements of the territory that most individuals have had access to, some more than others.

‘The Ephemeral Troup’ is beginning a new edition in 2019-2020, under the lead of a new Director. The future of the project seems uncertain in the long run since the Jean Bellorini is due to leave the TGP to manage another venue in the banlieue of Lyon, in Villeurbanne. Going forwards his projects are likely to be replaced by those of the new Director.

## Chapter 6: Case Studies Analysis and Discussion

This research proposed to bring the specific input of art theory into the field of urban research to understand if and how participatory arts can help deliver (more) socially just cities. This Chapter aims at providing an answer to this overarching question, by evaluating the results of the three case studies in relation to the research questions outlined in Chapter 3.

At the end of Chapter 1, the reader was left with the knowledge that there may be more nuanced and complex visions of the Creative City at play than those that were initially proposed, and that these may take into account social issues. In the fields of urban planning and urban development, the role of art in the city is usually discussed within the context of the Creative City debate. The Creative City concepts, as elaborated by Landry (2000) and Florida (2002), have provoked legitimate and vehement attacks by academics on account of their vagueness (Peck, 2005; Evans, 2009; Markusen, 2006; Krätke, 2011; Nathan, 2015) and for the adverse impacts the policies implemented in the name of the Creative City have produced (Leslie and Catungal, 2012; Pratt and Hutton, 2013; Vicari-Haddock, 2013; Ratiu, 2013; Marti Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2011; Mc Lean, 2014; Parker, 2008; McRobbie, 2011; Gerhard et al., 2017).

In the last decade, many authors have suggested new avenues for research on the Creative City (Borén and Young; 2013, Jakob, 2011; Pratt, 2011; Kagan and Kirchberg, 2013; Ratiu, 2013). They propose to develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of the ways creativity is used in cities. In order to face the real threats of new inequalities (Gerhard et al. 2017), researchers have called upon the creation of new ‘more-than-capitalist’ Creative City models, paying attention to the social dimensions of urban development. Meanwhile the work of Sharp et al. (2005) suggests one to look beyond the role and intentions of the individual artist, and instead to focus on the creative process involved in the making of the artwork, and of its reception.

The objective of this research was to see how, in practice, the ideals of social justice and sustainability were considered by the different stakeholders involved in the Creative



City discourse. When referring to the dimension of the socially ‘just’ city, our understanding is grounded in the definitions provided by Fainstein (2010) and Sen (2009).

Chapter 2 drew additional tools from art theory (Rancière, 2009) to demonstrate how arts may be contributing to the ‘making of the city’, in the sense of the “process by which the interaction between urban society and city, in its material reality, spaces and territories, produces a specific ‘urban reality’ in perpetual transformation” (Noizet, 2013:389).

The input of socially engaged art has played a remarkably small role in the Creative City debate. It was left out during the initial formulation of the Creative City discourse, and only developed as a follow up to the relative failure (at least in sustaining access to governmental funding) of the Community Art movement in the UK (Landry, 1985; Bianchini, 1993; Matarasso, 1997; Bishop, 2012). The most recent and comprehensive attempts at understanding the role of artists in the city (for e.g. Murzyn-Kupisz et al., 2017) have struggled to integrate reflections on socially engaged arts. By focussing on the specificity of arts, and on the disconnect between the intention of the artist and the outcomes of an artwork, Rancière’s theory reveals what one can and cannot expect from arts. What an artwork can bring to a city is rarely tangible and measurable; it is better thought of as generating a new ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2009). This ‘political’ potential of arts is symbolic. Claire Bishop’s analysis of participatory arts (2012) suggests a more pragmatic way of looking at socially engaged artworks. In her analysis, participatory arts are characterised by the fact that “the work of art is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant”. (Bishop, 2012:2). Bishop highlights that the ideals behind the practice of participatory arts are likely to multiply the likelihood that the ‘political’ potential of art is activated, not by creating ‘coherence’ – revealed to be a ‘mirage’ (Kwon, 2002), but by creating the possibilities of dissensus. Today, participatory arts invest more on process than on pre-defined outcomes. That process values two of the concepts particularly dear to Rancière, namely ‘plurivocality’ and

‘dissensus’. This corresponds to what Miwon Kwon (2002) calls upon, as the new form of public art, i.e. “collective artistic praxis [as] a projective enterprise [...] performing its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modeling or working- out of a collective social process” (Kwon, 2002:154).

Taking stock of this input from artistic theory, my work proposed that one way of bridging the ‘knowledge gap’ on the actual role of arts and creativity in cities, was to analyse the processes and outcomes of participatory artworks. I proposed an in-depth exploration of such works in order to unveil the different visions of the Creative City at play. My intention was to establish how these visions can impact on city development, both in terms of urban planning and in terms of the ‘making of the city’ (Noizet, 2013:389).

By means of three case studies, all set in the same municipal boundaries but led by very different stakeholders, I investigated how participatory artworks have mobilised creativity in the city and contributed to urban planning or to ‘the social fabric of the city’. Chapter 2 highlighted that artists do not necessarily think of ‘use’ as the instrumentalisation of art (Tania Bruguera, *Arte Util*, see p.70).

In this chapter, I evaluate the findings of my analysis of the case studies (as presented separately in Chapter 5) in light of academic research. Here I seek to demonstrate how these results advance our understanding of the way in which arts can help deliver a more socially just city. I also analyse the implications of my results for the Creative City debate, as well as their limitations.

In order to begin this evaluation, we must return to my stated research questions:

A first set of questions was proposed to investigate the reality of alternative visions of the Creative City. Do such alternative visions exist? How are they influenced by political orientations? Who are they expressed by? How do they differ between stakeholders?

A second set of questions looked at how these visions were implemented. How were they implemented? Are there measurable outcomes? What was the interplay between these different visions? What were the power relationships at play?

The third set of questions interrogated the role of participatory artworks more specifically. They aimed at identifying how participation happens and what the outcomes of this participation might be. The subsequent questions were: Has the making of the artwork been participatory? What form did the participation take? How may the artwork be read by the audience? Did participation make the artwork univocal or plurivocal? Did it create consensus or dissent?

Below, the case study results are presented following the order of these three sets of questions, as follows:

1. Alternative visions of the Creative City, looking at various stakeholders (local authority, artists, residents).
2. Implementation of the discourses.
3. Role of participatory art forms in terms of multiplication of the ‘political’ potential of artworks.

### Alternative visions of the Creative City

1. The local authorities of the Red Belt have developed an alternative vision of the Creative City.

The Parisian Red Belt appeared to be a place in which there would be a high probability of encountering alternative visions of the Creative City. The case of Plaine Commune provides an example in which the Creative City policy cannot merely be labelled as a ‘repackaging of neoliberal policies’ (Peck, 2005). My research findings partially validate the hypothesis that the political orientation of the municipal stakeholders had a strong impact on their visions of the Creative City. This result was unsurprising, given the historical lineage as regards to the role of arts in society to which the communist municipal elite is referring, one in which “culture in its diversity is what assembles a local and a national society” (Braouezec, 2004:175). The most interesting finding here was that the communist local authorities have become trapped by the contradictions of their attempts to care for the existing population combined with the use of more ‘traditional’ Creative City policies which aim at bringing new people and new economic activities to the city.

Over the course of my research, I have indeed found that the local political actors, such as the ex-Mayor of Saint-Denis and President of Plaine Commune Patrick Braouezec, and the current Mayor Laurent Russier, have publicly placed themselves in the historic political continuity of the municipal communist positions, exemplified by the position of Jack Ralite (see p. 108-110).

The content of the key official documents defining the approach of the local authority with regards to culture and creation, the 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy (Plaine Commune, 2016) and the 'Cultural Orientation Plan of the Municipality of Saint-Denis' (Saint-Denis, 2016) largely confirms this. In the development of the Plaine Commune 'Territory of Culture and Creation' strategy, several visions of the Creative City were at play, as shown in Chapter 4. The political orientation of municipalities in the area has played a strong role in the drive to revise the initial proposal made by the state. From an initial focus on creative industries, the final strategy document was modified to include larger considerations linked to culture and creation. This re-working of the initial proposal was initiated thanks to an artist and was supported by the elected representatives of the least affluent and most diverse municipalities in the North of the territory, located far away from the pre-existing agglomeration of creative industries, in the south of the area, la Plaine.

Plaine Commune's strategy document includes provisions aimed at countering the most common adverse impacts of Creative City policies. It shows a specific attention to alternatives to private-led urban development, to nurturing and supporting the 'alternative' and local arts and crafts and to avoid creating new inequalities. The three main criticisms on Creative City policies and side-effects I have extracted from the literature in Chapter 1 are the following: 1. repackaging neoliberal policies, reinforcing the status quo; 2. negative effects on the arts sector; 3. creation of new inequalities: diversion of investment towards new infrastructure, displacement, inequalities due to the creative economy, gendered and racialised inequalities. The strategy attempts to address them: the vocabulary it uses is not that of growth and competitiveness, but of balanced development and attention to the most vulnerable people in society. This analysis is confirmed when looking at the more detailed priorities (Plaine Commune, 2014). The neoliberal project and vision is not dominant in this

strategy. On paper, the local stakeholders have worked on an alternative proposal to the neoliberal use of the Creative City with regard to the use of culture and creation, this alternative is largely based on the existing activities and type of arts that were already present on the territory. The Strategy 'Territory of Culture and Creation' has shown consideration to these issues and proposes ways to address them. Plaine Commune is committed to supporting its artists and valorising the existing cultures of the territory and has allocated some human and financial resources to meet its commitment.

However, the results are not clear-cut. If one looks in more detail at the actions proposed as part of the strategy, contradictions appear. Gentrification and a change of population emerge as an expected outcome. The negative impacts of Creative City policies, as detailed so extensively in the literature, are reappearing.

One of the actions planned as part of the strategy is to identify spaces that could be occupied temporarily by artists in order to valorise the area's heritage. There are several examples of such artistic occupations in Saint-Denis, which are supported by the municipality and Plaine Commune, such as 6B. In the case of 6B, Aubry et al. (2015) show how the developer has used the presence of the artist residence to raise land value in the area and in its proximity. The case of 'Espace Imaginaire', the space in which 'Montjoie! Saint-Denis!' takes place, (as described in Chapter 5) reveals the difficulty for the city of Saint-Denis to really address social issues by appeal to a trendy culture-based occupation of a space. Despite the presence of a few migrants on the 'Espace Imaginaire', and the provision of activities that involve the local residents to a certain extent, as we have shown in the case of 'Montjoie! Saint-Denis!', most of the people involved in the running and management of the place are young, white educated people. Louise Roux from Hoc Memento herself made the observation that the place is mostly run with and for young, white educated people in their 30s, some of whom have arrived very recently in the area. She mentions for instance a young, very active member of the cooperative, who is currently installing a bread oven on the space, as one of the typical examples of a gentrifier. In an area surrounded by cranes and new developments, it is justified to highlight that the strategy of the municipality and Plaine Commune when making such spaces available to artists may not be simply limited to providing cultural

animation in the neighbourhood for existing residents. This case is somehow similar to that of the examples provided in the literature, in which artists are in a paradoxical situation of being willing to benefit a neighbourhood, to try and invent new forms of organisation and are, at the same time, acting in a manner that changes the neighbourhood dramatically. This corresponds to a situation in which artists are “relatively powerless in urban development processes which seek to appropriate culture and creativity in very instrumental ways to achieve neoliberal goals” (Borén and Young, 2017:300). This case is similar to that of the cultural space ‘Frappant’ in Hamburg, described by Kagan and Kirchberg (2013), in which artists are in an “ambivalent position”, torn between their artistic interest and needs (cheap space to experiment) and the governmental exploitation of their activity, as a way of revalorising the space. The municipality does not see gentrification in negative terms. The Director of Culture for the municipality of Saint-Denis, Didier Coirint (Interview, 2009), openly admits that the municipality would welcome an increased social mix in the city (understood here in terms of socio-economic background). This would avoid intensifying the concentration of poverty.

Such a double-edged approach with regards to the local population of Saint-Denis is the manifestation of a tension the elected representatives are experiencing, and which is exemplified by the political positioning of Patrick Braouezec<sup>80</sup>. The communist municipality is managing a poor territory, blighted by very intense (and intensifying<sup>81</sup>) social and economic issues. At the same time, it is experiencing pressure and increasing demand for land in the southern part of its territory and it sees the possibility of increasing revenue, which in turn could help tackle social issues. In Saint-Denis, the municipality is trying to juggle its ideology of social justice and its needs for revenue to enable public action and redistribution. Aubry et al. (2015) have labelled this attempt to synthesise the ideals of growth and of social justice “communist municipal entrepreneurialism” (2015:123). Using the term “entrepreneurialism”, here, in reference to David Harvey’s analysis (1989), is, however, slightly misleading because

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<sup>80</sup> Patrick Braouezec, ex-Mayor of Saint-Denis and President of Plaine Commune, has been very active in bringing the Stade de France and now the Olympic Games to the territory.

<sup>81</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 4, poverty is increasing in Saint-Denis, while it is mostly decreasing in the rest of the Ile de France.

it would assume a synthesis, a comprehensive approach led by the local authority and fully in the hands of the local authority. This approach does little to help understand the complex interplay of power relations between the various stakeholders interested in the Greater Paris metropolitan development. It also undermines the functioning initiatives of the municipality in favour of social justice, such as the imposition of a 40% quota for social housing on all new developments. In the case of Saint-Denis, as we have shown in the case of Pleyel and ‘The Football Pitch’, the reality is that of a fragmentation of urban planning, in which some parts of urban space are extracted from the usual planning rules and, because of the metropolitan dynamics at play, developed under the lead of non-municipal stakeholders.

## 2. Artists have developed alternative visions of how creativity is to be mobilised in the city

Beyond the official visions put forward by the local authority, one of my research questions was to look at who else in the area was formulating alternative visions of the Creative City. My case studies unveiled visions of the Creative City that have been developed by artists. In the case studies, I have attempted to emphasise the specific visions of the artists. As reported in Chapter 5, none of the artists had actually appropriated the term Creative City, but they had nevertheless developed visions of what their type of creativity might bring to the city. Creativity is not conceived by artists as a tool for social outreach but as a specific medium which can unsettle existing hierarchies and the organisation of the social fabric.

Below I summarise the way the artists from the three projects have expressed their respective visions of the role of creativity in the city.

The artist collectives involved in ‘The Football Pitch’ are working on the intersections between the world of arts and of urban planning. They “mobilise arts as a way of intervening on space and society” (Cuesta, website)<sup>82</sup> and of making people express their relation to their environment. With this project, they wished to make the

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<sup>82</sup> <https://cuesta.fr> [Accessed: 28 September 2019].

multiplicity of voices of the neighbourhood be heard in order to record “anecdotes of the past and [to] imagine new uses”<sup>83</sup>. The artist saw herself as a ‘mediator’ between the different stakeholders.

The two main people involved in the artistic team of ‘The Football Pitch’, Nil Dinc (GONGLE) and Alexandra Cohen (Cuesta) share sustained artistic interest in using arts to create social and political change. They also set their actions specifically in the city. Nil Dinc does not use the term Creative City to speak about her work, and she does not position herself in relation to the main neoliberal view of the Creative City. Nevertheless, her work is set in the city context, with the objective of acting upon the social dimension of ‘the making of the city’ (on the way people interact with each other and with their environment). The involvement with a local authority in order to get people to comment on the urban transformations around them is in direct correspondence with her line of artistic research. Dinc perceives games “as a tool for understanding our relationships with others and with the world around us”. She started working on the way people perceive “the transformation of their environment at the architectural, social, political and cultural level” at the same time that she became invested in the domain of sport. These themes, as well as an interest in “popular neighbourhoods” constitute a major part of her work. According to my research, Cuesta is one of the few actors which is positioning itself as a mediator and co-producer of projects, somewhere between artists and local authorities. This cultural cooperative uses the terminology of co-production of the urban space, of the making of the collective and of the urban space<sup>84</sup>. Without explicitly referring to the Creative City, Cuesta has worked to position itself at the centre of an interplay between the world of arts and of urban planning. It also claims to have developed methodological tools to intervene with artistic processes in the making of the city. Their practice is similar to the examples studied by Arab et al. (2016) in *Experimenting Artistic Action in Urban Planning*, and those analysed by Borén et al. (2017) in that it directly interacts with urban planners.

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<sup>83</sup> TUMBLR, Le terrain, le joueur et le consultant. <https://leterrain-lejoueur-leconsultant.tumblr.com> [Accessed: 7 January 2020].

<sup>84</sup> Title of one of the workshops they ran in 2015 during the annual meeting of the National Federation of Urban Development Agencies.



Hoc Momento ('Montjoie! Saint-Denis!') expresses an aesthetic vision of the relationship between their work and the city. It is an aesthetic interest that drives them to create in abandoned places. When I asked Louise Roux how she conceives the way her artworks change the city, she responded that it is first and foremost an aesthetic project: the city, through the play, for the duration of the play, is seen differently by those who act and attend the performance. Hoc Momento proposes new narratives of a place (constructed in the relationship with the history of the place) and a new way of experiencing space. She did add that there may be a more long-term impact, in terms of changed perception by the participants and audience of the place. In its scenography Hoc Momento is interested in the audience's movement, in the way the bodies inhabit a place, as if the body movements and the cultural and poetic occupation of the space were leaving an imprint on the territory. More concretely, the play's script explicitly deals with the urban transformation the area is experiencing and its political and societal impact. The question of who the Olympic Games benefit, and the staging of their cancellation, is central to the play. Hoc Momento acted from a marginal position, both in terms of the theatre world and in terms of their relation with institutions. Within the theatre world, outdoor *in situ* theatre production is easily assimilated to another – less valorised genre – the 'arts de la rue' (street arts). These types of project have no specific funding stream to access and their commercial valorisation is extremely difficult, since the plays lose relevance when produced in another area, and since the whole scenography needs to be rebuilt and rethought in each space. As far as relations with the institutions goes Hoc Momento had very little financial support, and very few local contacts at first. The way Hoc Momento wants to change the city is more symbolic than pragmatic. Its members' interest in the Situationist International (Interview with Roux, 2009) is clearly visible here. For them, the shape of the city changes according to the way it is symbolically inhabited, in what 'remains' from the way it has once been explored or been used as a stage. The Situationist International experimented with linking up disconnected neighbourhoods of a city by speaking to each through walkie talkies. For a brief moment, for the people who were actually talking, the shape of the city was changed and re-appropriated; the two neighbourhoods actually became close to one another (McDonough and al., 2004:272). It is worth noting, in fact, that for the

Situationist International, these actions were a way of opposing brutalist architecture and planning. From the academic literature on artists and the city that I have studied, this kind of action is not conceptualised and described as part of the Creative City (Borén and Young, 2017). Nevertheless, I would argue that there are valid reasons to consider them as fully-fledged elements of an art-led Creative City. Hoc Momento's action did not have a long-term impact on the actual physical shape of a space, beyond a specific duration, however the artists believe that – in some ways – their action has had an impact on the making of the city, on the “perpetual transformation” of the “specific ‘urban reality’”, from the definition of the “fabrique urbaine” (making of the city) proposed by Hélène Noizet (2013).

Jean Bellorini (Théâtre Gérard Philippe, ‘The Ephemeral Troup’) is perhaps the person who had the most ‘classic’ understanding of the relationship between arts and the territory. By ‘classic’, I mean that his understanding of the role of arts institutions is grounded in the history of cultural decentralisation in France: placing theatres in deprived areas and opening up to local residents is a way of giving equal access to the arts to all. The theatre plays its role if it manages to bring the local population in to use the space. Nevertheless, the artistic proposal of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ goes far beyond the usual educational offering of theatres. ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ is thought of as a collective-creative process to produce a high-quality artwork. In this vision, creativity is used in the city to destabilise conventional roles and representations. Bellorini expressed to me that he is more interested in the changes the Troup allows for each individual involved than for the city more generally. While Bellorini defends a fairly traditional conception of the role of arts in the city, this project does go a step further. The beneficial aspect of the group's diversity, of the encounters between people from different backgrounds, is also part of the project. The impact of being part of a diverse group was the main positive short-term impact mentioned by the participants I interviewed. One individual, Mamou, highlighted to me how important it was for her to be working in the process with people who came from outside the ‘93’, outside of Saint-Denis (meaning Paris and the other parts of Greater Paris). Beyond bringing individual's emancipation and empowering the youth of the city to become active players in the making of the artwork, the theatre links with its territory by putting the youth of the city

on stage, where the cultural power emanates from. ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ put the population of the city on stage, which in turn attracted a very large and content local audience to witness a relatively complicated contemporary play. This is hugely significant given how unusual it is in France to see ethnic diversity on stage in the main theatres. The composition of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ does stand out as a demonstration of the symbolic power of the young people of France in 2019, in all their ethnic diversity.

These case studies confirm that artists carry alternative visions of how their art and artistic processes contribute to the various dimensions of social justice in the city. These visions are complex, and vary from one project to another. Each project involves its own engagement with the actual urban transformation of the city, but there is no dominant narrative as to ‘how’ this should look, or what form it should take.

My contribution to the academic debate is to show that such socially engaged artistic processes, which deal with the social context of an area from an artistic angle, can be conceived as elements of Creative City policies. This will be further elaborated in the second section of this chapter, when looking at the results of the implementation of such processes with regards to the three dimensions of the ‘just city’ as defined by Susan Fainstein (2010).

### 3. For residents in Saint-Denis creative industries are out of the picture of identified creative and cultural spaces

My work included several workshops with inhabitants of the area, on their visions of what culture and creation in the city are and where it takes place. The results of the workshops reveal that the existence of creative industries on the territory is relatively unknown to the local population, or is - in any case - conceived as happening behind closed doors. This part of my research was perhaps the most underdeveloped (there were limitations relating to the outreach towards participants), but there were some interesting results regardless. The fact that the creation of creative industries happens at considerable distance from the lived realities of the area and the strong dominance of the official cultural institutions was particularly noteworthy. Participants also valorised

several mundane and individual forms of creation, and included heritage and sports as part of the definition of creative and cultural places.

### Implementation of alternative visions: outcomes

The core question this research set out to answer was ‘Do artworks contribute to delivering a (more) just creative city?’. The results, exposed above, demonstrate that – with an understanding of the Creative City that is not limited to urban planning but which extends to a larger conception of the ‘making of the city’ – local authorities and artists do intend to deliver a more just city thanks to the use creativity. There are still other issues to address however: what do we observe during the implementation of the artworks? How do intentions impact on the reality of the delivery of a (more) just city? Which dimensions of social justice do these artworks address? The following section evaluates the results observed in the case of the three artworks analysed.

#### 1. During their implementation, the artworks addressed the three dimensions of the just city.

How has creativity been used during the work-processes deployed in the case-studies analysed in this research? Fainstein (2010) defines the three dimensions of a ‘just city’, as equality, democracy and diversity. In this section, I analyse how the artworks address the three dimensions of a just Creative City.

Table 4 below summarises if and how these three dimensions have been dealt with in my selected case studies. The breakdown between the objectives voiced by the artists, the process of making the artwork, and the outcomes allows us to evaluate the differences between expectations and reality. The content of the table is extracted from the interviews with stakeholders and built on my interpretation of the artworks' components.

Table 4: Analysis of the case studies according to the three dimensions of the ‘just’ city, Source: elaboration by author

| Dimensions of the Just Creative City | Equality  | Democracy (deliberative process / political interaction)   | Diversity (usual participation in cultural activities / ethnic/intergenerational diversity)  |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>The football Pitch</b>            |   |  |  |
| Objectives                           | The game strived to put everyone on an equal footing  | “Grasp and invent possibilities” for the neighbourhood. Collective writing.  | “Recount the neighbourhood in all its plurality”   |
| Process                              | Use of sport commentaries to swap positions. All equal in front of playing a game with new rules                                  | Songs to express dissent<br>Several occasions to meet with decision makers in different formats  | Several types of workshops proposed. Enabled participants to reach out to different kinds of people and take part in the activities they liked   |
| Outcomes                             | Participants highlighted that hierarchies were challenged   | Expression of dissent was achieved but no real change in urban planning project. Local authority participants hinted at a slight change in policy making | Diverse range of individuals involved in terms of race, culture and generational backgrounds   |
| <b>Montjoie! Saint-Denis !</b>       |   |  |  |
| Objectives                           | <i>The action was set in a deprived area, with the objective of bringing in animation and arts (cultural democratisation)*</i>    | <i>Introduced reflections on the space that may be minority ideas *</i>  | Willingness to involve local residents and migrants and to build bridges between people from different backgrounds, including academics  |
| Process                              | Free access to workshops and creative process<br><br>Participants brought in ideas: equal rights to give input and make proposals | Deliberation and discussion between participants was used during the creative process  | Diversity was supposed to be within the group of actors but hard to achieve, so alternative ways to get involved were proposed, such as short-term workshops to help for the scenography.<br><br>Diversity of audience was built up by local networking and communication with educational institutions.<br><br>Diversity of cultural influences within the play, notably via music (Brazilian, African music and instruments) |
| Outcomes                             | The play was staged several times in the same place, for free, as a way to propose equal access to the cultural activity          | A deliberative process was staged during the play – it remains unfinished, posing the question of when/how a political deliberative process takes place  | Diversity of participants was achieved mostly by involving people in the scenography and as an audience.   |
| Ephemeral Troup                      | Equality  | Democracy  | Diversity  |

|            |   |  |  |
|------------|---|--|--|
| Objectives | Theatre was open to all   | Brought young people to learn the experience of freedom, to be free may be considered as a way to build aware critical citizens (post WWII French conception of theatre) | Geographical origin of participants was considered. This ensured ethnic diversity and some diversity of socio-economic origins. The lack of pre-existing identified cultural practices was a selection criterion |
| Process    | Young people from the Troup had full access for free to the plays shown in the theatre  | Participants left free to analyse and interpret the text. Took part in the collective elaboration of the play  | The group was ethnically and culturally diverse  |
| Outcomes   | ‘Equality’ / redistribution of access to the theatre via free access to the play for family and friends of the actors in the Troup. | n/a  | Diversity of audience. Diversity of youth of France shown on stage – symbolic  |

*\* I used italics to highlight that these are not explicitly mentioned by the artists, they are implied in the answers received in interviews and in the actions of the artists.*

With this table in mind, I will present an analysis of the three dimensions of the ‘just city’ within the artworks, in terms of intentions, process and outcomes. I will follow the above order: first regarding the dimension of equality, second regarding the dimension of democracy and third, the dimension of diversity.

Some of the observed outcomes confirm that the art projects succeeded in bringing more equality to the city. ‘Equality’ was conceived by the artists as the equal right to have access to artistic activities (‘The Ephemeral Troup’, ‘Monjoie! Saint-Denis!’) and as the right to participate within the creation process ‘on equal footing’<sup>85</sup> with the artists (‘Montjoie ! Saint-Denis!’) or with other stakeholders (‘The Football Pitch’). The outcomes of the three projects confirm that some progress was achieved here. In the case of ‘The Football Pitch’, my interviews demonstrate that participants felt hierarchies were challenged, at least in the short term. In the case of ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ and

<sup>85</sup> I refer to ‘at equal footing’ in quotation marks here, because while these were collaborative and participative processes, without strong imposition of hierarchy and authority, this did not mean that everyone had the same role. Despite the space afforded to the participants to intervene the process, their role was not ‘equal’ to that of the artists who were the ones coordinating and finalising the creation process, due to their specific professional experience and role in the project. In ‘The Football Pitch’, Nil Dinc wrote the rules of the game and the artistic protocol of the project (type of workshops, role of the teams, interactions). In ‘Monjoie! Saint-Denis!’ Louise wrote the text and Frederico Nepomuseno oversaw the staging of the play.

‘The Ephemeral Troup’, free access to art spaces was provided for all or many of the audience. My observations, interviews and analysis of post-project questionnaires show that such projects brought a considerable number of people to attend the plays who had never been in a theatre before. These results must of course be seen in nuanced terms. My analysis does not provide information on long-term impact. Neither were all dimensions of equality addressed: the projects did very little to tackle the conditions of socio-economic inequalities for example (though the team of TGP have provided actual support to individuals in difficult situations).

The artworks also included actions related to the dimension of ‘democracy’. As part of the project of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, Jean Bellorini expressed the objective to “free” young people. This clearly relates to the main ideological framework of French national cultural policy; that of creating critically aware citizens, that are free to think and act by themselves. Bellorini insists that he helps something emerge from the young people’s acting. He says he gives them a leading role in the creation process, even though it is he who makes decisions regarding the scenography. This brings forms of empowerment to the young people. The two other projects, meanwhile, dealt more directly with the question of democracy and deliberation, as a process. In ‘The Football Pitch’, stimulating a deliberative process was part of the commission by the local authority: the artists had to involve participants to discuss the urban planning project. Nil Dinc highlighted that she believes the project has helped some people develop a new political awareness, and that groups were established which would continue to be in discussion with the local authority on the urban planning project. This result can be presented as one that increases democratic participation. Further research could analyse these outcomes in more detail or look for counter-evidence to this claim. In ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’, the experience of deliberation was part of the creative process; ideas about the form of the show were discussed, commented-on and validated in a group. The question of politics and deliberation also appeared in the script. The play depicts a failed process of deliberation, culminating in the beheading of the main character. This raises awareness of the way in which democracy can function and malfunction – in a purely



metaphorical sense. Further research might unveil what trickles down in real life from this kind of example.

All three projects have had an impact in terms of diversity in the city. The three projects directly looked for the involvement of diverse groups of people. However, diversity is a broad term, and the conceptions of what is ‘diverse’ differed from one project to another. When working to attract a diversity of people, ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ and ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ concentrated explicitly on whether people had access to artistic activities prior to the project and on the geographical origins of the participants (i.e. whether or not they lived in Saint-Denis or in the neighbourhood.) In both cases, the focus on the place of residence of the participants was used as a proxy to achieve social mix in terms of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Those coming from the area were more likely to be of diverse ethnic origins and more likely to be of less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. In all three projects, the participants from non-white ethnic backgrounds were those recruited locally. In the case of ‘The Football Pitch’, the participants themselves, the artistic team and the local authority have all highlighted that diversity of the group was achieved, both in terms of intergenerational diversity and in terms of ethnic background. In the case of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, a similar diversity of the group of young people has been verified. The most interesting result, however, was in the diversity of the play’s audience, and in the symbolic occupation of the main stage of the theatre by groups who are largely under-represented in the theatre world<sup>86</sup>. Bringing the whole diversity of an area on stage is a powerful action that aims to challenge cultural injustice, as defined by Nancy Fraser (2005). This was one of the objectives of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’.

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<sup>86</sup> Since there is no ethnic data in France, there are no official reports or analysis on the under-representations of people from ethnically diverse origins in French theatre. However, the observation is largely shared that they are under-represented, as this discussion held in Grenoble on 28 May 2018 reveals. A recording is available online on the website Theatre Contemporain.net <https://www.theatre-contemporain.net/video/La-diversite-culturelle-en-question-Festival-Regards-Croises-2018>, [Accessed: 2 January 2020]. On official websites, one can find a description of a project similar to that of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, with the title ‘When Diversity comes up to the stage’, published on 12 March 2018, on the website of the Ministry of Culture, <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Actualites/Theatres-nationaux-quand-la-diversite-entre-en-scene>, [Accessed: 2 January 2020].

## 2. Limits to the implementation of alternative visions – big money and the fragmentation of urban space

Power relations between stakeholders have worked to influence, limit and determine the outcome of the art projects and the impact of alternative visions of the Creative City in Saint-Denis more than I expected. This result applies specifically to ‘The Football Pitch’, the project which is the most integrated within the official strategy of Plaine Commune.

The artists from GONGLE and Cuesta highlighted the limits of ‘The Football Pitch’ when it came to the disconnection with the actual urban planning study. This situation was also identified and deplored by the local authority employees of Plaine Commune. In the case of ‘The Football Pitch’, the proposals from the participants should have fed directly into the urban planning study (which is generally realised by urbanists and architects as part of the pre-design phase in a development). However, because the first call for tender failed to identify a suitable project, the urban planning study was actually finished before the artwork and its process unfolded. We have seen that the participants from the actual developer’s team attended in very small numbers, and that on the last day, the ‘Big Encounter’, as the commentaries reveal, it was not at all easy for the other participants to communicate with them. Finally, big development projects directly adjacent to Pleyel neighbourhood were not included in the topics officially discussed with the artistic projects and none of the stakeholders involved in the projects participated. My research has revealed that in some areas of Saint-Denis (Grand Paris Express, The Olympic Village) the main developers apply their own priorities, logics and cultural programmes, taking some areas away from the implementation of Plaine Commune and the ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy. Even within Plaine Commune, municipalities can act in opposition to the strategy’s objective. For instance, despite the fact that the strategy supports ‘third spaces’, the municipality of Saint-Ouen, unilaterally closed off one of the most established alternative cultural spaces of Greater Paris, Mains d’Oeuvres. This case shows that the guiding principles of the strategy may be diverted from, not only by the biggest, most powerful developers, but also by the

municipalities, which have delegated power to Plaine Commune. The implementation of Creative City Strategies is subject to the balance of powers at play in an area, and are constrained by the areas of competences of each local authority. In Plaine Commune, this limits implementation of the strategy in new, ‘more-than-capitalist’ ways (Leslie and Cantugal, 2012). These results are in line with the findings of Arab et al. (2016), which show that artistic experimentation in the field of urban planning has, on the whole, extremely limited impact on the actual urban planning policies and urban projects.

### The role of participatory art works

The three case-studies involved residents and city users in their work, mostly as actors (‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ and ‘The Ephemeral Troup’) and as actor-players (‘The Football Pitch’). They also involved people through research workshops (‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’, ‘The Football Pitch’, ‘The Ephemeral Troup’) and sessions for building scenography (‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’). The participatory form multiplies the impact of a play, in that it increases outreach to families, friends, and extended social networks of the participants. However, in the case studies, there was a low number of participants with a weak socio-economic background (‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’, ‘The Ephemeral Troup’) or, on the contrary, representatives from the most powerful stakeholders (‘The Football Pitch’). Although in many ways the three theatre projects managed to engage ‘unusual suspects’, the number of people from those groups was always limited. Involving non-professionals and engaging with existing social structures to get in touch with residents is extremely time consuming (Interview with Roux and Nepomuceno, 2019), as is the process of dealing with young people facing socio-economic difficulties (Interview with François Lorin, 2019). Artistic and cultural projects cannot be expected to have quantitative significance in the way that they impact on the city.

The input of participatory art is more immaterial. Jacques Rancière (2009) tells us that the outcome of an artwork may diverge completely from what the artist had expected, and that this characteristic “to weave together a new sensory fabric” (2009:56) is what makes art socially and politically relevant. Rancière proposes that arts create “a

multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible”. In all three case studies I have observed characteristics of art projects highlighted by Rancière (2009) and Bishop (2012), i.e. the creation of a multiplicity of meanings, including some that are not core to the mainstream political debates, and to some extent, the creation of dissent, rather than the creation of consensus.

Nicolas Bourriaud claims that “relational arts produce new forms of relations between people” (2001:15). In the case studies, hierarchical positions and usual ‘roles’ of diverse groups were challenged. According to Louise Roux, in the case of ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’ local residents, young people from the neighbourhood, became ‘experts’ in the show. With ‘The Football Pitch’, changing body attitudes and the use of sports commentary induced changes in the way people listened to each other and related to one other. For Claire Bishop (2012), the practice of building collaboratively is a way of opposing capitalism and oppression. The potential for emancipation at the individual level was clear in the case of ‘The Ephemeral Troup’, with young people being accompanied and encouraged to find their own forms of expression.

Table 5 summarises how the different ‘potentialities’ opened-up by artworks have been realised in the three case studies. The information presented on this table is based on my analysis and interpretation of the artworks.

Table 5 : The case study analysis, under the criteria of the specificity of arts as defined by Rancière (2009) and Bishop (2009), Source: Own elaboration

|                    | Pluri-vocality  | Dissent // unusual discourse or idea                     | Multiple Interpretations // receptions by the audience              |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| The Football Pitch | Yes, through the songs and several other means. A large variety of ideas and opinions | Dissent between the groups with regard to urban planning | No specific message was passed on. The object of the project was to |

|                        |                                     |  |   |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
|                        | on the urban form<br>were collected |  | make people<br>exchange views.  |
| Montjoie! Saint-Denis! | n/a                                 | Attack on the OG /<br>Staged<br>cancellation of<br>the OG                                  | No clear message<br>from the plot of the<br>play                      |
| The Ephemeral<br>Troup | No univocal<br>message              | The imagery and<br>plot devices;<br>confronting stigma<br>around same-sex<br>relationships | A complex play.<br>Ultimate<br>interpretation left to<br>the audience |

These three participatory art projects have revealed new options, ideas, potentialities, and ways of considering given situations. The questions posed by ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis’ for example: ‘What will really happen with the Olympic Games?’ ‘And what would happen if they were cancelled?’, are completely outside of the sphere of public debate in France. Similarly, the incongruity of the idea of waking up the Kings and Queens of France by digging up the grounds of Saint-Denis opens avenues through which to think about the links between the history of the place, its current significance, its future possibilities, and the way it is exploited today.

Returning, then, to the core question of this research: ‘Can participatory arts help deliver a (more) socially just Creative City?’. This study found that the three theatre projects did bring changes to a small number of individuals and did propose new ‘symbolic’ openings in the existing social fabric. Bringing in art theory demonstrated that the tools so far used to assess the role of arts in the city have been broadly mismatched with the type of input one can realistically expect from the arts, which tends to happen at the margins, and in the symbolic realm.

## Conclusion

*C'est nous le Grand Paris,  
C'est nous le Grand Paris,  
La banlieue influence Paname, Paname influence le monde,  
Le 93 influence Paname, Paname influence le monde,  
Le Maghreb influence Paname, Paname influence le monde,  
Oui l'Afrique influence Paname, Paname influence le monde  
(...)  
Si tu respectes l'Histoire ce drapeau est mien  
(respecte moi j'ai la couleur des braves)  
Papi t'a défendu est-ce que tu t'en souviens?  
(quatre ans dans un Stalag)  
Mon frère t'a agressé y'a qu'ça tu retiens  
Accepte ta jeunesse, elle a du caractère,  
tu vois pas qu'ils veulent voir Paris par terre,  
Pas tant qu'on traînera dans ses artères,  
pas tant qu'on traînera dans ses artères  
Song, C'est Nous le Grand Paris, Médine et al. (2017)*

*We are Greater Paris,  
We are Greater Paris,  
The suburb influences Paname\*, Paname influences the world,  
The 93 influences Paname, Paname influences the world,  
The Maghreb influences Paname, Paname influences the world,  
Yes Africa influences Paname, Paname influences the world  
(...)  
If you respect History this flag is mine  
(respect me I have the colour of the brave)  
Granddad defended you do you remember?  
(four years in a Stalag)  
My brother assaulted you, it's the only thing you remember  
Accept your youth, it has character,  
Don't think that they want to see Paris destroyed,  
Not as long as we drag along in its streets*

*Medine et al.*

*\* Paname is a word for Paris*

Figure 31: Screen Shot from the music video for 'C'est nous le Grand Paris' ('We are Greater Paris') (2017)  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sfVkJYIyik>



“We are Greater Paris” sing the young rappers from the suburbs of the French capital (Médine, 2007). From the most recognised artists on the contemporary art scene, such as Thomas Hirschhorn, to the most popular musicians, such as Medine, artists have found multiple ways to claim their belonging to the city and their role in its making.

What is the contribution of artists to the Creative City? My PhD research started from this broad question. Although it was clear that the debate on creativity should have something to do with artists it seemed that their role was badly represented and analysed; it was often focussed on the creation of a ‘bohemian milieu’ (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002) or more recently on actions of resistance to or collaboration with the way the Creative City has played out in specific places (d’Ovidio and Cossu, 2017; Borén and Young, 2013; Dzialek, Murzyn-Kupisz, 2017). The reflection on the Creative City remained mostly within the frameworks defined by Landry (creativity as innovation in policy making) and Florida (urban economy and growth). The new roads for research pointed to a re-framing of the reflection of the Creative City. Why would the word creativity be left to neoliberals and capitalists? This question seemed to hang in the background of work by Pratt, (2011), Jakob (2011), Borén and Young (2013), Mc Robbie (2016), Mould (2018), Cossu (2017), and Beaumont and Yildiz (2017). Instead these researchers have proposed that alternative visions could exist that would not buy into this dominant discourse, but which would conceptualise the dimensions of justice, and social justice most of all, as an integral part of the Creative City. And so Pratt (2011), Borén and Young (2017) and Mc Lean (2014) proposed that looking at the details of what is happening on the ground, at how exactly the Creative City is conceived by politicians and artists, and at how they manage to turn their vision into reality, would be a good way to proceed.

In this research, I have followed the path that was set out by these proposals. I have generated situated and contextualised knowledge of how the Creative City is conceived in Saint-Denis, and how this vision, as encapsulated in Plaine Commune’s ‘Territory of Culture and Creation’ strategy is put into place. As Markusen and Gadwa (2010) have called for, I have turned my eyes to areas which are not at the core of the metropolis and which are outside of the US and the UK. I have looked at how the national context frames the making of Creative Cities, as Cox (2017) has suggested, and at other types of creativity than those defined by Landry and Florida, as Edensor et al. (2010) have called for. I have directly focused on a key area that is left out from the implementation

of the neoliberal Creative City: the social dimension of the ‘making of the city’ (Noizet, 2013).

Anchoring my reflection in the French context, marked by a strongly ideological cultural policy, invited me to look at what was happening in the theatre world. Theatre is usually left out of the type of projects that are identified as part of the urban planning regeneration efforts, such as public arts and community arts (Sharp et al., 2005; Evans, 2009). Here cultural theory (Rancière, 2009; Bishop, 2012) provided me with strong grounds to look at participatory art projects, many of which are in the domain of performance and theatre, to investigate the way artworks are produced and read, as Sharp et al. (2005), and McLean (2011) have proposed.

The way art is to be used in the city remains contested and is interpreted differently by various stakeholders. As shown, a municipality, a state agency and artists can pursue different visions of creativity and of the role of arts in the city, which confirms the hypothesis elaborated by Pratt (2011), Prince (2010), Borén and Young (2013) and Ratiu (2013), that the actual implementation of Creative City policies on a territory is complex and results from the interplay between the different actors. My research demonstrates that in Saint-Denis there are various different visions of the role of the arts in the city superimposed on the same territory.

All three of the participatory theatre projects I studied claimed to relate to the social fabric of the city. How did they turn their claims into practice? What in their practices allows them to say that they act as ‘weavers’ of social interactions (Rancière, 2009)? Close observation of the projects revealed that their participatory character made them able to achieve their goals with regards to building social interactions and to challenging hierarchies (at least temporarily). These art projects managed to involve, in different ways, people who do not usually engage with artistic projects, and to make them interact with other stakeholders. They succeeded in integrating these voices within the process of the production of the artwork. They directly tackled the three dimensions of a ‘just city’ as defined by Fainstein (2010): equality, democracy and diversity.



However, all three cases revealed obvious limits in the scale and the scope of their action in the city. For example, they achieved mid-way objectives in terms of changing urban planning processes. How far these projects have managed to change the city, beyond the people who came into direct contact with the artworks, remains uncertain. ‘Montjoie! Saint-Denis!’, for instance, conceived its action on the city to be one of ‘aestheticising’ the urban space differently, at a certain moment in time. How this might ‘remain’ in the city, though, is impossible to quantify. Yet, as Rancière (2009) tells us, counting and quantifying the impact of arts is deluded.

How can alternative ‘more-than-capitalist’ visions of Creative Cities, which insist on the social dimension of city making, be implemented and spread then? Claiming that art allows a new ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2009) is hardly going to convince anyone that is not already convinced. In this research there are some elements of an answer. Plaine Commune activates its strategy of putting arts and culture at the centre of the conception of the city by making people experience long-term art processes: it is by making stakeholders experience what an artistic process brings to their professional practice (for urban planners) or to their ability to convey the message to the local authority (for the participants) that Plaine Commune convinces more stakeholders to change their approach to and practices of creativity. A strong limitation is the tendency of the most powerful stakeholders in the ‘making of the city’ (the ones who have the most money) to stay away from such efforts, as the case of ‘The Football Pitch’ has shown.

Despite these imbalances of power, artists continue with their practices, investing and inhabiting the city and trying to change it in their ways. They are providing touches of experimentation, and working on symbols and representations. As Jean-Marc Huitorel (2019) says “what art can give is not necessarily what is expected from it and what one thinks it can give”. Putting all the diversity of the youth of France on stage in a professional production, as ‘The Ephemeral Troup’ has done, or making urban planners “change the focus in the way they see the space” (Plaine Commune, 2019) may make

the city change as much as a new bridge or a new building in the long term, if, as Hélène Noizet (2013) encourages us to do, one looks at all the influences and elements a city is made of and not only at its contemporary shape. The “gaps [...] that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible” (Rancière, 2009:72) may have more impact in the long run than one would assume at first.

How can one justify using funding to support art projects? This was the question posed by New Labour in the UK, which resulted in unconvincing quantifications of the social impact of the arts (Matarasso, 1997; Merli, 2002) and a turn towards looking at the impact on the economy (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002). Borén and Young (2013) suggest that developing new ways of understanding the Creative City may help build better policies. The findings from my research do not provide easy tools or directions for policy makers, who have to justify the use of public money. Participatory, socially-engaged artistic theatre projects are unlikely to bring immediate ameliorations to a large number of people, and are unlikely to have a significant impact on the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of residents. When included in the planning process, results remained very limited with regards to the actual impact on the city’s physical shape. This research highlights that much work is still to be done if one wants to relate the type of findings presented here with the policy field. The framework for evaluating the impact of immaterial actions in the city needs to be constructed further.

In this research I have demonstrated that the specific input of art should not be disregarded in discussions of the Creative City on the basis that it does not have direct economic impact or easily quantifiable social impact. Analysing art projects in detail reveals many ways in which artists mobilise creativity to change the city. A new conception of a ‘just’ Creative City should aim at encapsulating precisely these kinds of contribution.

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