

"BUILD TOGETHER", TRANSFORMATION OF A MILITARY SITE INTO A MULTICULTURAL SITE IN LE HAVRE



COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE POLITICAL INNOVATION
IDENTITY TRAINING **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT** CAPACITY
RENEWAL PARTICIPATION **CULTURAL HERITAGE**
MEMORY **DIVERSITY COOPERATION** SUPPORT

1. Context

Le Havre is writing a new chapter in its history: raised to the ground in the Second World War, the town has built itself back up by expanding and annexing neighbouring towns in the 1950-60s. With its 8 neighbourhoods separated on either side of a cliff, le Havre has had to adapt to the industrial restructuring of the port and automotive economy, which has led to a dramatic decline in the number of inhabitants. Over the last 15 years, the city has put in place a policy dedicated to urban renewal and economic growth. Its social indicators are still a cause for concern, such as a much higher unemployment rate than the national average, especially in the Tourneville area.

CULTURE IS NOT ALWAYS A NEATLY PACKAGED PROGRAM. RATHER, IT IS A PROCESS THAT ITS STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD DISCUSS, DEBATE AND BUILD TOGETHER.

UNESCO's declaration of the city as a World Heritage Status to commend the reconstruction of its heritage was the starting point of the creation of Le Havre's new image. This event changed the way the inhabitants of Le Havre perceived their city. It inspired the city to come up with a more ambitious cultural policy:

- improving the collections in the Modern Art Museum that focus on the impressionist movement (which originated in Le Havre);
- opening a model apartment to exhibit the rebuilding process;
- rejuvenating the municipal Art School, which focuses on careers in design and graphic design.

The closure of the space dedicated to new music within the Oscar Niemeyer *Volcan* triggered a significant rallying of key players and members of the public. Following public conferences on culture, the City's Mayor and Directorate General asked for suggestions from the aforementioned key players and members of the public. Following this, the cultural players launched an open process where all the stakeholders, artists and members of the public who supported the project would have the chance to discuss their requirements. This mobilisation of people became an instrument for discussion, dialogues and for diagnosing the situation. The concert halls and rehearsal rooms project was replaced by a project that met a different set of requirements. The Fort, at the heart of Tourneville is built around a government shared between local/city stakeholders and located on a site where all of the city's cultural vitality has developed.

THIS PROCESS HAS GONE BEYOND CULTURAL PROVISION; IT IS BASED ON THE RIGHT TO CULTURE AND EQUITY.

2. Le Havre and culture

Since these conferences have been held, the municipality has shown a willingness to make culture a major developmental focus in the area. Aside from the restoration of cultural facilities such as the *Volcan* (an architectural piece by Oscar Niemeyer that provides a national stage and future media library), this policy relies heavily on the certainty that the cultural landscape is able to respond to the majority of the challenges that the city is yet to face, in terms of appeal, influence and contribution to the community. This is why, since 2011, a specific reading program 'Reading in Le Havre' has been forming a dense network of reading facilities and took centre stage at the '*Le Goût des Autres*' (The Taste of Others) festival.

Upon his election in 2010, the Mayor described it as a real 'pillar of the revival of Le Havre' and explained that Culture: "is not always a neatly packaged program. Rather, it is a process that stakeholders and anyone who wants to be involved should discuss, debate and build together". Many cultural contributors (particularly from art schools), new musicians, amateurs, professionals, artists and social players have come together to form this project on the former military site in Tourneville and its surrounding area in order to integrate culture into development, not only in the local area, but in the rest of the city as well.



Le Havre is very committed to its Agenda 21, which it has named 'Building a Sustainable City Together'. The city wanted to integrate its main public policies into this Agenda and has made a point

of integrating its reading-related cultural policy. From the most spectacular to the most modest, this 'reading plan' involves a variety of interventions that aim to give the residents a taste for writing and reading books. The municipality has integrated this into the 'living together well' section, which has become a new focus of Le Havre's Agenda 21. In the future, the city hopes to complete this integration in order to bring together everything that contributes to living well in an area and could be a major aspect of its sustainable development. Culture has strong social and economic dimensions. It is a strength in and of itself for the city and its inhabitants.

3. Objectives and implementation of the project

3.1. Overall and specific objectives

Overall objectives:

- To meet the cultural requirements discussed by the organisations and inhabitants/users.
- To integrate the actors and artists from the area into the development processes of these projects and support the participatory democracy by establishing a rich dialogue on the best convivial and economical interests for the culture of an area.
- To recreate a sense of pride for the people of Le Havre.
- *Additional overall objective:* To promote the identification of unknown cultural needs through the establishment of a non-institutional response accompanied by the City and based on the expectations of the people of Le Havre.

THE CITY HAS PLACED ITSELF ALONGSIDE THE STAKEHOLDERS WITHOUT
SUBSTITUTING FOR THEM. AN IN-HOUSE POSITION HAS BEEN CREATED:
'CO-BUILDING' OFFICER.

Specific objectives

- Transform a military site into a multicultural area with a large variety of projects led by various key players from the area or the municipality to meet some of the discussed requirements.
- Reconfigure this site into a cultural centre and a public living space that can generate activity throughout the city, specifically in the nearby neglected area, thereby inducing encouragement for this initiative.
- Let the city benefit from its cultural vitality by providing a long-term platform for multiple activities in an environmental context.

3.2. Characteristics and actions completed

The opening of the site at the heart of the Tourneville commune has established a link with the community centre in order to give the cultural dynamic an active presence among the residents. Two associations have taken on the two most urgent requirements: rehearsal rooms, concert halls, live performance rooms, teaching rooms, residential exhibition space, accommodation, co-working spaces, social areas. The city is undertaking the improvement of working spaces for visual artists, highway maintenance, lighting and access. Around thirty organisations have united as a group of employers and are providing a platform for regular cooperation and meetings. With its mass cultural dynamics, this site opens up a wealth of possibilities for actors and artists. It also greatly increases opportunities for action with audiences, by aiming the range of cultural provision to a greater number of amateur or professional inhabitants, through live performances and training.

CULTURE HAS STRONG AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS. IT IS A STRENGTH
IN AND OF ITSELF FOR THE CITY AND ITS INHABITANTS.

- Designing a project through a process of meetings with teams that were active in the artistic and cultural sectors in Le Havre, such as artists. It involved listening to the needs and opinions of each other and using these to form projects led by the associations (activities, spaces and functioning). The

aim was to design a place that would benefit the community through new music, theatre, dance and visual art in order to give the area its own social, economic and ecological dimension.

- Operating collectively; a crucial part of forming a coherent project. The collective government encourages cooperation, respect and collaborative efforts from all those involved by creating a work environment that can bring out the unique qualities that open up a social space to the neighbourhood. This method of operation also takes ecological parameters into account. The structure of the shared management enables it to change, to be flexible and promises a great variety of cultural provision, which guarantees its vitality. "Avoid creating a system where big organisations crush little ones, or where professionals replace amateurs. Avoid becoming a filtering system. Instead, put forward a multi-structural tool that allows sensibilities, radically different cultures and diversified practices to develop."



- Completion of three projects based on the affinities of the actors and of the city, which led to the construction of buildings made from old containers. Military bunkers were restored and safety standards were implemented at the site. Cultural artists and actors were mobilized to carry out a social diagnosis of the area, as presented by the community centre. This led to the establishment of a partnership for a future contract for the social development of the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood lunches were organised each month for the residents in order to come up with a celebration to inaugurate the site in September 2013.

3.3. Operation

The organisation of the project has been based on the cultural requirements outlined by the stakeholders. Their mobilisation, which the municipality has encouraged, revealed requirements that had not yet been discussed. This process has gone beyond cultural provision; it is based on the right to culture and equity. The 'building together' method has involved a great variety of stakeholders. An inclusive collective government has been established. The key to the process is: taking time to speak to each other, to listen to each other, to delegate roles according to people's abilities and experience. It is also necessary to learn to make decisions together in order to manage the daily lives of stakeholders, citizens and municipal services in accordance with the project and to use the initial momentum.

THE AIM IS TO DESIGN A PLACE THAT BENEFITS THE COMMUNITY THROUGH NEW MUSIC, THEATRE, DANCE AND VISUAL ART IN ORDER TO GIVE THE AREA ITS OWN SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION.

"Alone, you can go fast, but together, you can go far," is the local saying in this old fort. It is said in times where it seems 'too time-consuming' to take everyone's opinions into account in order to maintain the cultural dynamic. The project is the result of suggestions from 23 civil society organisations that work with other associations, inhabitants, users, the municipality and community centre. It requires everyone to take responsibility for part of the overall project, as well as an overall responsibility. The associations have chosen a coordinator to gather all the important elements together in order to draw up a coherent project. This is the fruit of a long process of group discussion, listening and learning.

Thanks to this work, a new cultural public meeting space open to everybody has been built in Le Havre, which contributes towards restoring the environmental, social and economic balance for neighbouring communities. This project has been supported by a brave policy, which has designated culture as a major factor of social and economic progress in a difficult context. As a political choice, culture is an enthusiastic and profoundly democratic way of revealing the potential for creativity and vitality in an area that so desperately needs it in order to develop economically.

ITS SHARED-MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE ENABLES IT TO CHANGE, TO BE FLEXIBLE AND PROMISES A GREAT VARIETY OF CULTURAL PROVISION, WHICH GUARANTEES ITS VITALITY.

4. Impacts

4.1. Meeting objectives

The result itself is very convincing, in that, through the 'bottom-up' process, the diversity and creativity of the project leaders has been much richer than it ever would have been if the municipality had been solely responsible for meeting the discussed requirements. This success also encourages stakeholders in the area to develop their abilities and ideas. The municipality's confidence in their ability has paid off: a new connection has been formed between the local authorities and the neighbourhood initiatives, which increases the practical artistic potential for everyone. It also enables the professionalization of actors by creating a positive and professionalizing economic flow. A second cycle of new projects is already emerging. This first phase of transformation has enabled:

- the opening of a 16,000m² site to the public, in keeping with a 30,000m² neighbourhood with 10,000 inhabitants, including:
 - A new building (named TETRIS), which comprises a meeting space, a concert hall, an exhibition and artistic creation room, a mobile production room and professional art studios and a pedestrian through road;
 - The restoration of military bunkers (named SONIC) into five music rehearsal rooms, a teaching room and a resource centre;
 - The creation of a coherent site comprising: the home of visual, sound and stage artists within the different sections of the building, two music schools (jazz, experimental world music), a sound and image recording studio, two places with group accommodation and community workshops, the municipal department of city archives, an employer group and shared gardens;
 - The enhancement of the site and its surroundings: highway maintenance, lighting, green spaces.
- A meticulous mapping of future artistic and cultural projects.



Alongside two associations from the collective, the municipality has been the contracting authority for the three main building sites for the new structures, the restoration of part of the bunkers, the development of site access and bringing site security up to standard. The occupancy agreements were written collectively by all the organisations involved and were accepted by the municipality. The Community Centre was the driving force for mobilizing the inhabitants. The Tourneville Fort is an example of participatory land policy on a large scale that brings together multiple stakeholders who, far from holding back, have created an efficient dynamic.

4.2. Overall Impact

The principal impact was that of the municipality, who showed a clear willingness to break new ground in terms of governance. New dialogue methods and ways of clarifying everyone's responsibilities have been established. The city has placed itself alongside the stakeholders without substituting for them. The municipality has created an in-house 'co-building' officer position. The process has required a cross-sectional approach from services.

THE RESULT ITSELF IS VERY CONVINCING, IN THAT, THROUGH THE 'BOTTOM UP' PROCESS, THE DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY OF THE PROJECT LEADERS HAS BEEN MUCH RICHER THAN IT EVER WOULD HAVE BEEN IF THE MUNICIPALITY HAD BEEN SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR MEETING THE DISCUSSED REQUIREMENTS.

This process has provided an opportunity for stakeholders in the area to acquire new skills. It has provided in-house cultural officers with the chance to experience of a new way of operating. This site has become a unifying and stimulating place for the artistic and cultural scene in Le Havre. It proves that this type of methodology is possible. It enables and facilitates the professionalization of young people who hope to embark on a career in the cultural sector. The dynamics of this site are developing people's interest in activities both inside and outside of the site (new partnerships between associations and institutions have demonstrated this).

Relying on the stakeholders in the area has produced a stimulating movement within a creative atmosphere. The project is a mark of recognition that creates possibilities and makes people want to stay in the city. It makes the City look more dynamic and altruistic from an outside perspective. This project has given the inhabitants a sense of pride and attachment to their area. The site and its ways of operating attract a creative population.

The city has shown its willingness to stimulate creativity in the area from all sectors by stating that it can turn ideas into realities. This resonates the feeling of a new atmosphere that encourages development stakeholders to invest in their land. Thanks to the skills gathered in the Fort, the initiatives that have been developed and the city's image, new economic activities related to design, fashion, information technology, cinema, photography and tourism will be attracted to the city. In fact, they will find the converted military site to be greatly suited to their cultural practices, complemented by a very attractive natural site (sea coast light).



5. Further information

The city of Le Havre was a nominated candidate for the first 'UCLG International Award - Mexico City - Culture 21' (January-May 2014). The awards jury produced a final report in June 2014 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to promote this project as a practical example for the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

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