

SUSTAINABLE LARGE URBAN PROJECTS CONFRONTED TO THEIR HABITABILITY

THE EXEMPLARY CASE OF THE CONFLUENCE AREA IN LYON

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Context

For more than ten years, many initiatives of various scales have blossomed, which aim to promote and build sustainable development and consumption modes. The domain of urban policies, understood in the broadest sense, makes no exception, with many eco-district projects, eco-renovation processes, and awareness-raising campaigns deployed to reinforce the environmentally-conscious practices of inhabitants which are promoted to the rather recent function of eco-citizens. The MOVIDA research program positions itself in the complex web of sustainable development, and at the same time aims to measure its effectiveness and operativeness. To what extent, and through which innovations can these various policies and initiatives actually impact the way of life of these populations? Our own research project consists in transposing this question to the domain of urban renovation projects, by asking the following question: is a sustainable city habitable, under which conditions, requiring which adjustments or practical tricks? More precisely, we offer to **document the effects of the implementation of sustainable urban development projects on the changes to the way of life of the city-dwellers, from the experiences of its inhabitants**. Our project is part of an innovative approach, in that it aims to explore an aspect that is not well documented yet, as some of these urban projects are just now beginning to be inhabited: the habitability of these new models of a sustainable city and the transformation of the ways of life actually caused by this new urbanity. The objective is to better understand the hurdles in the way of the appropriation of these local projects, which bring together eco-technologies and governance techniques, and which aim to create and sustain new practices in daily life, and ultimately new ways of life. The expected results also allow a better understanding of the operativeness and limits of the behavioral incentives that come with these urban projects (technical or communicational support, discussion workshops, awareness-raising meetings, or personalized support sessions).

Area of research

The research is focused on one main area, the Confluence project, located in the second arrondissement in Lyon, which, because of its size (150ha) and ambition both in terms of urban redevelopment for the Lyon urban area, and international influence among other metropolises, integrates and takes into account its own exemplary nature. Another, more minor area has also been approached: the Village Vertical residents cooperative, located in the Maisons-Neuves neighborhood in Villeurbanne, which is a good example of another sustainable urban experimentation.

Results: Resymmetrizing the construction of a sustainable city

The main results of the study converge to illuminate a complex system of tensions and mediations linked both to the status as a *prototype of a sustainable city* and to its strictly urban dimension as a *city in the making*. Indeed, while the residents do manage to inhabit the Confluence neighborhood, it comes at the price of important secondary adjustments in relation to the technical and governmental devices of the project, which are widely failing. Then, to inhabit the Confluence neighborhood is to inhabit a milieu of social, spacial, and even xenophobic tensions. Here, the scale of the project and of the transformation it causes emphasizes and exacerbates the tensions inherent to the urban fabric.

Discreet mediations form a sustainable city

The main achievement of our study is to have shown that there is no gap between the sustainable

city equipments and the use that the residents make of them. As proof, the recurring failures and breakdowns, the unsuitability of the equipments, the weakness of some materials are part of the daily life of the residents, and provoke adaptations and adjustments, a real multiplicity of *relations*: from low intensity use, to diverted appropriation, to critical use, we have revealed the wide array of relations that the inhabitants have with these equipments. This mediatory characteristic of inhabiting comes from an interaction with an experimental technical domain, necessitating that the residents (but also the developers and decision-makers) *make do* with the failures that occur and the low degree of concretization of the technical objects. From the point of view of the residents, the habitability of the sustainable city takes place as a last resort in the mediation spaces formed by these arenas which are *a priori* banal and without specific qualities, such as the co-owners' assembly, the daily interactions between the tenants and the custodian or the multi-purpose technical agent from the OPAC (Office Public d'Aménagement et de Construction), a neighborhood council, or a tenants association opposing the eco-renovation. It is quite often within these small collectives that the technical, legal and practical readjustments emerge which allow a shared appropriation of the sustainable city.

The residents as theoreticians of the sustainable city.

The prototype city is dysfunctional, quite logically, yet what is more striking is the ability of the residents we met for offering analyses, criticism and explanation systems for these failures. These theories, like the mediations exposed earlier, constitute as such other ways to bridge the supposed gap between use by the inhabitants and equipments of the sustainable city. Thinking about the dysfunctions, or the low degree of concretization of the technical objects, is a way to create some sort of fiction that would place the residents back at the scale of what is happening to them, and that would prepare them to actually solve the various problems they face. But this theory of the dysfunctions also connects to a deeper analysis of the fragility of the city itself, this "big machine" that the inhabitants have to deal with, and through which they display their capacity for explaining and identifying the causes of their problems. The persons we met can follow to the deepest level the thread of these networks that make this "machine" so robust in appearance, to reveal its extreme vulnerability.

Problems and principles of inhabiting

The residents of the Confluence neighborhood are constantly forced to project forward the problems they encounter, to ensure the continued possibility of their inhabiting. As there is no confrontation between the residents and the developers or the decision-makers, there is also no "big jump" to be made by the inhabitants, or no hope to make their point of view adequately heard. To take seriously the capacity for problematization of the residents is, as we have shown throughout this report, to accept to follow them when they "jump" from one place to the other, one domain to the other, one time to the other, tracing a logic that resembles no formal logic. This logic is in no way irrational, *provided precisely* that we do not mistake it for a formal logic: this is a logic of living beings, of inhabitants, dealing with new and unexpected requirements demanded by a milieu still largely unknown.

Valorization

The research report will be used during the year 2017 to lead to the publication of two scientific articles as well as a book published by Éditions des mondes à faire, aimed towards a wider audience.