

Abstract

This research develops a possible understanding of the relationship between creativity (in its broad meaning) and city branding. More specifically, the aim of this study is to depict a cohesive landscape of the multiform creative environment of the city of Nantes and to see how such lively cultural and creative richness can be used to promote the visibility of the city at European level. The thesis theoretically starts from two different conceptions of the city. One is the vision taken from the urban studies, where the city is seen as the centre of contemporary society, and therefore it is studied from a sociological point of view. In this section, particular relevance is given to the discussion of the controversial concept of the *creative city*.

The second conception of the city will be considered relates to communication studies. What is at stake here is the image of the city, together with its communicative potential. In particular, the focus is on the notion of city branding and the building of a *city identity*. In the analytical part, the research combines the two areas of studies, giving birth to a mixed perspective. In conclusion, besides giving a global vision of the use of Nantes' creativity for branding purposes, the study also underlines weaknesses in the branding process and suggests potentialities to be exploited. Finally, the research argues that the branding campaign that the local administrators consider to be the next step towards Nantes' development is, in reality, a powerful tool of urban development.

I. Introduction

During the last decade, city marketing has become an established practise for all European cities administrations. Many scholars have commented on this practise with controversial outcomes. The main source of argument lies in the following question: Can a city be considered as a product, and therefore being promoted with the same tools? The present study borrows the approach adopted by Chris Murray in the book *Making Sense of place: new approaches to place marketing*¹, where the author affirms that “cities cannot be reduced to ‘a product’”², as they are living, multi-form, culturally distinct entities. Currently, the academic community generally agrees on the fact that a successful city marketing strategy should take into account all of the city’s cultural peculiarities by opening up to a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach. Thus, this research is based on cultural mapping and planning studies. These two related disciplines are defined as a strategic approach to the study of cities. As a matter of fact, through the analysis of cities’ *cultural resources*³, they allow the study of communities’ culture.⁴

Like the majority of modern European cities, Nantes is also working on its image and its brand. The inspiration for this study comes from the recent creation of the *Conseil Consultatif à l’attractivité internationale*, (consultative council for international attractiveness). This agency is an associate structure initiated by the mayor of Nantes Jean-Marc Ayrault. The committee joins a large variety of personalities: from university leaders to media experts, from politicians to enterprises’ professionals. The stated objectives of the committee are to participate and to coordinate the international attractiveness strategies of

¹ Murray, Chris, *Marking Sense of Place: New approaches to place marketing*, Bournes Green: Comedia, 2001.

² Bianchini, Franco and Ghilardi Lia, *Thinking culturally about place*, in *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol.3, Number 4, October 2007, Palgrave Journal, UK.

³ Meaning not only cultural policies, but also historical heritage, arts and media activities, youth culture, institutions, natural and built environment etc...

⁴ Bianchini, F. & Ghilardi L. *Op. Cit.*

the city. At the same time, this council wants to become the benchmark for sharing and valorising all propositions addressed to Nantes' international development.⁵ The intentions are interesting, but work is still at an early stage. At the moment, the council is concentrated on setting up a branding campaign for the city. On the table, and amongst the general public, the debate is divided halfway between gossip and the political polemic. According to some, the administration's idea to brand Nantes is merely an attempt to emulate other European realities, more than a concrete need for the city. Hence, this study is addressed to Nantes' administrators. Its goal is to raise real knowledge and awareness on city branding practises and to provide new perspectives. A clear understanding of the topic is a prerequisite for city administrators if they want to be effective in explaining the reasons for such a big investment to their citizens. Secondly, the study strives to provide a global vision of Nantes branding potential by underlining and coherently putting together the pieces of Nantes' creative milieu. By providing a more detached perspective on Nantes' development and creative milieu, this study hopes to give a useful contribution to the council decision-makers' activity.

In order to create a clear picture of the link between branding and the creative city development in Nantes two minor questions are posed:

- a.** How does the creative city model of development fit into the case study of Nantes?
- b.** How can Nantes' creative milieu be used in a branding perspective?

1.1 Structure of the thesis

After the introduction, the next chapter explains the chosen methodology and the reasons for this choice. The theoretical chapter approaches first the cultural mapping theory as a tool of urban planning. Consequently, it gives room to the

⁵ From the association statute "Agence de développement à l'international" article 2, 19 October 2010, Nantes Metropole.

debate on creative cities as a model of urban development. The final section of the theory chapter is dedicated to the presentation of branding and its relation with marketing and communication studies. In order to understand Nantes' case study, the analytical chapter provides a reading of the empirical data through the lenses of the theories adopted. The analysis is carried out by dividing Nantes' creativity according to some larger tendencies emerged from the data collection. In the analysis, the creative cities theory represents the common soil of all the topics. Although the privileged perspective of this section is branding, a socio-urban point of view is also included as essential complement of the discussion. The thesis closes with some comments on the weaknesses and the potentialities of Nantes' branding.

II. Methodology

2.1 Research strategy

The aim of the present study is to investigate the aforementioned case study by means of an in-depth **qualitative analysis**. First, as the research goal is to understand the dynamics of an on-going process such as city development, a qualitative approach is considered more useful because it enables phenomena interconnections to emerge. Secondly, both *creativity* and *attractiveness*, which are the key terms of the study, are not quantifiable subjects. Conversely, a quantitative approach would neither allow the study of the causes and the consequences of certain facts, nor it would provide a reliable analysis of an ongoing processes.⁶

The research philosophy adopted is **social constructivism**. This choice is generated by the nature of the topic itself. As this ontological orientation states that knowledge and reality are actively constructed by social actors, in response to interactions with the surrounding milieu⁷, the social constructivist lens is considered as suitable for the analysis of processes strictly depending on people's decisions. Additionally, if the city is seen as centre of social development and social life, a social constructivist approach is the only reasonable point of view to adopt. Moreover, urban landscapes are the result of human interaction and therefore the clearest evidence of the interdependency between phenomena and their social context. On the contrary, an objectivist ontology affirming the non-interaction between social actors would be inappropriate, and it would lead to a misleading report.⁸

The epistemological position of **interpretivism** is chosen because it underlines the importance of both participants' and researcher's perceptions. An interpretative approach is used first, because the study deals with terms such as *attractiveness* and *development*, which are abstract ideas and therefore highly

⁶ Bryman, Adam, *Social Research Methods*. New York: Oxford, 3rd edition, 2009, pp. 21-23.

⁷ Bryman, A., *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

⁸ Bryman, A., *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

subjective. Second, during the analysis of texts and interviews, it allows considering participants' background. Thus, it is necessary to take certain factors into consideration: political credos, personal relations and professional backgrounds, for example. On the contrary, a positivist point of view denying the influence of the activity in the environment on social phenomena was excluded.⁹

Of course, the investigation was inspired by other research on the topic. The study started from a deductive theory, which was useful to gain a fundamental theoretical grounding. However, the case study nature is also suitable for the building of an inter-related theory, depending on data collection.¹⁰ In other words, the interpretation of the phenomena is based both on inductive and deductive methods, always inter-related in a circular movement of interpretation.¹¹ During the analytical process, in fact, as the hermeneutical spiral allows taking advantage from previous studies, it also adds and produces new elements. The aim is, in other words, to get to a new theory admitting case study specificities and ambiguities. An example is given in Figure 1.

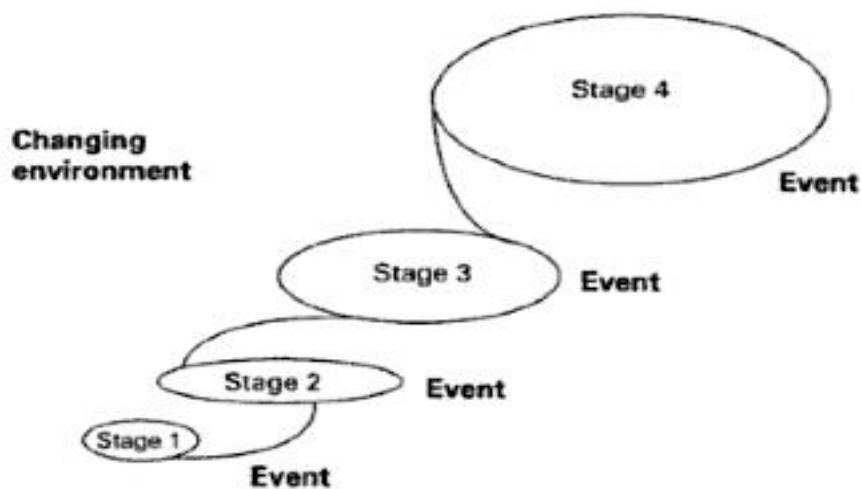


Figure 1 - Spiral Models¹²

⁹ Bryman, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Bryman, A., *Ibid.*, p. 541.

¹¹ Carson, David and Gilmore, Audrey and Perry, Chad and Gronhaug, Kjell. *Qualitative Marketing Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2001, pp. 182-183.

¹² Carson, D. *Ibid.*, pp. 182-183.

Finally, as the concept of creativity and development are new and highly suitable to different interpretations¹³, the final picture of this case study is explorative. No unidirectional reading of the phenomena at stake is imposed, but insight into the intertwined relations between the creative development of the city branding studies is provided.

2.2 Research Design

The research strategy adopted is the case study. This approach is considered the most suitable to be used when as in our case “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”¹⁴. Here, the urban context is not only the study background, but is an active part of the investigation. The analysis of the development of the image of the city of Nantes, for example, cannot be eradicated from its French context; on the contrary, it is completely dependent on it.

This study combines different kinds of data and various ways of data collection, appropriate to a case study¹⁵. The empirical gathering of information consists of both primary and secondary data, always complementing each other. Primary data consist in gathering information about the city creative milieu and its actors. They include information about the current situation of Nantes development in its broader meaning, but also future plans and historical facts. To do so, a lot of observation was made. Taking advantage of the journalist position, and the daily close contact with Nantes’ municipality, it was possible to acquire a great amount of information. The primary data collection covered the period between August 2010 and February 2011.

Through the period of primary data collection, the research was implemented by the collection of secondary data. This consisted of professional reports, press conference releases and academic literature on the city of Nantes. In addition, institutions’ websites, newspaper articles, some video and radio podcasts were

¹³ The term of *creative city* was first used by Landry in 2000.

¹⁴ Yin, Robert, K., *Case study research: Design and methods*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, 2003.

¹⁵ Yin, R.K., *Ibid.*

also used to complete the information gathered with the interviews and observation.

This variety of data sources allowed the process of triangulation. The information obtained was verified through different sources, so as to control its reliability.¹⁶ But triangulation was also used during the analysis while employing different methods, such as content analysis and conversational analysis¹⁷. Relying on the flexible nature of **qualitative content analysis**, it was decided to use this approach not only for the analysis of texts, but also for the study of the interviews, so to make implicit meanings emerge and to establish a relationship between theory and data.¹⁸ Thanks to participants' collaboration new paths, previously not considered, were identified and researched mainly via websites linked to Nantes' municipality and local newspapers. Among the topics emerged from the data collection, only those related to branding were considered for the analysis. Subsequently, they were analysed and discussed through the theoretical lens.

Even though a visual approach to Nantes' case was not considered in the original research design, it became clear while analysing Nantes' image creation, that discussion of the visual aspects of the city communication branding perspective was also necessary. In the same way, while approaching the theme of participation, some comments on the use of social media as communication tool seemed to perfectly fit the overall discussion.

The interviewees' group consists of key-persons of the city, currently members of the "council of the international attractiveness", (Conseil à l'attractivité Internationale), but also a journalist and a citizen once involved in the city marketing department.

Due to the complexity of the topic, it was considered useful to interview experts and to gather specific knowledge and new angles on the direction of city

¹⁶ Bryman, A., *Op.Cit*, p. 274.

¹⁷ For the notion of conversation analysis see p. 10.

¹⁸ Bryman, A., *Ibid.*, pp. 274-278.

policies concerning city development. Some of the interviewees, like Karine Daniel (in charge of the European project for Nantes), Katharina Freter (in charge of development international for Nantes Metropole), Philippe Malinge (European projects manager) and Jean Blaise (director of Nantes tourist office) are at the core of the decision-making process that concerns the development of the city in an international perspective.

In the beginning, qualitative semi-structured interviews were set up because “interview process is flexible [...] the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events”¹⁹. However, after the first interview with Karine Daniel the semi-structured form was abandoned because it impeded the flow of the discussion. Only a few fixed key-points of discussion were constantly submitted to the interviewees. This interview technique was decided as the best approach, because a topic rich with interconnections needs a flexible approach that encourages the active participation of the interviewees.²⁰ The interviewer adapted her role according to the area of expertise of the interviewees, trying to get the most out of the conversation by letting the interviewees propose new and unconsidered issues.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. In the appendix, the transcriptions of the parts, directly or indirectly, quoted in the thesis can be found.

Regarding the analysis of the interviews, considering their length and complexity, an *ad hoc* approach was found to be the most effective way of meaning extraction. Thus, more than one technique was used to fully uncover the meanings of the interviews.²¹ First, some main areas of interest were identified thanks to Giorgi’s meaning condensation. This approach is an empirical method useful to “analyse extensive and often complicated interview texts by looking at natural meaning units and explicating their main themes.”²² So, first of all, through cultural mapping, the different forms of expression of

¹⁹ Bryman, A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 438.

²⁰ Bryman, A., *Ibid.*, pp. 274-278.

²¹ Kvale, Steiner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 193.

²² Kvale, S., *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Nantes' creativity were identified. They were subsequently included in the frame of the creative city model that Nantes' development seems to be inspired by. This allowed seeing to which extent the creative city model can be applied to Nantes, and from which parts of the theory Nantes can really take advantage of, in order to build its branding strategy. After identifying, the most interesting aspects of this theory, they were analysed from a branding perspective in order to highlight their assets and weaknesses. Sometimes, in order to get a better understanding of Nantes' case, some connections to other case studies were also added.

As the role of the interpreter is to go "beyond what was directly said to work out structures and relations of meanings not immediately apparent in the text."²³, the use of meaning interpretation was considered necessary to investigate non-textual and covert contents of the interviews.²⁴ To this end, it should be noted that every text is the outcome of the context in which it was produced. Hermeneutics was therefore employed since it "emphasizes the socio-cultural and historic influences on qualitative interpretation and exposes hidden meanings."²⁵ In addition, the national and regional background case (Nantes is located in the region Pays de la Loire, a department of West France historically related to Brittany) is fundamental in order to fully understand the context in which the phenomena at stake are taking place. Language and culture are therefore fundamental parts that the researcher has to consider during the analytical process. The use of **conversation analysis** was also considered useful considering the job position of the interviewees. Their way to entail the conversation and to answer questions has been seen as a useful detail to take into consideration. In order to assure a proper comprehension of the data, both verbal and written, content analysis was used.²⁶ Not only the participants' but also the researcher's perceptions and bias have to be taken into

²³ Kvale, S., *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.

²⁴ Kvale, S., *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁵ Byrne, Michelle, *Hermeneutics as a methodology for textual analysis - nursing applications AORN Journal*, Vol. 5, 2001, pp. 1-4.

²⁶ Byrne, M., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 1-4.

consideration, as all her decisions, based in part on perception and opinion, inevitably affect the development of the study.²⁷

The researcher was aware of her influential position in interviews, due to her internship position as journalist at a well-known city radio station. For this reason, the researcher guaranteed that the recordings would only be used as academic data. None of the information gathered was broadcasted or used in a different way than the one stated. It is also important to note that EUradioNantes, the radio station where the researcher was an intern, is financed by the local authorities, as well as by the European Union. All participants demonstrated a collaborative attitude, in part due to their sympathy with the EUradioNantes project and their confidence in its manager Laurence Aubron. At the same time, the research aim was covert; the researcher tried not to reveal too much information about the purpose of the study in order to avoid participants paying lip-service²⁸. Finally, the research also had to be very aware and careful about identifying implicit biases in interviewees' speeches. Participants' work environment, as well as their political orientation, could have affected participants' comments, as well as the research findings. Being involved in this network of working relationships, the researcher might also be biased while treating comments related to the project she was involved in. At the same time, the journalistic perspective was fruitful and fundamental for the data collection. As a EUradioNantes journalist, getting in touch with the most qualified people in the field was in fact relatively easy. During six months, the researcher got to know the environment and the dynamics of Nantes' local administrative life well.

The initial list of participants did also include some persons at the head of various urban creative projects in town. However, due to their tight time schedule it was not possible to arrange a meeting. Their contribution was therefore substituted with an accurate data search using other sources, such as

²⁷ Vaus David de., *Research Design in Social Research*, London: Sage, 2001.

²⁸ By "lip-service" it is meant that interviewees live up to the researcher's expectations, because an unnatural environment was set up. The danger that might occur is that respondents would try to accommodate their answers based on what the interviewer might expect from them.

the internet or other people. This kind of qualitative research takes a lot of time and there are infinite other ways for the analysis to be deepened. It would be interesting, for example, to cross the qualitative outcomes with a more quantitative approach on the knowledge of Nantes by foreigners for example. Other researches could otherwise address their insight to residents' perception of Nantes development and the international city ambitions.

The following chapter of the research provides the theoretical background necessary to understand and discuss Nantes' case study.

III. Theory

This study is based on two theoretical pillars. The first has its roots in the branch of urban development literature dedicated to the role of culture within city planning. However, cultural policy is not the only element discussed. Because of the sociological approach of this research, notions such as *city image* and *identity* will also be considered in this chapter. According to the line of research line that deals with culture and creativity, the debate about urban development inevitably assumes certain knowledge of the concept of the *creative city*. For this reason, a chapter of the present section is dedicated to the debate on the creative city model of development, mainly to give a clear overview of the academic literature on the topic.

The second key-element of the theoretical block originates from the field of communication. In particular, this research deals with the concepts of place marketing and place branding, considering them as the main tools currently in European cities' attractiveness strategies. In order to avoid confusion during the development of this thesis, a brief terminological remark will be made.

Branding and marketing are usually tagged as communication strategies. Although generally speaking, they might be used as synonyms, they are not. Even if they have the same goal, namely, to boost the image of a product, the means they use to reach that goal are different, but not contrasting. Marketing is a strategy working as an external force: it studies the target group (consumers) and it focuses its action on the image of the product. In other words, marketing deals with advertisement and customers' behaviour. On the other hand, branding affects the product identity itself, adding new values and changing its identity together with its image. Moreover, while marketing focuses specifically on the product, branding acts more deeply, digging into the original core of the product: the company and its human capital. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of branding, this theoretical section concludes with the

development of the place branding theory, which is considered the key-point between urban development and communication strategies.

3. Culture in the urban context

3.1 Contemporary cities: the urban change

The last twenty years have been fundamental to the change of all European urban areas. On the side of the socio-economic change, urban life and urban spaces endured a deep transformation. Facing economical crisis and the decline of the industrial model the last thirty years, local administrators have been engaging in a challenging task: turning their cities into post-industrial urban areas. The key words for the change have been: service industries, information economy and network society. In the post-industrial city, the urban framework has transformed. In every European place-makers' agenda, quality of life replaced industrial growth plans. Technological innovation has contributed to the lessened importance of geographical distances not only within the same nation, but, in particular, among the more developed European cities. As a consequence, European cities developed a competitive attitude towards each other.²⁹ The rivalry is obviously economic, but what is at stake here is not merely competition between tourist destinations. On the contrary, it is a fight for attracting investments and all kinds of skilled workers: from engineers to artists, from policy makers to researchers, or, to use a famous expression: *the creative class*³⁰. Although the debate was already taking place in certain British academic milieus since the eighties, the idea of creativity as a central force in city life gained prominence in 2002, thanks to Richard Florida bestseller *The rise of the creative class*.

Besides the fight for the appropriation of the creative city theory, what is interesting and new, is the brutal *intrusion* of marketing strategies in urban

²⁹ Lavagna, Mariangela, *Creative industries, cultural quarters and urban development, the case studies of Rotterdam and Milan*, Amsterdam institute for Metropolitan and international development studies, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2002.

³⁰ Florida, Richard, *The rise of the creative class*, Paperbook, NYC, 2002.

planning practises. The combination of these two areas of expertise rose precisely from the cities' need to be competitive, even beyond national borders. It is at the crossroads between communication studies and urban planning that the creative city theory came out. Even though the debate on creative cities is relatively new, a lot of ink has already been spilled with different, and rather opposing, interpretations. In the following section the creative city model is developed and discussed considering these different perspectives.

3.2 The creative city

The history of Nantes looks like the history of many other ex-industrial European cities, newly converted into cultural hot-spots. At the end of the eighties, like Manchester and Turin, Nantes decided to turn into a *creative city*. But what does that really mean?

One of the problems with the definition of the *creative city* lies in the term *creativity* itself. As an intangible resource, creativity is hardly quantifiable and therefore difficult to contain completely within one definition.³¹ However, a main idea of what a creative city is can be deducted from a brief mapping of the creative city literature.

The term *creative city* was first introduced by Landry and Bianchini in 1995.³² In their work, *creativity* is a wide concept that adopts new and alternative approaches to tackle cities' contemporary problems. To some extent, Landry and Bianchini's concept of *creativity* could be replaced with the term *innovation*. The birthplace of this idea is to be traced in the United Kingdom, where the discussion about the role of culture in city regeneration (both as social and economic factor) was already taking place in the late eighties.³³ Therefore, early on, the creative city was a model of urban development, where culture was set

³¹ Myfanwy Trueman, Cook Diana, Nelarine Cornelius, *Creative dimensions for branding and regeneration: overcoming negative perceptions of a city*, in Place Branding and Public Diplomacy Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

³² Bianchini, Franco and Landry, Charles, *The Creative City*, Demos, London, 1995.

³³ O'Connor, Justin, *The Definition of "Cultural Industries"*, in The European Journal of Arts Education Vol. 2 No. 3, February Manchester Metropolitan University, 2000.

as the main pillar of city social and economic regeneration. Later though, the concept started to be used in different disciplines, taking different connotations according to the perspective adopted, until the top of popularity was reached in 2002, with the publication of Richard Florida's bestseller *The rise of the creative class*.³⁴ In this book, the creative city becomes a model of economic growth, driven by a special class of citizens: the creative class. According to Florida, a city deserves to be awarded the tag of *creative*, if it counts a strong presence of skilled workers and young creative professionals. He paints a clear picture of the city by suggesting three main prerequisites to build the creative city: technology, talents and tolerance. More precisely, the city theorised by Florida is based on knowledge economy and technologically advanced companies (*technology*). In order to give lifeblood to the city economy, these companies would tend to recruit the most skilled minds on the global labour market. In a global competitive economy, where the market fulcrum passed from the product itself to human knowledge, it is clear how highly educated and experienced workers can make a difference (*talents*). But scientists and engineers are not the only characters that Florida hopes to get settled in his creative city. In fact, contextually with the more strictly economic issue, he also points out the need for an open-minded and pleasant place to live (*tolerance*). Artists, communicators, designers represent another branch of fundamental inhabitants that implements the *creativity index*³⁵ of a city. Thus, this model gives green light to any kind of cultural events and leisure time amusements, together with parks, bike lines and an efficient public service. With Florida, the creative city shifts from a sociological approach to a more shaped and fixed model of urban development. Ever since, local administrators have welcomed this model, and Florida's work has been accepted as an urban planning handbook all around the world. Conversely, the academic society did not react the same way. As a matter of fact, the creative class theory has been harshly criticised by many scholars on different fronts.³⁶

³⁴ Comunian, Roberta, *Rethinking the creative city: the role of complexity, networks and interactions in Urban creative economy*, in *Urban studies journal*, Sage, September 2010.

³⁵ Florida, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 257.

³⁶ Comunian, R., *Op Cit.*

First of all, as Hospers³⁷ states, the concept of creative city is temporal: different cities have been creative in different periods and also in different ways. For this reason, he claims the idea of creative city to be replaced by the no-time idea of *innovative* and/or *successful* city. And there again, the subjectivity of the concept of *successful city* leads to a never-ending discussion: does successful mean wealthy, equal or *cool*? Furthermore, one of the most common criticisms on *The rise of the creative class* lies in the *condition sine qua non* of Florida's creative city: the creative class. Besides excluding low skilled-workers and other disadvantaged social groups, the creative class theory is completely turned outwards: while constantly looking for foreign talents, it shows to be totally careless towards the *native talents*.³⁸ Can a city that just imports talents consider itself creative or innovative? In our case, should Nantes forget the heritage of the working class that has been working in the dockyards for decades? Even when Florida discusses the role of universities, instead of opening a constructive debate on the modalities of innovation of the educational system, he always points out the attraction power of such institutions to talented individuals, more than the *self-production of talents*. Similarly, regarding culture and creative economy, Pratt³⁹ points to the incompleteness of this theory, which only serves to underline the city as a place for consumptions, omitting the productive step in the chain. In fact, Florida always refers to culture focussing on its consumption potential (nightlife and cultural events in general) forgetting to discuss cultural industries that materially produce culture (music labels, music management, audiovisual studios etc). In other words, one of Florida's weakest points is the marketing-oriented approach his theory is grounded on. Pratt insists on the commercial nature of Florida's concept: the creative city he builds is a marketing tool, an added value that does not approximate a rational urban planning model. It is rather the opposite: a superficial hype for city

³⁷ Hospers G-J. and Pen C., *A view on Creative cities beyond the hype*, Vol 17, n. 4, Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

³⁸ Fonseca, Ana Carla and Urani, André, *Creative cities perspective*, Creative City Production, Sao Paolo, 2009, pp. 1-4.

³⁹ Pratt, Andy, *Creative cities: the cultural industries and the creative class*, Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography, Stockholm, 2008.

promotion.⁴⁰ According to Pratt, culture and creativity are presented as marketing tools to sell the city, instead of being considered as direct source of income and production. In addition, turning the attention to the public level, this conception risks skewing cultural policies from their original aim.⁴¹ Moreover, Florida's *three Ts* theory (technology, talent, tolerance) is based on a standardized city model, which does not take into account regional cultural and historical area specificities. This *uniformity* is not only questionable in a sociological context, but also from a communication point of view. According to Bianchini, it is not possible to directly transfer strategies previously used from one city to another. Therefore, although supporting the need for city branding, he suggests culture as a means of city analysis. Bianchini also argues that culture is able to encompass diversity and therefore also to make a difference in adjusting communication strategies to different realities.⁴² This cultural approach based on the disciplines of cultural mapping and planning is going to be discussed in the next section.

Founding his urban model on a city capacity of attracting creative people, Florida underlines the point of intersection between urban planning and communication studies. All criticisms and shortcoming aside, his creative city theory has two merits: first, the popularization the topic outside the academic milieu, and second, the rehabilitation of the idea of the city as an entity of emancipation, after decades of degradation. In effect, the creative city theory reaffirms and legitimizes urban areas as the core of modern economic and social life.⁴³

Considering the nebulous and multi-faced nature of the concept, it was reasonable to identify a few dimensions especially useful for getting a key reading of the creative city. After discussing Florida's model and its non-generalization, Florida's 3T theory, was not considered appropriate for

⁴⁰ Pratt, A., *Op. Cit.*

⁴¹ O'Connor, J., *Op. Cit.*

⁴² Bianchini, F. & Ghilardi L., *Op.Cit.*

⁴³ Author's free translation from Vivant, E., *Que'est-se que c'est la ville créative?*, Presse universitaire de France, Paris, 2009.

analysing the case of Nantes, since its rigidity does not open up to the particularities of the case study. As replacement, a flexible triptych was considered more suitable and useful to understand Nantes' case study.

Following Landry's thought, the three fundamental patterns of a creative city are *culture, communication and cooperation*. As already stated, the reason for this choice lies in Landry's approach to creative city. In his work, the creative city is presented as a process, more than a fixed model. His idea of creativity is as a mindset, a way of thinking about the city. He imagines a participatory city where creativity does not lose its function in a consumer-aimed approach, but keeps on being the main tool for city makers' working agenda. Moreover, Landry emphasizes the responsibilities of the public administration (concerning public policies and citizens' participation) more than on the creative class and creative industries contributions. According to him, creativity is a "problem-solving tool"⁴⁴ that everyone, from social operators to health managers, should bear in mind when facing new challenges. It is from this fluid notion of the creative city that Landry's extracts his three dimensions:

- *Culture* or the city identity. Culture has to be rooted in city history, but it also has to be able to project itself into the future. The talent of a city, meaning, its most distinctive and competitive resource, is its cultural identity, its diversity as a product of its history.
- *Communication* meaning an efficient system of information, both within and outside the city. Here technology becomes the key tool for success. New media and information technology are the base of a society willing to become one of the most advanced cities on the globe. For instance, technology offers an opportunity to solve over with logistical problems, such as geographical barriers or remote locations. Furthermore, a city without a healthy communication system cannot dare to compete with other metropolitan areas with a highly structured and proficient promotional apparatus. At the same time, a wise use of technology allows cutting expenses and pollution, thus supporting a more sustainable way of living.

⁴⁴ Landry, Charles. *The Creative City*. London: Earthscan Publishers, 2000.

- *Cooperation*: this concept not only embodies Florida's *tolerance*, but goes even further. The challenge of a creative city is to be inclusive. Diversity has to be not only accepted, but also integrated into city life. Local governments not only have to play the role of the mediator between the national government and the local communities, but above all to act as a promoter of an intense constructive dialogue within the citizenship. Otherwise stated: "The creative city is a city capable of mobilizing its diverse component parts in the pursuit of a plan for the future."⁴⁵

Importantly, communication and cooperation are not only meant to be forces within the city limits. The international angle that Nantes wants to add to its branding strategy gives a reflection of the supra-national level of city connections. Particularly, due to the intense contacts to the European Union, give these connections their own peculiar character, and as such these deserve to be probed.

At international level, cooperation often appears in the form of networks amongst cities. During the last decades, different projects and congresses were held in order to promote the sharing of best practises between cities, so as to allow a comparison between several kinds of development models worldwide. In Europe, the most important international platform is EUROCITIES. This network discusses local policies in seven areas: cooperation, culture, economy, environment, knowledge society, mobility and social affairs. Throughout the year, EUROCITIES' members attend the conventions and the commissions group meetings held by different city, giving them the opportunity to get to know others' experiences as well as experts' perspectives.⁴⁶ However, EUROCITIES is not only active on the local level. It also works as a lobby towards the European Commission, as a megaphone for European city administrators. To summarize the above, networking is an outcome of the

⁴⁵ Carta, Maurizio, *Culture, Communication and Cooperation: the three Cs of the creative city*, International Journal of Sustainable Development Issue: Volume 12, Number 2-4 / 2009.

⁴⁶ EUROCITIES <http://www.eurocities.eu> [last accessed 09/05/2011]

knowledge society that has, in itself, turned into a powerful tool for city-makers.

3.3 Cultural planning

During the six months of observation, and several interviews carried out in Nantes, the sociological approach of the city council to development issues appeared more and more clear. For this reason, to adapt to the city-makers' perspective, Landry's creative city approach was considered the most suitable way to get a key reading of the *creative Nantes*. As suggested by Bianchini and Ghilardi⁴⁷, a functional branding campaign requires an in-depth knowledge of the city. A branding campaign cannot be based only on marketing theories, or even standardized procedures already applied on other cities. Every city is different; therefore the approach has to be unique, each time. Unlike products, that basically have no history, cities are living entities with a past, whose specifics very much affect the future of the city. Nantes, for example, has for centuries had an important harbour. The closure of the dockyards in 1987 was a real shock for the whole city that felt its identity disappearing. Considering the relevance of culture in Nantes' regeneration process, Landry's acknowledgement of the strategic position of culture⁴⁸ into nowadays' urban assets seems to fit to this case study. As a consequence, Landry's holistic perspective on the creative city is considered a useful framework to interpreting the role of culture in Nantes.⁴⁹

According to Colin Mercer, the "cultural turn"⁵⁰, which urban planners turned to in the late 80's, was due to the galloping globalisation trend and the increasing attention towards quality of life. First in Australia, then in the UK, the way cultural issues entered the urban planning framework changed the concept of city development radically. At the same time, the relationships between the local administrators and the cultural communities changed. This

⁴⁷ Bianchini, F., & Ghilardi, L., *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁸ Meant as cultural resources: from amenities to arts in general

⁴⁹ Mercer, Colin, *Cultural Planning for urban development and creative city*, 2006.

⁵⁰ Mercer, C., *Ibid.*

shift reformed urban planning. From being a technical discipline reserved for architects and policy makers, it opened up to use from others, such as economists, environmental specialists, social officers and cultural actors.⁵¹

Simultaneously, cultural planning emerged as a result of a mixture of academic speculation and first hand experience in urban design.

In reality, cultural planning is everything but a revolutionary discipline. The first to introduce this term was the Scottish urbanist Patrick Geddes at the beginning of the twentieth century. His contribution is important in this debate, as he was the first scholar to approach urban planning as an anthropological discipline. As a matter of fact, he outlined the importance for city makers to know how people live, work and move in their environment. According to Geddes, planning is not merely about infrastructures and transportation, but drawing a realistic and precise image of the community is also necessary. The foundation of this cultural planning strategy, in fact, lies in *cultural mapping*; which tries “to trace people’s memories, visions and values”⁵². It is obvious now, how cultural mapping can be a time-consuming process: it requires a scrupulous observation of the territories and of their inhabitants. All this information goes towards clarifying the stories and the relationships between the residents and their environment. The greatest difference between traditional urban planning and cultural oriented planning is that a “cultural assessment, as an integral and necessary component, establishes the objective presence of the community *within* the planning process, rather than simply as an 'object' of planning”⁵³. But Geddes’ ideas went even farther when its focus was turned on citizenship. Anticipating some branding identity aspects, Geddes proclaimed the active role of culture in citizen-formation, by stressing the positive influence that culture can have on people, more than on the economy. Ever since, inspired by Geddes, other scholars developed his idea on cultural planning, adding new experiences and including aspects from other disciplines. Now the shared definition states: “Cultural planning is a strategic and integral planning

⁵¹ Mercer, C., *Op. Cit.*

⁵² Geddes, Patrick, in Mercer C., *Op. Cit.*

⁵³ Mercer, C., *Op Cit.* p. 10.

and use of cultural resources in urban and community development”.⁵⁴

The attention to local specificities, as pointed out by Geddes, was believed to be suitable for an in-depth analysis of Nantes’ case study. In addition, his reflection on citizenship and culture naturally recalls the city identity question. Who are we, who do we want to be? How do others see my city and me? These are all basic questions to take into account when working on building a credible city image.

Above, culture as a broad concept that recently has started to be perceived as a relevant part of urban planning and development was mentioned. But what we mean by *culture*? In this study, culture is meant to be a collective name that encompasses all cultural resources. According to Ghilardi, a cultural resource is anything that contributes to the culture of a particular place or people. If culture is perceived as a set of heritages, beliefs and social structures shared by a community⁵⁵, then cultural resources can represent either something tangible, like a historically significant building, or intangible, like, for example, the atmosphere of a place. Ghilardi adds that cultural resources include the arts, but also a larger range of human and infrastructural resources. This demonstrates that, as already stated in the introduction, the multi-disciplinary nature of cultural planning does not end with cultural policies or the art sector, but it also includes the economic, the social, the infrastructural and the environmental sector. Hence, the definition that cultural planners adopt is more of a perspective, rather than a specifically defined entity. In its wide sense, “culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterise a society or a social group. It includes, not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and

⁵⁴ Ghilardi, Lia, *Noema Research and planning, presented Copenhagen 2004*. Oresund cultural planning.

⁵⁵ Ghilardi, L., *Ibid.*

habits..."⁵⁶ For policy-makers, the definition of culture merges the idea of culture as identification with arts, with culture as tradition, in other words, a way of living and a longing towards human development.⁵⁷

Due to the broad definition of culture adopted by cultural planning, overlaps with other disciplines are constant and unavoidable. The natural fluidity of culture opens up to the study of the community as a whole. More than affecting single aspects of communities, culture works on a higher level, by affecting the global concept of a society. Due to its global impact, culture can lead the way to city development in many fields: inspiring new forms of business, ways of inclusion or employment policies. It can affect identity and citizen participation. Thus, through the analysis of some creative projects of the city of Nantes, this study aims to come to a global understanding of Nantes' society and, consequently, to the identification of the values driving city development.

At the end of the twentieth century, the term *culture* started being replaced by a concept that emphasised its connection to economy. The definition of *creative industries* is nowadays at the core of the cultural and economic policies of the most developed cities in the world. However, this term has been at the centre of the academic debate for many years. In order to clarify what is at stake, some key aspects of the definition are given below.

3.4 Cultural or Creative industries?

During the last few years, the concepts of *cultural industries* and *creative industries* have become central, even fashionable, in the on-going debate on city development. All popularity aside, the definitions of *creative industries* and *cultural industries* is far from being clear. The two terms are often used as synonyms, and, even if they might indicate the same industrial sector, the usage

⁵⁶ World Conference on Cultural Policies, UNESCO, Declaration of Mondiacult, Mexico City, 1982.

⁵⁷ Everitt, Anthony, *The governance of culture: approaches to integrated cultural planning and policies* Cultural Policies Research and Development Unit, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg 1999.

of two different terms is not necessarily evident. According to Justin O'Connor, the real problem with the definition is owed to the shifting of the concept between the cultural aspect and the economic one.⁵⁸ The term *cultural industry* was introduced in the eighties by the Greater London Council. At the beginning, it was intended to highlight the economic contribution of the cultural sector to the city economy, as well as to clarify the independence of such companies in the public funding system.⁵⁹ In other words, the term attempted to describe a new cultural strategy of the extension of both culture production as well as consumption. Later, however, the economic and cultural spheres started to drift apart. The cultural factor was partially exploited by the labour party in political campaigns and used as a marketing tool, while the economic aspect was employed by cultural agencies to apply to the conservative government for public aids. In doing so, the concept lost its original connotations, acquiring a political aspect. According to O'Connor, the term *creative industries* was introduced to get rid of any political connotations that would link culture to a traditional public funding policy. Therefore, more recently, the English department of Culture, Media and Sport substituted the adjective *cultural* with *creative*. This was thought to be a positive change, able to catch a broadly shared consensus. The substitution also seems to be linked to the rise of the information society and industry: in this case, the adjective *creative* would seem more appropriate in its evocative feeling towards modernity and innovation.⁶⁰

Having explained the historical and conceptual differences in the terminology, it remains to be explored which branches of industry should be classified either as being cultural or as being creative.

According to the English department of Culture, Media and Sport creative industries are

⁵⁸ O'Connor, J., *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁹ Garnham, N., *Public Policy and the Cultural Industries*, in *Capitalism and Communication-Global culture and the economics of information*, London, Sage, 1990.

⁶⁰ Garnham, N., *From Cultural to Creative Industries*, an analysis of the implication of the creative industries approach to arts and media policy making in the UK, *International journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol.11,n.1, Routledge, 2005.

“those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Similarly, we retain the same coverage, taking the creative industries to include advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio.”⁶¹

Cultural industries are instead considered to be a specific branch of the creative group, dealing with cultural tourism, museums, heritage and sports. The definition proposed by the English department of Culture, Media and Sport has been adopted by many other countries. However, this is not the one and only possible definition, and many countries outside Europe use different definitions. This heterogeneity has made it difficult to get to a reliable mapping of the phenomena and its economic value.

The qualitative approach used here and the focus on the multiple forms of Nantes’ creativity makes the distinction between the two categories relatively unimportant. However, in order to avoid confusion, an academic standard required explaining the difference. Additionally, even though this thesis does not focus on the mapping of the cultural and creative industries, the difference between the terms was necessary to understand the data during the empirical stage of the research. Thus, to avoid misunderstandings, when talking about issues related to creative and/or cultural industries, the term *creative milieu* is often preferred. Concluding, as this case study deals with a city and its management, the evolution of the concept of creativity in the institutions’ view helps understanding the relations between culture and Nantes’ public sector.

As noted, the new concept of creative industries underlines culture as a source of incomes: first as consumption based sector, like in Florida’s theory, but also as a means of production. The following chapter explores the ways culture contributes to the economic system.

⁶¹ Department of Culture, Media and Sports, *Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001* (2 ed.), London, UK, 2001.

3.5 The economy of culture

Urban creativity may not only take different forms, but it may also produce a range of tangible and intangible economic effects.

The first economic results are the so-called *direct benefits*. Besides the incomes coming from the goods trade, this term also refers to the labour force market. In 2006 alone, in Europe, about 6.5 millions people were employed in the creative sector⁶². The latest studies prove that the presence of creative industries is one of the indexes of the regions' prosperity in European. Not surprisingly, for instance, at the top of the ranking of the most creative spots in Europe we find Paris, London, Milan and their surrounding regions.⁶³

The second kind of incomes produced by the creative business are *indirect benefits*. Namely, the salaries that are earned within the cultural sector, and are successively spent in other areas. In practice, this resembles the cycle of production-consumption that feeds any kind of market. Furthermore, more *induced benefits* coming from the cultural sector are, for example, those earned by restaurants and bars located close to concert halls or a cinemas. As previously noted, culture brings *intangible benefits*. Cultural events are one example. Obviously, a free show does not cash in itself, but it can turn out to be a powerful tool of promotion for the city image. The benefits that such cultural activities induce are therefore not necessarily immediate, but may have a positive effect in the long run.

Finally, from a sociological perspective, the *qualitative benefits* derived from culture are not less relevant than the economic ones. Culture also feeds the peoples social needs. First attracted as mere users, spectators could potentially turn into actors themselves, joining the community of creative activists. The ascendancy of culture on people should not be forgotten: the market of ideas stemming from a lively cultural environment also affects personal development, social cohesion, civic pride, and, finally, it can even turn into a

⁶² It includes creative and cultural industries.

⁶³ Power Dominic, *Priority sector report: Creative and Cultural industries*, European Commission, Europe Innova Initiative/European Cluster Observatory, March 2010.

source of new ideas for city government.⁶⁴

The branding perspective that this thesis is mainly interested in, and the economic and the sociological effects of culture are both given consideration. Indeed, the *two-headed* nature of this study, based on communication strategy and urban studies, are unified in branding theory. One of the strong points of this conjunction is that it captures the interdependency between economy and sociology of culture, as described above.

So far, culture and its financial effects have been approached by explaining the advantages they bring to local economies. However, globalisation shaded a different light on the cultural sector. A factor that was intrinsic in culture, but that was still unexploited until the end of the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the eighties, the competition between cities became more and more harsh, and European cities started struggling to survive the challenge of urban regeneration. Many industrial cities had to suddenly face a terrible economic crisis that often brought along a period of social and urban decadence. The need for a transformation of the economic model led some cities to look for new, unbeaten tracks towards the economic growth. Some local administrators realized the potential benefits that an attentive use of cultural policies could have brought. Hence, they started thinking of using culture as a tool for renewing the city, transforming it into a pleasant place for working, living and investing.⁶⁵ Grey, polluted and suffocating, many European cities wanted to change their look, to turn into modern and pleasant place to live. By offering a variety of possibilities both as leisure time activities, but also as labour force's catchment area, culture had a big role in this mutation. Moreover, the path of culture⁶⁶, as a broader concept, is simultaneously promoter and dependent from the rising of the consumption society and the knowledge economy. Contextually, the rise of marketing researches made slightly shifting

⁶⁴ Lavagna, M., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 7-15.

⁶⁵ Lavagna, M., *Ibid.* p. 1-5.

⁶⁶ See cultural planning definition of culture pp. 21-24.

the objective of the cultural action and policy, from a physical transformation of the city to a question of communication. This is a crucial point of the history of cultural policies in cities. While the initial attention was directed to the actual change of the urban milieu, during the nineties, culture started to be seen as a way of communication, a powerful instrument to regenerate, not the city itself, but the image of the city.

The first stage of this new way of thinking about culture was aimed to attract fresh talents, but also investments and tourists through the strengthening of the city image and visibility. According to Ashworth, “there is nothing new about places being promoted by those likely to profit from their development. What is new, however, is the conscious application of marketing approaches by public planning agencies not just as an additional instrument for the solution of intractable planning problems but, increasingly as a philosophy of place management.”⁶⁷

4. Branding the City

At the beginning of this theoretical section⁶⁸, a distinction between marketing and branding was presented. When transferring the concept to cities, the same differences between the two disciplines remain. However, due to their common

“Marketing
is the process or technique
of promoting, selling, and
distributing a product or
service”

Merriam Webster’s

roots in the domain of communication, and their common aim *to sell the city*, city branding is generally speaking considered as a developed stage of city marketing. This evolutionary view leads sometimes to a confusing use of the terms, especially when marketing and branding are applied to cities. Even though marketing and

branding are to be distinguished, their common origin makes natural the

⁶⁷ Ashworth G.J., Voogd H., *Marketing and Place Promotion*, in Gold J., Ward S. (ed.s) *Place Promotion. The use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions*, Chichester, Wiley, 1994, p. 39.

⁶⁸ See theory p. 13.

connections between the two disciplines. Hence, to fully understand the development of branding, some notions of city marketing are necessary. Actually, marketing and branding do not exclude each other, on the contrary, they are reciprocally complementary. That is the reason why they are both parts of this study.

Nowadays, “place marketing has been established as a philosophy of place management and a function complementary to planning”⁶⁹. However, it has not been always the case. To reach the integration of promotional tools into management and urban planning strategies, city marketing went through some stages and transformations, which are explained in the following section.

“Branding
is the promoting of a product or service by identifying it with a particular brand”

“a Brand
is a class of goods identified by name as the product of a single firm or manufacturer”

Merriam Webster’s

4.1 From City Marketing to City Branding

In the beginning, city marketing was just a summary of advertising and promotional means, such as posters, flyers and commercials for tourist destinations. However, in the nineties the marketing system started becoming more structured and angled. This shift was possible due to both the growing importance of *image* in western culture (with the coming of the so-called *image culture*) and the boosted importance of culture in city development. In particular, at that time, culture was considered the decisive tool to reconvert old industrial areas in new, entertainment districts. Manchester and Birmingham are the firsts, and most known examples of city regeneration operated through culture.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Kavaratzis Mihalis, *Branding the city through culture and entertainment*, Groningen University, the AESOP 2005 Conference, 13-18 July 2005, Vienna, Austria.

Place marketing is a broader branch of marketing mainly related to tourism. City marketing is a specific category of Place marketing.

⁷⁰ Lavagna, M., *Op. Cit.* p. 18.

This primordial stage of city marketing originated a number of criticisms: first of all, the assimilation of cities to any other product. Such assimilation implies, as a consequence, a standardized strategy for very different cities and targets. Nowadays however, cities are generally recognized as far more complex entities than regular products. They are heterogenic and changeable entities carrying a powerful set of images and sensations. So, to make up for an ineffective city image, at the end of the nineties, city marketing evolved into a second stage. Instead of merely proposing a set of promotional methods, this step of city marketing theory based itself on the attraction of qualified workers and the implementation of service jobs. The promotional strategy became less direct and subtler. The aim was to make the city attractive for new potential inhabitants, by underlining its high standard quality of life and providing good public services. Here, for the first time, culture emerged both as marketing and urban management tool. City promotion strategies eventually intertwined with regeneration plans. During this phase, cultural and creative industries were highly encouraged as source of development and wealth. This second stage of city marketing can be related to Florida's *creative recipe*. It is in this approach that the seeds of the newborn branding theory can be traced. It was no more a question of advertising the city; the focus has turned on the transformation of the city itself. However, the change that this second stage of city marketing claims, still consisted in a justification for the promotion of the *perfect city*, fun and fashionable, rather than to an authentic will to reform the city and its social apparatus. However, it has to be noticed that, this approach introduced a new inwards perspective that is one of the pillars of the city branding theory. For the first time, a marketing campaign was not addressed to tourists or foreign investments. Even if potential and actual citizens were wrongly assimilated (from a marketing perspective they should represent two different stakeholders, with different needs and expectations), what is remarkable is that city marketers eventually considered inhabitants as a target group. However, not even this approach took into consideration *the city soul*. Like the previous phase, in fact, these standardized prerogatives risked to transform all cities in the same kind of product. If the goal of marketing is to make a product ready to

compete on the market, then it cannot be said that such a uniformed strategy can be anyway successful. To answer the call for uniqueness, during the last ten years, another approach was proposed as the most suitable for cities: the city branding.⁷¹ At this point though, considering city branding as merely the last step of city marketing evolution would be imprecise. Because of its special regard towards the identity issue, city branding adds to communication disciplines a concrete city management' mark. Thus, besides being a communication strategy, city branding can be considered as a real city-planning tool.

4.2 What is branding?

Before treating in depth its adaptation to cities, a short recall to the branding theory is provided.

Commonly associated to a logo or a catchy slogan, a branding strategy is a more complicated process, where such images are only the tipping point of the iceberg. As a matter of fact, the branding process requires an attentive study of the product, of the company and the target group. Following the branding approach, every product brings a set of socio-psychological attributes that, if well selected and associated, can produce the added value useful to beat competitors.⁷² According to Keller, one of the most influential scholars in branding, a brand is defined as "a product, but one that adds other dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need. These differences may be rational and tangible and/or emotional and intangible..."⁷³ Usually, three are the aspects that are considered the cornerstones of a brand: identity, image and positioning.

The scheme below (figure 2) presents the structure of a particular kind of branding strategy, called *corporate branding*. Unlike marketing, where the focus is

⁷¹ Kavaratzis M., *From city marketing to city branding: an interdisciplinary analysis* with Reference to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens, Groeningen University, 2008. p. 45.

⁷² Kavaratzis M., *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷³ Keller, Kevin L., *Conceptualizing, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity*, Journal of Marketing, 1993, pp. 1-22.

on the product, in corporate branding, the company is not only the *final user* of the branding campaign, but it is directly involved in the study process. The corporate branding conception derives from the companies' need for a well-coordinated communication strategy. Nowadays, company's integrity is fundamental. If the company wants to be competitive in the global market, no divergent messages have to be sent out. In this case, a branding strategy focused on the company offers the opportunity to create a coherent company image. Branding the whole company instead of the product also allows reaching different stakeholders with only one communication strategy. Other benefits deriving from corporate branding are related to the company ethics. Focussing on values and people, corporate branding also touches sensible themes like social responsibility, for instance. Contextually, involving employees at any grade, it also gives the right to sociality to be part of the company image and identity. Finally, it also prevents money dissipation in commercials and advertisings, because instead of promoting the single product, this holistic approach accomplishes many communication needs all in one.



Figure 2, modified from Dahl, H., Buhl C., Marketing & Semiotik. København: Akademisk Forlag, 1993.

1) **Identity** stands for the inner image of the company. *What is the idea I want to communicate about myself?* This question is related to the owner, as well as to the employees of the company. According to branding, everybody needs to commit in the branding perspective, as the employees are the first endorsers of the

company. A coherent and reliable identity message needs to be communicated to the market. What is called 2) **Image** is instead the external image that the company shows to consumers. Therefore, the question related to the image is: *How do I want to be perceived by my costumers?* The image component is very much related to the target group: the group of costumers chosen to sell the product to. The image is connected and depending on strictly communication tools such as marketing, advertisements and media. At last, 3) **Positioning** addresses its focus on the way the company aims to achieve the image it wants. *How do I differ from my competitors?* The positioning deals with strengths and particularities of the product and the company: the characteristics that the company chose as the most evocative and effective to communicate its image.

This simple scheme described above (figure 2) works for products, but is it so also for cities? Can a city be treated as a product? There is no doubt that the branding of a city is less linear than the branding of a shampoo. However, also places can find a way to differentiate themselves in order to be competitive. Here, cultural mapping becomes fundamental in order to get an in-depth knowledge of the way people move, live and use their city. Indeed, understanding the social fabric is the first step also to understand how people perceive and imagine their place. To sum up, cities are *brandable* with the exception that the branding process is not monolithically applied, but is the outcome of an *ad hoc* planning, shaped on city's objectives and peculiarities.⁷⁴ The scheme at page 35 (figure 3) shows the brand components relation adapted to city branding.

⁷⁴ Kavaratzis M., *Ibid.*, p. 58.

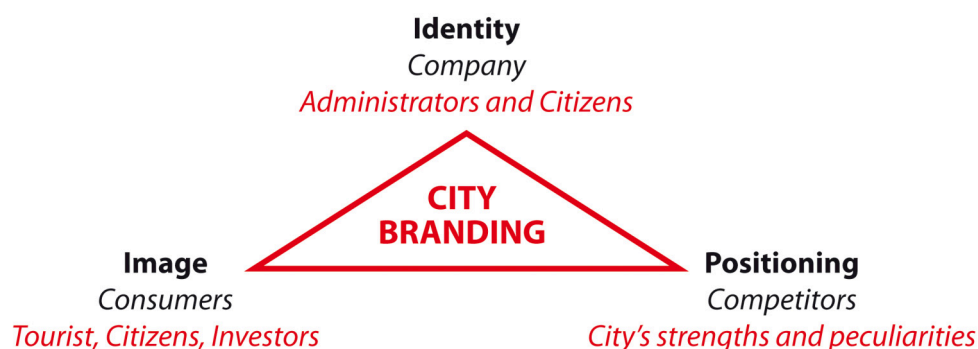


Figure 3, Therkelsen Anette, Destinationsbranding – kan det lade sig gøre?
Working Paper no. 3/May 2006 Aalborg University

In city branding, the branding triangle starts from administrators and citizens. To answer the 1) **City identity** question, city cultural and historical backgrounds are the predominant element. Like for products where the owner and the employees are both engaged in the branding process, also for cities, the identity-making process involves both citizens and administrators. However, in the case of cities, the question is slightly different, as a city is not a private good. A city is a heterogenic product, made of people. Local governments cannot change or impose their own identity to the whole, as easily as a company owner does. 2) **City image** is the factual externalization of city identity. It deals with appearance, word-of-mouth, urban legends. As anticipated, in city branding, the challenge of an effective image consists in the creation of a set of ideas suitable for different target groups all at once: inhabitants or tourists, students or workers, men or women etc...Due to this multifaceted nature, city image is a complicated issue that will be explored later in this chapter.⁷⁵ Finally, 3) **City positioning** consists in the characteristics the city can be recognized for. According to branding, by using these peculiarities and a good communication strategy, the city may have its chance to stand out beating its competitors. According to the figure 3, the corporate branding strategy may be successfully applied to cities. Unluckily, a successful city branding strategy is more sophisticated than what is shown in this scheme. Even with the helpful lens of

⁷⁵ See theory pp. 39-40.

cultural mapping, city branding is a complicate process: first of all, in terms of time. The effects of a city branding campaign, in fact, are measurable only after several months, or even years. Furthermore, even if local governments take inspiration from corporate branding, the need for an adaptation of the model is still necessary. Unlike corporate branding, city branding requires to create a universe of signs and symbols that are more complex than in the case of a private company. The city brand has to create and persuade citizens of the sense of their city, and the sense of their life there. Here, again, the contribution of cultural mapping turns to be precious. An attentive study of the city culture, of the people and their use of the city can compensate the shortcoming of corporate branding, by making a difference for a successful city branding strategy.

4.2.1 City Branding and creativity

Generally speaking, city branding is defined as the process that aims to create, or revalue, the image of the city. As mentioned before, during the last twenty years, European cities started perceiving culture as a key factor, able to turn their image upside down, to break a stalemate getting their budget back on track. The idea rose because of the growing of leisure time importance in Europeans' costumes. At the same time, the intensification of relations and exchanges between cities, as well as the birth of the European single market, made rising the need for competition within cities, especially in Europe. After years of decentralization, both economic and residential, the city started to regain its role as economic and connective node, as vital part of an economy growing more and more as supranational.

The reason for the relation between the city and cultural and creative industries is simple. These activities strongly depend on networks. The ideas exchange can only be developed in a place where connections are simple and fast. The circulation of idea that is at the base of nowadays economy (the so-called

*knowledge economy*⁷⁶ and/or society) led marketers and local administrator to use the word *creativity* as a promotional tool. According to this approach, the combination of culture and city branding is manifested in three different ways, or better, three branding techniques. *Personality branding* consists in the use of an honoured citizen, to identify the city with. Barcelona and Gaudi, for example. Second, the *Flagship construction*, where a big project, usually architectural, becomes the symbol of the city: an illustrious example is the Guggenheim for Bilbao. Finally, *Events branding*, that makes the city to be identified with a big manifestation, usually cultural: the Edinburgh drama festival is one of the most significant examples in Europe. This analysis made by Kavaratzis and Ashworth points out that none of the above is expressly designed for branding the city, but all these events or monuments were there already. The essential action of branding is therefore to exploit and implement the communicational and emotional function of such cultural events or public works. Although a certain *city marketing frenzy* leads sometimes to the creation of projects for purely promotional aims, city branding, as intended by Kavaratzis and Ashworth, is addressed to the city life itself, to the citizens. Thus, its action does not only look outside, but it also works on, and within, the city society.⁷⁷ Branding is a double process that allows achieving economic benefits from tourism or investments, but also works on community development, local identity shaping and social exclusion prevention.⁷⁸

The boundaries between cultural and promotional aims may be blurred. Also in Nantes, culture exploitation is a major issue in the public arena. Particularly, this issue goes along with the polemics growing around Jean Blaise, the most important cultural personality in town, who is defined by some detractors as *an homme de payettes* more than as a reliable administrator. Kavaratzis and Ashworth's analysis faces city branding from a perspective suitable to the reading of Nantes' case study, as the authors caught the difficult balance

⁷⁶ Economy based on ideas, creation, trading knowledge. It is strictly related to education and therefore to culture.

⁷⁷ Kavaratzis M. & Ashworth, *From city marketing to city branding: towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands*", Place Branding vol.1, 2005.

⁷⁸ Kavaratzis M., *Op.Cit.*, p. 45.

between culture and communication that also emerges from some aspects of this case study.

Indeed, branding is more than a series of well coordinated strategies. The relation between city branding and sociology makes this debate complex and fascinating. Part of the branding action is addressed to people's way to interpret the reality, and the city, by creating emotional associations. As previously anticipated, addressing directly the representation of people's space, branding is much more than the last chapter of nowadays marketing strategies. Its influence on mental associations turns to be a powerful tool of city management and planning.⁷⁹ In other words, in agreement with Kavaratzis, city branding is defined as "the creation of a recognisable place identity, little more than a sort of civic consciousnesses, and the subsequent use of that identity to further other desirable processes, whether financial investments, changes in user behaviour or generation political capital."⁸⁰

At this point, the most challenging part of the city branding is creating a coherent city image, suitable for different groups of stakeholders that differ by age, sex, cultural background, financial situation, political views etc...Our cities are most of the time working place, residential place, leisure centres, holidays and financial centres, all at once. Is it possible to agree on all fronts by proposing one and only brand for all these purposes and audiences? The present case study supports Kavaratzis assumption that *yes, thanks to the corporate branding lesson, it is possible*. In order to achieve concrete results within all the audience segments, it is necessary to design an approach based on universal and transversal values, such as: sustainable development, social responsibility, creativity etc...However, easily shareable ideas are not enough. Besides the rational part that makes people agree with the values that the city wants to identify itself with, it is important to work on the irrational part; the part that creates associations. It means that a whole set of images and narratives

⁷⁹ Bottà, Giacomo, *Popular Culture and Urban Creativity in Helsinki and Berlin*, IEHC Conference – Helsinki, August 2006.

⁸⁰ Kavaratzis, M., *Op. Cit.* p. 60.

has to be created around the city. These “stories”⁸¹ are built into the city thanks to a conscious and focussed city planning: *Marketing the city* implies first *Making the city*. As for a product, there is nothing worse than putting on the market a failing or an uncompleted product. In this perspective, the branding of the city is a multidirectional process: for its marketing aspect, it works on the communication of the new city image, but also affects the urban planning and policy by suggesting a more coordinated city organization.

4.2.2 The City image

In the previous chapter, the double action (inward, as identity maker and outward, as communication tool) of the branding process was explained. Branding the city is impossible without an attentive urban planning and an effective marketing campaign. Infrastructures, political decisions and communication are all actions that produce a visible outcome: a skyscraper, an ordinance, or a commercial. However, city branding process also consists of an immaterial part, much more abstract, but also fundamental for a successful campaign. The will to shape a new image of the city in people’s mind requires the knowledge of how people create images of places in their head. According to sociologists and cultural geographers, people’s mind gets an image of places in three possible ways. First, the physical element is necessarily important. So, the first way to affect people’s conception of a place is through urban planning and infrastructures. Moreover, the physical arrangement of the city is an important factor also for creativity. Because of their structures, certain cities are more inclined to develop a creative economy than others. For example, the so-called *clusters-based planning* (which will be elaborate in the next paragraph) is based on the idea that putting together creative activities, they would take advantage from the circulation of ideas within the cluster. Simultaneously, the cluster would work as an attraction pole for new and external contributors. A second factor to be considered while shaping or revaluating a city’s image is the way people use it. Like a product, the city is consumable. So, the city image

⁸¹ Kavaratzis, M., *Op. Cit.* p. 61.

depends on its perceived aim: is my city a tourist destination? A financial pole? or a leisure centre? Finally, the third passage sees the role of art and media at its core. In fact, people also create their perception of a place through words-of-mouth, articles, movies, novels and paintings. If the effect of media on people's perceptions is well known, the influence of art and music has been sometime underestimated. Usually in communication, but also in some creative city literature (Florida), art and music are superficially considered just in their appeal (even though their economic potential is always recognised). However, I feel to share Giacomo Bottà's idea that art and music can have a strong influence not only as a pleasant framework, or an appealing tool of promotion, but both as factual element of urban planning and city representation. To support his theory, Bottà points out how the music of the Smiths⁸² became the soundtrack and the synonymous of the city of Manchester in the eighties, or how Berlin is known worldwide as capital of techno music. Many others are the examples where popular culture, music and arts contributed to the shaping of a new city image.⁸³

Unfortunately, unlike Manchester, Nantes cannot counts on internationally known bands or clubs. However, also Nantes has its particular link with music. In 2007, Beirut, a known American band, wrote a song called *Nantes*. The song is actually one of the most famous of the band's repertoire. Now, even in America, many music lovers may be able to point Nantes on the map, without even having been to Brittany or France before, but only thanks to the title and the pleasant music associated to this Beirut's song.

This is just an example that proves the substance of the analytical angle suggested by Bottà. So, can art build a series of associations useful to strengthen the image of Nantes?

⁸² A legendary English band.

⁸³ Bottà, Giacomo, *Op. Cit.*

4.3 The Creative Cluster

Within the framework of Nantes' urban regeneration, a part of the Isle of Nantes, is about to be dedicated to creativity. Like many other cities in the world, the *quartier de la création*, (this is the name of the urban plan) wants to become the innovative core of the city: its *creative cluster*. Without aiming to get too deep in the urban planning discipline, it is appropriate to introduce the creative cluster model, looking at it as an element of the complex connection among city image-identity and positioning.

For Mommaas, the cultural cluster represents a "new urban cultural policy"⁸⁴ that implies a "shift from a policy aimed at organising occasions for spectacular consumption, to a more fine-tuned policy, aimed at creating spaces, quarters and milieus for cultural production and creativity."⁸⁵ Usually, the term creative clusters is applied to regions more than to cities. It is defined as "the geographic concentration of a creative industry (craft, film, music, publishing, interactive software, design, etc...) which pools together its resources in order to optimize the creation, the production, the dissemination and the exploitation of creative works. Such clustering activity eventually leads to the formation of a network and the establishment of partnerships."⁸⁶ However, this definition can be easily translated to the smaller city scale. In a more strictly urban context, a cultural cluster is an urban planning concept strictly related to city regeneration trend. Cultural clusters usually come to life from the ashes of old and left over places, often from ex-industrial complexes. In the case of Nantes, for example, the site chosen to host the new *quartier de la création* is the old tram garage Alstrom, in the heart of the old industrial area of the Isle on Nantes. The modern cluster usually starts from an architectural project of regeneration of these old sites. A big factory dismissed offers big spaces, suitable to be reinvented and to host

⁸⁴ Mommaas, Hans, *Cultural Clusters and the Post-industrial City: Towards the Remapping of Urban Cultural Policy*, Urban Studies, Vol. 41, No. 3, 507-532, March 2004, Taylor and Francis, London.

⁸⁵ Mommaas, H., *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ WIPO: http://www.wipo.int/ip-development/en/creative_industry/creative_clusters.html [last accessed 07/05/2011]

design studios, artistic laboratories and advertisement agencies. In this way, cultural and creative activities find a stimulating and vibrant working milieu. More concretely, cultural clusters' goals are: increasing firms' capacity towards innovation through more direct connections within companies, fostering productivity, by sharing new technologies as well as infrastructures. Finally, this organizational structure stimulates a healthy competition with the other companies in the cluster. Besides the direct positive outcomes on the city economy, a creative cluster is also important for the image of the city. A creative district is nowadays as appealing as a brand new building or a big cultural event. Actually, its potential is even higher, as it can combine modern architectural appeal to changing and adaptable functions. In addition, unlike an event, a cluster is a fix structure, therefore not submitted to time.

The next chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Nantes' case study. The empirical data collected are analysed and intertwined with the present theory.

Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Why marketing Nantes? An introduction to the case study

With a population of about 300.000 inhabitants, Nantes is the sixth city of France. Its geographical position, as capital of the West, made its fortune at the beginning of the seventieth century, thanks to the slave trade between America, Africa and Europe. During the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the economy of the region was based on heavy industry. Nantes' shipyards were the main source of employment and income of the entire area. However, due to the crisis of the industrial model at the end of the 1970's, the city faced a problematic period. Unemployment and social distress made the city to be well known as "*Nantes la belle endormie, Nantes la grise*" (Nantes the sleeping beauty, Nantes the grey city). The effects of a weak economy rebounded on the city's cultural life, which underwent a period of standstill. According to Philippe Malinge the situation was "un peu pénible: il y avait plus grand chose à faire, presque plus d'artistes et de cafés sympatiques"⁸⁷. (It was frustrating: there was not that much going on, almost no artists and nice cafés) With the closure of the dockyards, the city faced also a loss of identity. Without such a symbolic institution, what could the city take as its new inner soul? Since the 1989, under the guide of the mayor Jean-Marc Ayrault, Nantes has started a process of regeneration, where cultural policy has been adopted as the main tool of this process. Thanks to renovation efforts, public investment and planning, the city accomplished its transformation, turning into a modern city.

However, besides the overall positive feedbacks proved by rankings (best quality life in France in 2006), the feeling within the municipal council is that, at European level, the city is still quite unknown and it is even hardly detectable on a map. Unfortunately, in the era of globalisation and urban competition, local ranking is not enough to assure economic growth. According to Ernst & Young, in 2010, Nantes' visibility in international press underlines a communicative shortcoming. In one year, the city has appeared in a sample of

⁸⁷ Philippe Malinge & Katharina Freter focus group.

international media only 444 times, while Lille, attested just above in the ranking, has been quoted almost more than 1000 times. In other words, the city seems to be *healthy*, but its *image* is not convincing and it cannot get out of France.⁸⁸ After years of reconstructions and regeneration, where the city economy has been converted from industrial to the service sector, Nantes' local administrators are convinced that it is time to pass to another stage. The objective is now the positioning of the city in Europe. Since the beginning of its regeneration, Nantes bet on culture and creativity to lead its change. So far, this approach has demonstrated to be successful, therefore the administration seems to be keen on having creativity as central tool also during this communication and branding phase.

5.2 Nantes, ville creative!

Nowadays, the nomination for the award of most creative city seems has become every European city's goal. As explained before, with *the creative city* is meant a urban development approach that promotes alternative ways for ruling the city, in any areas: from economy, to urban planning, from social cohesion to culture.⁸⁹ In Nantes, the debate about creativity is quite lively and it is at the centre of the discussion on the future of the city. *Le quartier de la création*, *Nantes creative generation*, *Nantes création*, are all projects well known in Nantes. The constant use of the term *creativity* clearly conveys the will of the city to identifies itself with this concept, that, in general, can be summed as embodying innovation, growth, international perspective, sustainability and culture. However, at that point, as suggested by Hospers, the term *creative* could be simply replaced by other adjectives such as *modern and pleasant*. So, how many cities in Europe could claim to be creative? Is the term *creative* a good choice to base a branding campaign on? As the branding theory aims to distinguish the city from any other, by communicating an added value,⁹⁰ it is clear that creativity cannot be the focus of the branding campaign, not directly at least.

⁸⁸ Ernst & Young, *Définition d'un marque de territoire de Nantes à l'international*, 19 octobre 2010.

⁸⁹ Landry, C. *The Creative City*. London: Earthscan Publishers, 2000.

⁹⁰ Keller, K.L., *Op. Cit.*

Actually, the misuse of this term could even turn to be negative for the image of the city that, if compared to others, would risk appearing impertinent and self-overestimated. For instance, in a creativity competition with London or Paris, Nantes would definitely be beaten, conveying a bad image of the city. That is why in this case, the use of the term *creative* would be inappropriate: “a hollow hype”⁹¹, as feared by Hospers. If the marketing technique to advertise creativity as a thing that everyone must have, may work with products, its success is not evident when dealing with cities. If the goal is to make people move in the city, what is at stake here is a more important decision than the one of choosing a mobile phone brand. The decision to leave home for another location pushes people to be more aware of their new destination. They would probably check the place first, and if the place does not correspond to the idea that the city communication campaign has given, then, they would be upset, they will not move and they will convey their dissatisfaction to their friends. In this sense, the term creativity is quite dangerous. Its concept is too abstract and subjective to be used in Nantes’ branding strategy. Thus, instead of questioning whereas Nantes is a creative city by measuring its *dose of creativity*, the attention should be moved to another question, a qualitative one: how does this stated creativity become true in Nantes? What are its inflections?

Nantes’ city-makers seem to have ambitious expectations from the branding campaign. Above all, they seem to be aware of the sociological aspect involved in the branding process. This is considered an interesting and appropriate starting point for the city’s goal. It was therefore decided to keep the line of the city-makers, carrying out the research within the framework of cultural planning.⁹² While looking at the different forms of creativity in Nantes, this approach also allows an understanding of people’s way of moving, living and working.⁹³ These are all basic considerations to bear in mind while approaching a branding strategy.⁹⁴ At the same time, this vision traces a first idea of the overall city’s imaginative scenario, providing a substantial stating point for

⁹¹ Hospers, G-J. and Pen C., *Op. Cit.*

⁹² Mercer C. *Op. Cit.*

⁹³ Mercer C. *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Bianchini & Ghilardi *Op. Cit.*

further studies, both in the field of urban sociology and communication. Consequently, the final aim of this research is to uncover the peculiarities of Nantes' development model in order to identify some key factors useful for preparing the soil towards a future branding campaign⁹⁵. Only after the identification of *what makes Nantes different* from other cities, a branding strategy can be set up.

In the following paragraphs, Nantes' creativity is analysed through the lenses of cultural mapping and planning. The analyses is focused on the way creativity develops in Nantes, and the way the creative side of the city can be exploited in a branding perspective. The creative milieu of Nantes is organized in different themes, which were identified from the recurrent topics of the town's public debate and the speeches of the participants in this research. Thanks to the literature selected on branding and creative city, the empirical data collected are analyzed in order to get a clear understanding of the case study. Moreover, thanks to the cross checking of theory and data, new ideas and different angles of interpretation are also added.

5.3 Nantes' brand in city history

It is a common belief that culture has a central role in the development of every modern city.⁹⁶ Maybe for Nantes, culture is even more relevant than in other cities. "In twenty years, Nantes has become a major city, with an impressive development. At the origin of its success, there is a lively cultural activity that was able to bring the city to a second life."⁹⁷ This is how the French newspaper *Le Point*, introduces Nantes as the best French city for quality life in 2006. Since the election of Jean-Marc Ayrault, Nantes set an ambitious cultural policy that aspired to revitalize a territory strongly hit by the closure of its dockyards. Since then, the cultural sector has occupied a big slice of the annual city budget,

⁹⁵ Keller, K.L., *Op. Cit.*

⁹⁶ Landry, C. *Op. Cit.*, Florida *Op. Cit.*

⁹⁷ Sagot-Duvauroux D., Nantes : la Belle éveillée: Le pari de la culture, Université d'Angers, 2007. p. 1.

Trad. from: "*En vingt ans, Nantes est devenue une ville majeure au développement impressionnant. À l'origine de ce succès, une activité culturelle bouillonnante qui a su redonner vie à toute une cité*"

and nowadays is stated at 16%.⁹⁸ As many other ex-industrial cities in Europe, like Rotterdam or Manchester, Nantes cannot boast a remarkable historical or artistic patrimony.⁹⁹ That is why the need for a creative approach to cultural policies has been even more necessary since the beginning of the regeneration. To make up this shortcoming, the city equipped itself with some structures dedicated to different cultural scenes: three experimental cinemas, two theatres (*Le grand T* and *le theatre universitaire*), the opera, an art museum (*Le musée des beaux-arts*), an international music venue (*Olympic*). The large range of cultural offer seems to be the glory of the city and a source of proud for its inhabitants.

Continuing this brief glance to Nantes' cultural institutions, there is a place where it is worth stopping by while having a tour in town. Probably known as the most famous place in town, *le Lieu Unique* is a cultural institution that perfectly embodies the renovation efforts based on the city's heritage. The name *Lieu Unique* comes from *LU*, the famous cookie factory, which was based in Nantes until 1974. Since 2000, *le LU* "is a space for artistic exploration, cultural effervescence and conviviality"¹⁰⁰. The old factory premises host a restaurant, a disco-bar, a bookshop and several rooms for exhibitions and conventions.

Following out the tendencies on city regeneration that other European cities have adopted, Nantes tries to keep the connection with its past. Like the *LU*, many other cultural institutions are connected to the city's historical heritage. *Les machines de l'Ile*, for instance, consist in a permanent installation. It is from Jules Verne's stories (the writer was native of Nantes) that the mechanic octopus and other fantastic creatures got their inspiration from.

Historically speaking, an interesting period for the city was the eighteenth century, when Nantes used to be the first French centre of the slave trade. At that time, the city was well known as *ville négrière*. To mark the overcoming of that period the municipality has planned to inaugurate a memorial against the slavery in December 2011. According to the mayor the memorial aims to "montrer qu'on est conscients de notre histoire d'une part, mais que de cette

⁹⁸ Sagot-Duvauroux D., *Op. Cit.*

⁹⁹ Jean Blaise's interview, transcription n.2. Jean Blaise's track.

¹⁰⁰ LU website <http://www.lieuunique.com> [last accessed 18/07/2011]

histoire nous en faisons un point d'appui pour mobiliser les consciences, pour lutter contre toutes les formes moderne d'esclavage qui existent encore malheureusement à travers le monde."¹⁰¹

Le Lieu Unique and *le Mémorial contre l'esclavage* are two examples of urban development with a branding potential. First of all, *Le Lieu Unique* is the evidence of a culinary brand: *les petits beurre*, a kind of butter cookies with a good reputation in Brittany. In addition, the butter cookies also recall another product of the region internationally known: *le beurre demi-sel*, (the half-salted butter). For its part, the memorial tells about the new values that animate the present and the future of the city: equality and freedom. This is just an example of how the city could start thinking about its branding campaign. Bearing in mind the lesson of corporate branding, the city might decide to choose these added values to build its own identity.¹⁰²

Although the potential of art in imprinting a new image to the city is a concept that many cities have already exploited,¹⁰³ the reference to values behind cultural items also shows that the use of art in branding does not end its use in flagship projects and events. On the contrary, the action of culture may be even more effective and useful when approaching branding indirectly. Therefore, this study encourages the city to take also into consideration the intrinsic messages that some cultural actions bring along. This approach fosters a more personal way of branding and contributes to underline the unique brand of the city towards its competitors.¹⁰⁴

The brand-new project *Le Voyage à Nantes* introduces an important figure of Nantes' cultural realm: Jean Blaise. *Le Voyage à Nantes* is located half way between the cultural event and the tourist offer. Officially presented in January

¹⁰¹ Trad. "to show that we are aware of our history, but we also take our past as foothold to fight against all modern forms of slavery that still exist in the world."

Video http://www.nantesmetropole.fr/decouverte/les-projets-phares/memorial-la-memoire-de-l-esclavage-avec-christiane-taubira-international-39928.kjsp?RH=PROJET_MEMORIAL [last accessed 17/06/2011]

¹⁰² See theory on corporate branding pp. 32-36.

¹⁰³ Kavaratzis, M., 2005, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Kavaratzis, M., 2008, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45.

2011, this conceptual project is signed by the guru of Nantes' cultural life. Already founder of the *Lieu Unique*, Jean Blaise has now become the manager of Nantes' tourist office. In town, he is known as *the man of culture*. The involvement of an artistic director into an influent business sector caused a big debate between Jean Blaise's supporters and his detractors. For this research, *Le Voyage à Nantes* is a very interesting object of study for many reasons. As anticipated, Jean Blaise's inauguration at the head of the tourist office shows the awareness of the fruitful interdependence between culture and a strategic economic field. Moreover, it indirectly declares the end of culture as a burden for public cash, by turning it into a real source of income for the territory.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, from a communication perspective, tourism is obviously one of the most influential channels for city attractiveness. Third, the implantation of such tourist product clearly refers to "experience economy"¹⁰⁶. This so-called fourth economic sector is the fundament of destination branding, which is the tourist branch of city branding. The overture of the city towards this new kind of

Experience Economy
is the last stage of economy after agrarian, industrial, and service economy. (That is why it is also known as "the fourth sector"). The theory is grounded on the idea that experiences can add value to the products and services of our business.

economic approach also emerged from the interview with Maurice Berthinau.¹⁰⁷

According to this theory, experiences differ from services because they are charged of an emotional aspect: the service in itself is no longer enough; the offer must provide a memorable experience. However, this is not an easy task. In order to build-up a set of sensations, the guest/consumer has to get completely surrounded by the experience, a bit like he was on a stage where a drama is set and played all around him.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, without remarkable historical monuments, Nantes focuses its tourist offer on the creation of a unique experience. Besides offering a tourist product,

¹⁰⁵ See theory pp. 27-28. Lavagna, M., *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁶ Pine and Gilmore, *Welcome to Experience economy*, Harvard Business Review, 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Maurice Berthinau's interview, transcription n.8. Berthinau's track.

¹⁰⁸ Pine and Gilmore, *Op. Cit.*

Le Voyage à Nantes also conveys a precise idea of the city. What Jean Blaise proposes is simple: a *parcours dans la ville*, a city walk. Starting from the central station, the voyage leads the guest through some characteristic places:

*“Entrer au lieu unique, découvrir la collection permanente du Musée des Beaux-Arts, entrer dans la cathédrale par les cryptes...profiter d'un point de vue méconnu sur la vieille ville...s'arrêter boire un verre dans une sculpture...embarquer pour une croisière à la découverte du patrimoine naturel de l'estuaire et des œuvres qui jalonnent les rives jusqu'au littoral...”*¹⁰⁹

The structure of the project reveals an attentive study of the branding theory. The choice of the term “voyage” is not casual: it reminds of the mobility, of the historical connection of the city with the sea, and, obviously, it also recalls the imaginary world written from the pen of Jules Verne. There is a dreamy sensation transpiring from the presentation text. It is the same Jean Blaise that uses the word “evanaisante” (evanescent) when referring to Nantes during an interview¹¹⁰. Actually, there are also some other notable quotes that point out the mysterious aura of the city: «Nantes: peut-être la seule ville de France où j'ai l'impression qu'il peut m'arriver quelque chose qui en vaut la peine.»¹¹¹

This subtle and unreal atmosphere is also traceable in the most iconic city attraction: *L'Elephant*, which is part those machines de l'île, presented earlier. Because of its location in the ancient dockyards, *Les machines de l'île* embody the conversion of the city from industrial (the dockyards) to creative (the attraction).

¹⁰⁹ “Le voyage à Nantes” press release January 2011

Trad. « Getting into the Lieu Unique, discovering the permanent collection of the Musée des Beaux Arts. Getting into the cathedral passing through the crypt. Taking advantage from an unknown view point of the old city...having a drink in a sculpture, embarking in a cruise to discover the natural patrimony of the estuary and the art works that follow the bank until the littoral.»

¹¹⁰ Jean Blaise’s interview, transcription n. 2. Jean Blaises’ track.

¹¹¹ Breton André, *Nadja*, 1928. Trad. “Nantes: may be the only city in France where I feel that something worthy might happen.”

Going ahead with the representation that art can give to the city and its international representation, *Royal de Luxe* is a reality that cannot be failed to be mentioned. *Royal de Luxe* is a street theatre company based in Nantes that got to be known for its huge walking marionettes. Once again, Nantes produces a living *toyland*, which, with *Royal de Luxe*, is exported all over the world. The company, in fact, has been touring everywhere in Europe, but recently also performed in Mexico, Vietnam, and Japan. Therefore, the company could definitely be a city ambassador abroad. However, even if *Royal de Luxe* is constantly presented as one of the prides of the city, as well as a potential asset for Nantes visibility abroad, the connection between *Royal de Luxe* and the city is not enough emphasised. Actually, the company itself is not even that well known outside France, as the locals think. It is enough to type “Royal de Luxe” on Google, for instance, to realise the first page does not show neither the webpage of the artistic company nor the one of the city.

Les machines de l’île, *Royal de Luxe*, *le Voyage à Nantes* are meaningful pieces of the mysterious untouchable puzzle that may be used to create the image of the city. As suggested by Bottà, this “soft level, [working] on the imaginary dimension of a city, on the way a city is perceived, abstracted, thought of, dreamt, seen, heard”¹¹² is quite strong and meaningful for this case study. It is not only the abundance of the artistic features that makes this possible, but also the *fil-rouge* that seems naturally connecting all the parts and that creates a coherent and peculiar atmosphere.

However, to get back to *Le Voyage à Nantes*, although the poetic image is quite convincing, a well-built atmosphere does not make a tourist offer itself. Coherence has to be demonstrated also in the more concrete parts of the “voyage”: accessibility, quality of services and coordination between all the stages of the “walk” are necessary to make the experience memorable.¹¹³ If all the bricks of the wall are not well coordinated and perfectly functional, the risk is a collapse of the entire castle. Like pointed out by Maurice Berthinau, the

¹¹² Bottà, Giacomo, *Op. Cit.*

¹¹³ Pine and Gilmore, *Op. Cit.*

only things that one will remember about the trip will be those that went wrong.¹¹⁴ Organisation and coordination are part of the system that Bottà calls the “hard level”. This term refers to the more pragmatic elements of the city image. The importance of this logistic level is even more relevant when looking at the city not only as a holiday destination, but as a place to move to permanently. However, even on a rational decision like the one of moving to another city, the emotional impression always has an impact on the decisional process. Actually, usually this sensation is harder to hush up because it is created deeply into one’s unconscious.¹¹⁵ Only a balanced merging of soft and hard level can produce a coherent city image.

Focussing on this organizational aspect, one of the things that raises doubts about *Le Voyage à Nantes* (but also about the city branding process in general) is the language issue. *Le Voyage à Nantes* and the branding campaign have the final aim to increase the international visibility of the city, but very little material is getting translated into English. In this sense, Jean Blaise’s incapability to answer my question in English during the *Le Voyage à Nantes* press conference is symptomatic.¹¹⁶ Another remarkable example comes from Maurice Berthineau: “C’est scandaleux” – he says referring to the most famous *brasserie* in town, which provided a menu in English only after his remark¹¹⁷. Also Katharina Freter and Philippe Malinge’s ironic laughs reveal the embarrassing situation of city communication department. With regard to the English default, the image of Nantes as an international city seems quite far from reality.¹¹⁸ Only very few city attractions offer brochures in a foreign language, and, as any other city in France, people are not really keen on English. The conversion takes time: some websites are about to be translated and some English courses have been lately proposed to citizens. Although the communication issue was clear far back, the reaction comes quite late and

¹¹⁴ Maurice Berthineau’s interview, transcription n.9., Berthineau’s track.

¹¹⁵ Bottà Giacomo, *All the way from Berlin to Helsinki. Three ways of Urban Regeneration in Literature*, UrbEurope RTN Working Paper Series’, 2: 2006.

¹¹⁶ Jean Blaise’s interview, transcription n.2., Blaise’s track.

¹¹⁷ Maurice Berthineau’s interview, transcription n.10., Berthineau’s track.

¹¹⁸ Katharina Freter and Philippe Malinge’s Focus group, transcription n.5., Freter and Malinge’s track.

without a concrete direction. Even though Malinge confirms “Là on part de bas, donc on a un taux de progression pas possible à avoir”¹¹⁹, no concrete and coordinated communication plans seem to be in progress yet.

As it was said, branding a city requires a long and difficult process. A lot of efforts have to be done in order to clearly depict a coherent scenario, which may be used to build the city identity and to strengthen the city perception from outside. All this *subterranean work*, consisting in cultural mapping and researches, usually ends up in the production of the city logo. As clearly stated at the beginning, the aim of this study is not to propose a logo or a branding campaign, but more to set the terrain for it, by proposing a complete reading of the city elements in a branding perspective. However, this study wants to point out also the importance of a coherent graphic language that may give much more strength to the city communication. First of all, while looking for ideas for the branding campaign, the history of the city is a crucial element to get inspired by. The connection of the city and its historical path is everywhere. From the LU to Jules Verne’ remembering of *les machines de l’île*. All this *historical flavour* might be well communicated with a coherent graphic style that recalls the beginning of the twentieth century. *Les petits beurre*, *Les machines de l’île*, the surrealist walk of *le voyage à Nantes* could all fit under the same graphic language. In a branding perspective, the visual element would contribute to the creation of the Nantes’ image. The city would, in this way, take advantage of the style coherence, which would produce a more effective and convincing image into people’s mind. This is another demonstration of the legitimacy of art in both city branding and urban planning.

5.4 Nantes, ville Européenne

Another important line of Nantes creative development is represented by the city connection with Europe. The geographical position of the city seems it would not encourage any European feeling of belonging: Nantes is about 700

¹¹⁹ Freter and Malinge’s track, Trad. “[Concerning communication] we start from a very low level, so we have a long way to go.”

kilometres away from both Brussels and Strasbourg, the two European capitals. However, besides this geographical handicap, the city seems to bet on European projects to foster its international positioning. Recently, for example, thanks to the good management of the waters of its two rivers, Loire and Erdre, Nantes has been awarded as European Green Capital 2013. Being awarded of such a price is not only flattering, but can also turn into a very powerful promotional tool. The prestige of the city is boosted, while the image of the city takes, in this case, some *green nuances*. In other words, this prize offers to Nantes the opportunity to add to its image and values the notion of green, eco-friendly city. From a branding perspective, the importance of this prize is clear: first of all, no matter the reason, being awarded by the EU certainly confers respectability. At the same time, being able to certify the *green* attitude of the city is also an advantage. Recalling Florida's picture of creative city¹²⁰, the environmental aspect has become one crucial point in city urban planning. Pleasant green areas, open air places, together with a rich system of bike lanes and public bikes are all parts of that green spirit that Nantes wants to show to the foreign observers, as a sign of its modernity.

Considering the cultural mark that characterized Nantes' regeneration, the city's idea to show itself as a European cultural hot spot does not take anyone by surprise. In 2010, in fact, voices about the possibility to participate in the European Cultural competition for 2016 were spreading in town. However, Jean Blaise rapidly denied those rumours, informing that such an engagement would require a financial investment out of reach for the city.

5.4.1 Europe and youth

A peculiarity of the city is also the abundance of European projects focused on youth. In Nantes, the European institutions have been often seen as a means to develop creativity and to promote internationalisation. The magazine **Europa** was created in 2004 with the support of the University of Nantes. The aim of the magazine is to foster the feeling of European citizenship by creating an

¹²⁰ Florida, R. *Op. Cit.*

European public sphere. It is distributed every second month in 8000 copies in the region of Pays de la Loire (Nantes' region), but an electronic version is also available on the magazine website.¹²¹

Another media, another European youth project. **EURadioNantes** is a radio school. It broadcasts both on FM and online. Its editorial staff consists of young journalists coming from all over Europe. At the radio they are trained to radio journalism and European affairs. The radio contributes to open the international perspective of the city, not only because of its European editorial line, but also because its multilingual broadcast schedule. Although the news are given in French, there are four hours of daily English broadcasting. The radio schedule also sets programmes in other European languages. Regarding EURadioNantes, another important point of discussion is its editorial line, which is inspired by what they call "proximity journalism". Laurence Aubron, the director, states the aim of the radio-school: "On aimerait faire prendre conscience aux gens que localement l'Europe a une réelle influence sur leur quotidien...l'idée c'est de croiser l'échelon local et international pour rapprocher l'Europe des citoyens."¹²²

The project **Nantes creative generation** is only at its 3rd edition. The necessity of opening the city to new realities is, once again, at the centre of this youth project. Karine Daniel, in charge of Europe and international relations at Nantes' town hall, explains the idea behind this project.

"The idea is [...] to support cooperation and building of projects with a European dimension. To give the chance to design projects is a good thing; to give the opportunity to implement them is even better. So this award is a first step to work together. The stress of this award is that a group from Nantes necessarily joins other European groups. The City of Nantes is working in

¹²¹ Journal Europa <http://www.europajournal.info> [last accessed 18/07/2011]

¹²² Eur@dioNantes: ondes au son de l'Europe, interview à Laurence Aubron, Europa Magazine, October 2006. Trad. "We would like to make people aware that locally Europe has a real influence on their daily life...the idea is to intertwine the international and the local level to get Europe closer to its citizens."

European networks, and wants this expertise to be available for the young promoters of the territory."¹²³

All these youth projects bring along several interesting remarks. Obviously, they clearly show the will of the municipality to push the city out of its provincial dimension. However, what seems more interesting is the truly European character that the city wants to give to its internationalisation. It is not only the humanistic concept of Europe (as diversity of language and cultures), but all what is about is a clear political pro-EU feeling. Finally, the fact that the process of internationalisation is led by young people's projects is also physiological. New generations are the ones at the core of any innovation process. All these projects aim to educate young people in an international perspective. However, such experiences and opportunities are not enough to create a true international city. Katharina Freter claim with pride that the university of Nantes has the larger percentage of incoming Erasmus students in France.¹²⁴ Although it may be considered a good sign, it is only a partial success. An international and appealing city would aim to attract people willing to work and live there permanently. Foreigners' permanent stay is still uncommon, on the contrary, the city is considered more as a temporary place.¹²⁵ Some interesting demographic data attest that 31% of the population in Nantes is under twenty¹²⁶, while the range of people between thirty and forty is lower. This might be explained with the fact that after graduation a lot of people leave to get a job elsewhere: in Paris, Toulouse or Lille. Within the international community, it is quite common to think of Nantes as a nice place to have a family, but not to be a young professional. One answer to this phenomenon is connected to the city cultural milieu and it may be explained with the shortcoming of amenities offered to people in that age range. This demographic unbalance might turn to be harmful for the city economy as well. Young

¹²³ *Special Nantes Creative Generation*, Europa Magazine, October 2010.

<http://fr.calameo.com/read/000095191922f57a4b4b6> [last accessed 07/07/2011]

¹²⁴ Katharina Freter and Philippe Malinge's Focus group, transcription n.4., Freter and Malinge's track.

¹²⁵ Interviews with "Autour du Monde" Nantes local ESN (Erasmus student network) group.

¹²⁶ Anna Lenka Schlosser & Bernd Hartmann, *Creative industries in Northwest Europe: Mapping innovation opportunities*, ECCE innovation, Strasbourg, 2009. pp. 87-98.

professionals are the most active and productive class. They lead innovation. They are the *creatives* that the creative city's theory talks about. The centralized policy of the municipality could keep on setting the terrain for an innovative city, but people disposed to take over and to develop ideas are also vital. It is to this extent that Florida's creative class has to be considered: as a group of people that, in collaboration with the local administration, transforms ideas into action.

According to the creative cities theory, a factor that young people always consider before moving to another city is the variety of its leisure time offer and the city nightlife. Nowadays, in many cities in Europe, nightlife is a delicate topic. Unfortunately, Nantes is not an exception. Urban nights are everywhere under attack. Even Paris recently organized the "Etats généraux de la nuit" to ameliorate the drowsy nightlife of the capital. Like in Paris, for some years, the polemics caused by night noises have led to the closure of many places in the centre of Nantes. To cheer a bit up the night of the city, in 2007 it was decided to dedicate an ex industrial area to Nantes' nightlife. So, some old hangars on the Isle of Nantes were converted into bars and discos. The *Hangar à Banane* (that is the name of the complex) is a failure, after only three years from its opening. After a couple of successful seasons, in fact, the *Hangar à Banane* has dramatically reduced its appeal. Contrary to administrators' hopes, *l'Hangar à Banane* never became the centre of Nantes' night and young life. The reasons for this unpopularity are many: first of all, the distance from the city centre and the poor public transportation. But, of course, also the offer of amenities itself is not satisfying. Concretely, people do not walk three kilometres in the middle of abandoned warehouses, just to have the same cocktail that they could have had in the city centre. The location is quite special, as the hangar is located in the old dockyards, directly on the water. It could dare to try more innovative and alternative ideas. For example, instead of leaving to the single bars the responsibility for their own promotion, an idea would be to develop a common communication campaign that promotes the Hangar as a whole. A common big event to open the season would be another possible tool of promotion to be considered.

So far, what is evident is that a nightlife district in Nantes does not work. In Europe, other cities opted for this solution, sometimes with positive results. Brick Lane in East London is a quite successful example of re-conversion of an old industrial area into a nightlife centre, for instance. However, the most serious weakness of the nightlife district in Nantes is the shortcoming of a *niche music offer*. The *Hangar à Banane* is a block of mainstream places with no specific identity. According to Bader and Scharenberg¹²⁷, recently the demand for music has become more and more diversified. This is because, in a globalized era,

"Subculture
is an ethnic, regional,
economic, or social group
exhibiting characteristic
patterns of behavior
sufficient to distinguish it
from others within an
embracing culture or
society."

Merriam Webster's

people use music as a criterion of social distinction. Young people choose the destination of their Friday nights according to music, because a certain kind of music corresponds to a certain social group of audience. This research is more demanding in young adults than in students.¹²⁸

In nowadays society, subculture affects the development of our cities. Right after the closure of the dockyards, the isle of Nantes became the centre of Nantes subculture, and the old abandoned promises became the headquarter of underground music. But today, Nantes' underground milieu has nearly disappeared. As often happens, regeneration processes tend to privilege institutional creativity, suppressing unconventional artistic venues. This tendency goes along with the phenomenon of the gentrification that is going to be discussed later in this chapter. Therefore, although Nantes counts some reputable music venues, they are not the core of that subcultural capital that Thornton calls *hipness*, meaning the value constituting a niche that is distinguished from the mainstream.¹²⁹ In a branding perspective, the creation of a (or more) music niches would add *a sounds* to the image of the city. Aiming high: like jazz music is now synonymous of New Orleans, for example, or electronic music is the soundtrack of anyone's

¹²⁷ Bader Ingo & Scharenberg Albert, *The sound of Berlin: Subculture and the Global Music Industry*, International journal of urban and regional research, Blackwell Publishing, 2009. pp. 79-80.

¹²⁸ Bourdieu, Paul, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*, Routledge, London, 1984.

¹²⁹ Thornton Sarah, *The Social logic of subcultural capital*, in K. Gelder and S. Thornton, *The subcultures reader*, Routledge, London/New York, 1997.

memories of a weekend spent in Berlin. In addition, music niches may also feed and reinforce the local music dimension. An authentic sound would give a second life to Nantes' night district and it would also contribute to the shaping of an appealing lively city.¹³⁰

So far in this chapter, the word *proximity* seems to be central in the development of Nantes with different connotations. First, *proximity* is intended as the strong link to the history and the geography of the city. Even in line with the rush for internationalisation (that brings the city to look outside national borders), Nantes clearly does not want to lose its local roots. At the same time, on another level, the word *proximity* also wants to recall the idea of a cooperation and mutual influence within peoples and organizations. That is why the city is involved in many thematic networks both at national and European level.

5.4.2 European Networks

In order to provide the city with an advance development strategy, Nantes local governments looks elsewhere to learn from other metropolitan realities. The strongest impulses come from Nantes participation in the network of EUROCITIES. Karine Daniel, was the president of the forum *Culture* and the city also hosted in May 2011 the annual conference of the creative industries team forum that groups more than fifty European cities.¹³¹

Moreover, the leadership of the city in the ECCE innovation project proves once again the big bet of the city development on creative industries. ECCE innovation is a European network regrouping Nantes, Stuttgart, Eindhoven, Dublin, Cardiff that aims to foster creative industries capacities to help them getting in the new markets. The first edition of the ECCE project (2006-2009) ended with the paper "Mapping the innovation opportunities stemming from collaboration between creative industries and other industries."¹³² This report analyses and compares the creative potentials of the six ECCE cities. To

¹³⁰ See theory pp. 39-40.

¹³¹ Katharina Freter and Philippe Malinge's Focus group, transcription n.3., Freter and Malinge's track.

¹³² Schlosser, A., & Hartmann B., *Op. Cit.* pp. 87-98.

understand the importance of such industries for Nantes, it has to be noticed that the ECCE innovation report adopts the creative industries definition of the Unesco: “a creative industry is any industry carried by individual creativity and talent, likely to generate growth and employment while creating and exploiting the intellectual property.”¹³³ It therefore includes all kinds of arts, but also architecture and media. The impact of the sector on the economy of the region Pays de la Loire is remarkable: 20.000 jobs are directly related to culture. More than 13.000 permanent workers are employed in 640 companies and 8.600 persons work in the public sector. This last number is evidence of the effort of the public administration in addressing the city towards a new phase of development, after the crisis in the eighties. Economic situation aside, the report underlines a shortcoming of cross-sector projects within the creative milieu of the city. Cooperation is therefore needed, not only with international partners, but also within the sectors of the city economy.

If looking at Nantes through the lenses of Landry three Cs theory¹³⁴, it could be said that the city has all the three fundamental components: culture, communication and cooperation. However, while culture seems to be quite satisfactory for the city, a lot more has to be done concerning communication. In particular, the use of English has to be implemented not only regarding the advertising of the city abroad, but also regarding people’s confidence in this international language. Also the action of media is underexploited. They could be better employed to raise knowledge about the city, and to coordinate the different souls of the urban creative milieu.

In this sense, an attentive reflection on branding raise awareness on the city’s communication defaults; not only concerning a mere marketing promotion, but also creating awareness around communication within the different actors of the city. Propaganda aside, branding can help in coordinating and giving coherence to the real structure of the city.¹³⁵ *Le quartier de la création* (which the next chapter is dedicated to) rises also to compensate for this

¹³³ Schlosser, A., & Hartmann B., *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹³⁴ See Theory pp. 19-20.

¹³⁵ Kavaratzis, M., 2005, *Op. Cit.*

miscommunication within the creative industries.

5.5 *L'île de Nantes and le quartier de la création*

Nantes has a peculiar geography. Right outside the city centre, in the middle of the Loire, there is an island which, until forty years ago, was the headquarter of the hard industry sector of the city. Nowadays, this area is very much a building site: since the 1998, a plan to regenerate the Island of Nantes started. The goal was to turn the island from an industrial pole to a second city centre: the modern and creative heart of the city. The area hosts now a mixture of education institutes (pole of communication, architecture and press, school of art) and a number of contemporary architecture projects, from the new palace of justice, to *La Fabrique*, the new cultural centre of the city obtained from the regeneration of an old blockhaus. Few steps aside these buildings, one of the urban plans the city is more proud of is about to see the light: *le quartier de la création* (literally, *the creation district*). Hosting a pole of education in communication and design, but also art activities and media companies, this creative district longs to be the core of the creative world of Nantes. In 2012, date of the expected inauguration, Nantes would finally see the concretisation of what has been the *fil-rouge* of Jean-Marc Ayrault twenty-years city administration: the demonstration of the crucial importance of art and culture in the city urban and economic development.¹³⁶

The project is inspired by others European examples, like the Swedish Telefonenplan, and it is based on Mommaas' cluster theory.¹³⁷ In the cluster conception, the word *proximity* comes again as the key-term at the base of this project. Like Mommaas, Jean-Marc Ayrault claims the importance of the concentration of creative industries in a specific area in order to foster the exchange amongst education, research and companies. Regarding the creative

¹³⁶Île de Nantes, Un quartier de la création basé sur l'échange
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x99az3_ile-de-nantes-un-quartier-de-la-cre_creation [last accessed 06/06/2011]

¹³⁷ Mommaas, H., *Op. Cit.*

cluster, both the mayor and Mommaas arrive to the same conclusion: the *quartier de la création* is a crossroad project embodying the characteristics of both an urban planning project and an attractiveness strategy plan. While being the centre of the innovative economy of the city, this architectural and conceptual complex would also give a boost to the image of the city. The idea of the *quartier de la création* comes from the experience of a Swedish project: the Telefonplanen. In 2002, the multinational Ericsson left its headquarter, located in an industrial area outside Stockholm, the Telefonplan. After two years, the area was converted into a hotspot of creativity: the old factories area was filled with a mixture of art institutes, spin-ups and design studios. The Konstfalk, the University college of arts, craft and design is also situated in this creative cluster. The director of the institute Ivar Björkman points out an interesting indirect contribution that the cluster brought along. He affirms that the price of the flats in area around the Telefonplan, has risen of 20% since they moved there in 2007.¹³⁸

This consideration underlines the branding potential embedded in an urban regeneration plan, like the one just described. This fact gives reason for what Mommaas and Kavaratzis write about the branding impact of a creative cluster on the city image. Besides its cultural value, its economic and employment factor, the creative cluster can work as a flagship project, implementing the appeal of the city. Moreover, it also confirms Kavaratzis' definition of branding as an independent discipline from marketing.¹³⁹ Branding is not only last stage of marketing strategies evolution; besides the propaganda effect, branding can help in coordinating and giving coherence not only to the communication campaign, but also to the concrete structure of the city, affecting directly the city economy.¹⁴⁰ Finally, having a creative cluster in Nantes would give reason to the city to present itself as an innovative city that bet on culture for its future development.

¹³⁸ Cagliani, Licia, *Les écoles qui s'implantent dans les quartiers de la création en Europe*, radiopodcast Euradionantes, 19/01/2011.

http://www.euradionantes.eu/index.php?page=detailPodcast&id_podcast=6383&id_programme=12 [last accessed 18/06/2011]

¹³⁹ See theory pp. 32-38.

¹⁴⁰ Kavaratzis, M, 2005 *Op. Cit.*

However, the statement of the director of the Konstfalk also raises a problem usually related to city regeneration: the so-called *gentrification*. The transformation of old industrial areas into expensive and fashionable neighbourhoods brings about some drawbacks. In term of subculture, it was already said that regeneration plans tend to ban all those *modus vivendis* that do not fit with the image of a neat and fancy borough. In revenge, they welcome the arrival of the active and innovative middle-class. In France, this phenomenon gave birth to a new category of people: *Les Bobos*.

The bourgeois bohemian, is a highly educated young adult belonging to the urban middle-class. He eats organic and he cannot live without the last high-tech toy on the market. Generally speaking, he is the description of the *creative par excellence* described by Florida. That is how gentrification reconnects to the class system criticism of Florida's theory. Regeneration plans are delicate processes

***"Gentrification*
is the process of renewal and
rebuilding accompanying the
influx of middle-class or
affluent people into
deteriorating areas that often
*displaces poorer residents"***

Merriam Webster's

that have to be studied with worldly wisdom. The blind rush for creativity might cause social iniquity. The arrival of artists in a popular urban area makes the prices rise, and, consequently it leads to the exclusion of the lower class that cannot afford to live in the area anymore. One famous example of the consequences of the gentrification is

Berlin. Places like Prenzlauer Berg, and more recently Kreuzberg, are undergoing a drastic social transformation. These quarters are losing their historical characters and also their cultural diversity. The social uniformity of the creative class, who moved to these neighbourhoods, might encourage social conflicts. That is why the huge urban plan to build a creative district in the abandoned area of the Mediaspree, in East Berlin, is hardly contested. What protesters fear is another fashionable and elite quarter, where another piece of

the city authenticity would be erase in favour of a hip and expensive cultural hotspot.¹⁴¹

The example of Berlin underlines the connection between gentrification and city identity. The same questions should be discussed for the regeneration of Nantes' *quartier de la création*. Does an exclusive gentrified quarter fit to the identity of Nantes? Is it not in opposition with the idea of social cohesion that the city claims to be a model of?¹⁴² It must be said that Nantes is not Berlin and social division is less important than in the German capital. Nevertheless, gentrification should be a major issue in the management of the *quartier de la création*. The risk is to deprive the city of one of the most characteristic piece of its identity: the social aspect. Without condemning the creative district model, it cannot be denied that, from a social perspective, the concept is source of issues. During the next years, the municipality of Nantes will have to handle the gentrification forces, if it wants to maintain Nantes' identity of *ville de gauche* (labour city). A regeneration unaware of the social change would be counterproductive not only for a communication strategy, but, above all, for the identity feeling of the community itself.

The case of the *quartier de la création* shows a dual process. While following the mainstream lines of all metropolitan area in the world (by talking about *creativity, branding and competitiveness*) the Nantes seems to reject the idea of an aggressive race between cities. As a matter of fact, paradoxically, Nantes competitiveness model takes more the form of a cooperation. Instead of fighting with the competitors, Nantes works to build a solid network of partners. The cooperation projects the city is developing seem to be almost in contradiction with the branding theory itself, that originally prefers the system winners-defeated, more than relation based on partnerships. A particularly important and *in progress* connection has been established with the close city of Rennes. Within the two cities a thick programme of collaboration (from university

¹⁴¹ *Gentrification a Berlino*, Magazzini Einstein, on air on Rai Storia 06/05/2010.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqdRumuds8A> [last accessed 07/07/2011]

¹⁴² Karine Daniel's interview, transcription n.6., Karine Daniel's track.

agreements, to public transportation improvements) is developing very fast. Also in terms of creative industries the two cities work side by side on different projects. Nantes' local government understood that in the globalized world a city of only 300.000 inhabitants cannot dare to compete with any big metropolis all alone. That is why a thick network of relations, and in particular, the growing twinning with Rennes, is one of the biggest challenges of the next decades.

However, even this cooperation is not without consequences for Nantes' identity. The secular rivalry with Rennes for the title of capital of Brittany is not easy to get rid of in few years. More than thirty years after the disuse of the dockyards and the first city identity shock, Nantes is about to face another transition period. Both the regeneration of the Isle of Nantes and intensive collaboration with Rennes push the city towards a reformulation of its own identity. In this critical period, the emotional contribution of branding can be a guideline for the community identity. As a matter of fact, besides attracting potential investors and skilled workers, branding Nantes also means suggesting an ideal of the city through a set of values that residents feel to belong to. In reality, this inwards action of branding is the necessary first step to develop any kind of attractiveness communication strategies.

5.6 Nantes, ville de participation

Finally, the last value that characterises Nantes is *participation*. In this regard, the vibrant associative life of the town is notable: it counts about 3000 recognized associations with more than 50.000 active volunteers.¹⁴³ Due to the supportive role of the municipality, associativism is literally an economic model for the city. Again, this model seems to clash with the imperatives *be competitive* and *attract investments* that recalls the origin of branding studies.¹⁴⁴ The rush for premiership is not in Nantes' nature. The approach of the city is inclusive more than exclusive. From this point of view, this kind of approach goes against

¹⁴³ www.nantes.fr [last accessed 08/05/2011]

¹⁴⁴ Meaning the marketing roots of branding.

some drifts of Florida's creative class, where the city society is embodied by a niche for elects: the creative class. Nantes is not a *posh* city, nor a *cool* one. The mayor himself has given a big imprint to the character of the city. It might be even said that, after twenty years of uninterrupted governance, Nantes' image reflects the figure of its mayor. Thierry Guidet defines Jean-Marc Ayrault as an "homme de l'Ouest"¹⁴⁵ (to distinguish him, from *les Parisiens*, considered more keen on showing off even more than what they have). With his definition Guidet puts the mayor in the same category as its citizens, creating a compact community that shares common values. So, even if the urban debate brings sometimes voices that push for really ambitious projects and expectations, Jean-Marc Ayrault is considered a responsible and down to earth administrator, able to judge situations with common sense. His militancy in the socialist party determines the three developments pillars of the city he rules: large public support in culture, ecological sensibility and equality of opportunities. This modest but motivated, humble but proud picture of the city is fundamental when considering a branding campaign. On the contrary, an aggressive branding campaign like those of other bigger cities that chose to highlight exclusivity and premiership (such as *OnlyLyon*, or *LondonFirst*) would not be suitable for Nantes. An appropriate focus would be instead related to the quality of life and a nice common living. From this branding perspective, gentrification processes would show an *exclusive side* that does not belong to the history of the city. In this way, social cohesion and the image of Nantes as an egalitarian city would be distorted.

Fostering the participative character of its community, Nantes has recently inaugurated a new and interesting creative project: "*MaVilleDemain*: Inventons la métropole nantaise de 2030" (My City Tomorrow: let's invent Nantes metropolis of 2030). *MaVilleDemain* is a website dedicated to the development plans for 2030: an attempt of democratisation of the city future agenda. The core of the website is the ABCdaire: a list of 125 keywords that would define Nantes in 2030, where internet users can give their own contribution. The project is

¹⁴⁵ Thierry Guidet's interview, transcription n. 7.

new and the contributions are not many yet. The project is ambitious, and much more effort should be done in order to get people involved into the project. First of all, a more efficient use of media is suggested to make up for *MaVilleDemain's* communication shortcoming. In October 2010, date of its inauguration, only few media gave the information, so that it town the project was still largely unknown.

MaVilleDemain shows also the local administration's confidence towards new media. A website was preferred to a survey and a Twitter account was set up as tool for faster and easier communications. However, the setting up of these accounts is not enough to make things working. As the competition for visibility in the internet is very high, social medias need a constant updating and a creative approach to be effective in catching users' attention. Not surprisingly, more and more companies are designing *ad hoc* positions for social media experts. Leaving a website out of date or a social media account inactive could produce side effects. Social medias are a good idea to improve projects' visibility, but only if there is the certainty that someone will take care of them with constancy. After more than ten months *MaVilleDemain* has only 150 followers in Twitter: a ridiculous number for any twitter user. However, from their side, the promoters of the initiative have the tradition of civic sense and participation of the city. The high social engagement in Nantes' metropolitan area makes hope for a satisfactory outcome.

To conclude, the bet on *participation* represents a big asset for the city not only from the point of view of the development, but also in a branding perspective, for two reasons. First, as stated by Kavaratzis branding affects the city identity. It is obvious that if the inhabitants are involved in the city life, the process of branding would result more suitable and also more effective. Furthermore, I feel to extend what Karine Daniel¹⁴⁶ said about EUradioNantes' interns, to the whole resident community, saying that the first ambassadors of the city are its inhabitants. They reflect the image of the city outside its borders. So, if residents

¹⁴⁶ Karine Daniel's interview, transcription n.6., see theory 39-40.

are proud of their city, their authentic message would be more valuable than many expensive ad campaigns.

To make people being part of the branding strategy of the city, it is important to explain to them the project, and its reasons. According to Maurice Berthinau this *pedagogic action* was done during the first regeneration period. But, when the city gained appreciation and respectability at national level, there was a period that he called “la temptation de la pose” (the temptation of the rest), where Nantes thought to have reached all its goals. However, now, globalisation had moved the goalposts. Therefore, the perspective has to be moved to a supranational level. The needs for a new pedagogic approach to internationalization is evident in what Maurice Berthinau calls Nantes’ inhabitants “état d’esprit”¹⁴⁷ (state of mind). The citizens’ pride towards their city is definitely something positive. However, under an excessive city pride, a provincial-minded perspective may hide. “Quel beau projet!” - exclaims ironically Maurice Berthinau referring to the creative district on the Isle of Nantes- “...c’est un projet qui est traité un peu à la nantaise, avec l’idée que c’est le plus beau projet d’Europe. En fait, quand on regarde, on cherche, on s’aperçu qu’il y a beaucoup d’autres projets en Europe qui sont de dimension équivalente. Mais c’est un peu le besoin des Nantais de se dire « On est les plus grands, les plus forts...»¹⁴⁸

Certainly, this boosted self-esteem does not help the development of the city, or the opening of the residents’ state of mind, even though the positive feeling of the residents towards Nantes is obviously a fundamental part of an effective branding of the city. However, until the population will not understand the new European perspective that Nantes has to deal with, it will not take part in the building of the branding strategy. As a consequence, without the interest and the support of the residents, branding Nantes and improving its visibility abroad will not make any sense. Therefore, internationalisation does not have

¹⁴⁷ Maurice Berthinau’s interview, transcription n.11.

¹⁴⁸ Trad. “What a great project!...It is treated à la Nantaise. Actually, if you look a bit further, you realize that in Europe there are other projects like this one...It is a bit Nantes’ people need to say “we are the best”.

to be perceived as something additional, but as an absolutely essential part of Nantes' daily life. It is also important to assure that the population understands that, in a society where relations and exchanges are becoming more and more important, the quality of life that the city provide them with now is dependent on the capacity of the city to play an active role in the global network.

V. Conclusion

The findings of Nantes' case study have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. In each paragraph, an interpretation of the branding potential of the creative aspects of Nantes was provided together with some suggestions to overcome the shortcomings emerged from the analysis. In this conclusion, the single aspects of Nantes' creative milieu are merged to give a new synthesis of the priorities towards a future branding strategy.

What emerges from the analysis of the case of Nantes is that the city is facing a changing period. Some goals are clear, but the means involved to reach them are still to be discussed. The hostility of part of the public opinion towards the branding strategy is an emblematic sign of the serious problem of the local administration's communication strategy. This issue is not only strictly related to the branding sphere, but it involves many aspects of the city communication. From the unfamiliar attitude of citizens with English, to the weak communication of *MaVilleDemain*, it seems that in Nantes communication is considered as something to avoid. Somehow, with its old-style pragmatism, the city seems to judge communication as something frivolous or even pretentious. However, if the branding strategy keeps the focus on the social character of the city, on its participation and cooperation-minded model, acting both as a communication and a city development tool, there is no way the image of the city is threaded by a superficial marketing frenzy. **Communication is a necessity.** In the network society city, a city without *a voice* does not exist.

The analysis of this case study also reveals the importance of **coherence** and cohesion in every field. From a branding perspective, of course, it is necessary to work on a coherent image of the city, which has to avoid dissonant messages. Coherence is also very appreciated as a form of political conduct. When looking at a long run project, like the one of reconverting a whole city area, coherence is important to create cohesion and to raise a feeling of belonging among people that belief in the same project. In this sense, *Le quartier de la création* represents a

big challenge for the administration. Will the local administration succeed in keeping gentrification forces under control, preserving Nantes' social cohesion?

Among all these considerations, the most important effort the municipality has to do before starting any branding strategy is to explain the plans for the city and make clear their necessity. The suspicious attitude towards the branding campaign derives from the ineffective explanation of the intents and the new possibilities this process may bring to the population. Before addressing the attention to an international audience, the reasons for the change need to be made clear to everyone in the city. **Communication is not only about advertisement, it is also about information.** Internet aside, Nantes offers a wide variety of local media that the decision-makers could use to better inform the population about the new challenges that the city has to deal with.

Nantes is still fighting an inner war between its traditional socialist model and the new globalized trends of development. The creative city model clearly opens to the global perspective that Nantes' administration aim to. However, in some aspects, it is not suitable to the *socialistic* model that the city embodies, or has embodied until now. Competitiveness, growth, marketing strategies, gentrification and, obviously, globalization, are all themes that need to be explained and adjusted to the city culture. Nantes needs therefore to find a way that combines its two souls: the traditional soul of "ville de gauche" with its new globalized perspective. It might be not necessary to refuse one or the other. For example, in this sense, the dominant role reserved to culture in the creative city theory may be the connection between the socialist tradition of **cultural policies** and the **internationalisation** embedded in the concept of creative city.

Surprisingly, from the analysis of this case study, branding ends up emerging not as a goal, but as a decisive means for city development. Besides the logos and the building of a city image, Nantes' branding process produces one more effect: by questioning about the city identity, it forces the community to undertake a change. Without the concrete goal of a branding campaign,

probably the city would not have been put in front of such a need, or its realization would have taken more time. As a matter of fact, the cultural mapping observation, required by a branding strategy, addresses the reflection to the **city identity** and the challenges that the globalization brings along. Changing people's mind is hard and takes time. However, the history of Nantes tells the story of an incredible transformation already undertaken in the nineties. This time, the hassle is not the economic crisis. However, the loss of identity that the city experienced in the eighties is still part of this new evolution of the city.

To conclude, the branding strategy that the municipality of Nantes is determined to build involves the creative milieu of the city in many ways. Regarding the international visibility, Nantes can bet on its cultural milieu to produce some flagship projects able to make the city to be known outside France. In connection to this, a lively and mixed creative milieu is directly linked to the city's possibility to provide both high living standard and economic wellness to its inhabitants. Moreover, if combined, the force of branding and the creative sector can be even more powerful in the development of the city and the evolution of Nantes' urban society. By creating a set of feeling and perceptions, branding and culture cooperate in the construction of the city image, which is not only useful as a lure to attract tourists, but also as a reference point of the city identity.

As many scholars claimed, the creative city intended as a fixed model of urban planning is probably a fashionable but weak theory. However, if we adopt a larger perspective, the debate on creative cities can be very precious. The introduction of a cultural approach¹⁴⁹ in urban planning, in fact, is one of the most significant contributions given by this theory. Moreover, the analysis of Nantes shows how many elements grounded in this theory (notion of quality of life, communication, cooperation etc...) can be used to read and foster the development of our urban landscapes.

¹⁴⁹ See theory pp. 21-24.

VI. Reflections

This thesis aims to unveil the connections between the creative city theory and the branding theory through the case study of Nantes. The perspective chosen was cross-disciplinary: it involved communication and sociology. However, the topic is suitable to be studied also from specific angles: like the economic or urban planning perspective. Although this study is not generalisable to other experiences, some aspects found in Nantes' case studies may be used as starting point for further researches. For example, the issue of city identity and the importance of networking that were discussed for the case study of Nantes, invite to a larger reflection on the future of urban areas. Which is the future of our cities? Which is the shape of tomorrow's urban communities?

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