



revitalising industrial sites

---

Andrew Gray, ERA 21 Ltd.

## Ile de Nantes Festival on industrial heritage

July 2007



Nantes Métropole  
Stéphanie ARNAUD  
2 cours du Champ de Mars  
44923 Nantes Cedex 9

Nantes Métropole, one of the REVIT partners has witnessed an extraordinary example of how the image of an urban area can be uplifted. From being a run-down ex-shipbuilding industrial area cut off from the city centre, the area is being transformed into an active centre for creative arts and an imagination-stirring city open public space that attracts locals and visitors alike.

The Ile de Nantes lies in the Loire River right next to Nantes City Centre and was historically a large ship-building area before this was all moved to St Nazaire, nearer to the coast. With the demise of the industry in Nantes a new focus needed to be found for the island that would integrate it with the city centre, and the city felt it important to retain the various skills used in building ships. This has been achieved partly through well planned regeneration of the fabric of key buildings, both old and new, and the layout of the transport routes and public open spaces on the island.



What makes the Ile de Nantes different from other schemes, however, has been the ambitious and imaginative creation of large scale creative machines in the island's Machine Workshop (situated in an adapted old foundry building), including an enormous steam-powered elephant made of wood, steel and leather that "walks" around carrying up to 30 tourists on its back! The elephant is the first of a series of machines, that are both planned and already in the making, which employ over 100 people from around 30 different trades and professions! It made its first "promenade" on 30 June 2007, and now attracts hundreds of visitors a day to the site.

One machine, being developed for completion in 2009, is a fairground carousel depicting submarine life in different depths of the ocean. Another is an enormous "Tree of Herons" that will enable people to walk through its branches, which will be decked with hanging gardens, and research is currently being carried out as to what plants will grow in those conditions. The latter will be placed elsewhere on the island to encourage people to visit the whole island and not just the machine workshop area.

The renewed image of the Ile de Nantes has formed a focus for the new school of architecture, linked to the University, professional offices, state-of-the-art law courts and housing provision, and has triggered an annual arts festival that aims to form a link between the Loire Estuary cities of Nantes and St Nazaire.

**Visit the Website dedicated to the Ile de Nantes Machines at :**  
[www.nantesmetropole.fr/html/lesmachines](http://www.nantesmetropole.fr/html/lesmachines)

**and discover the project through photos, videos, drawings...**