



revitalising industrial sites

SAMOA,
société d'aménagement de la métropole ouest atlantique

Mixed-Use and Diversity at the Heart of the Ile de Nantes Project

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1. Existing Structures

Made up by uniting a dozen islands in the Loire River, with fluctuating contours, the Ile de Nantes is a constantly evolving **composite area**:

- A **district** that has grown out along the historic North-South axis;
- To the west an area that has welcomed **industry** and **maritime activities** since the middle of the 19th century;
- To the east, a district developed in the **1970's** where tertiary public sector activity predominates.

The de-localization of industrial, port and road transport activities during the 1980's led to the creation of large tracts of wasteland and required joint action to **renovate a part of the town**, and **to bring together** these very distinct entities and link them to the rest of the urban area. The 350 hectares of island-land include **residential areas**, which need upgrading, nearly **90 hectares of evolving land**, and public spaces that are often **inadequate** and **dilapidated**. There is therefore a need to improve the everyday **quality-of-life** of the **island's 13,000 inhabitants** while at the same time planning development to encourage **new inhabitants** and new businesses.

2. Project Philosophy

Heritage:

Closely allied to the composite nature of the site, the agglomeration has taken up the challenge of a new development trend based on a multifunctional diversity that respects heritage. The primary goal is to find a balance between residential and urban economic functions and an attractive living environment.

Given the size and potential of the Ile de Nantes site, it appeared clearly unreasonable to restrict it to one single use or function. We are not proposing a major development with large-scale demolition, which would create a completely new image for the town, setting the islands adrift from their past. The approach is quite different. It involves accepting the historic heritage and, rather than succumbing to the temptation to destroy everything and start anew, to follow a more subtle path, more respectful of the heritage, which draws inspiration from the sites and memories. The diversity of the site is not perceived as a series of obstacles to be overcome, but rather as a fundamental factor to be taken into account in the philosophy of the project.

However, this does not mean simply accepting the various legacies and claiming a bond with the past, but more of addressing the existing and attempting to improve and transform it. The aim is to repair and restore rather than destroy what is already there. This should not prevent innovation but rather encourage moderation in its implementation. Thus, the Ile de Nantes urban project will be careful to avoid demolition wherever reuse or reconversion seems possible.

Project Phasing:

Although the guidance plan is the main directive of the Ile de Nantes urban project in that it outlines the architectural orientation of the proposed projects and recommends a working method to define the shape of a town, it is clear that the process challenges formal urban planning concepts. A town centre is not created overnight;

on the contrary, because it is a constantly evolving entity, this approach emphasises flexibility, keeping development options open for the future.

In a broader sense, this is in keeping with the major trend that is seeing a shift of the town centre towards the south of the agglomeration. The plan is therefore to manage this historic process first of all in the North part of the site, while phasing the project according to a North-South dynamic.

Local Dialogue:

While the Ile de Nantes project team is well aware that it has to respect both the history and traditions of the district, it also attaches great importance to the players present on site who must contribute actively to project development. This means that instead of a purely top-down initiative disguised as a democratic discussion, an integrated, dialogue-driven approach is employed, encouraging contributions from all the relevant individuals (local residents, people who work in the area, etc.) and public and private agencies, hence the evolutionary nature of the project. The desire to turn the Ile de Nantes project into an Eco-District will be based on dialogue and a whole range of environmental safeguards, making the procedure part of a sustainable development strategy.

Global Approach to the Site:

Rather than focusing on zoning, the Ile de Nantes development approach consists of considering the entire island, as of the first operational phases (2002-2007 programme). The urban regeneration project must therefore look at the Ile as a whole, with each section and boundary conceived based on a global view. Compartmentalisation, segmentation or partitioning of the project are out of the question.

Far from a desire to suppress diversity, the urban planning expert in charge of the project, Alexander Chemetoff, actually insists on it. He believes that towns have never been either separate entities or homogeneous, even in ordered cities, created over a short space of time. Here, Alexander Chemetoff refuses any formal planning, favouring the benefits of diversity, a modern artistic value if ever there was one. Diversity is born out of preserving the existing features and adding contemporary contributions. The project consists of making cohabitation and juxtaposition possible, whilst reinforcing the sense and evocative power of the apparently dissonant elements that make up the future urban space. This demand for diversity is most apparent in the freedom given to owners to exercise their right to develop using a mixture of high-rise and low-rise structures. Thus, the heritage transmitted by observing the site is optimised and contributes to mixed-use development of the area.

3. Mixed-Used Issues

At a time when we are searching for solutions to counteract urban sprawl and endeavouring to inject new energy into town centres, the Ile de Nantes represents a major opportunity to:

- Offer residential accommodation in the centre of the urban space;
- Welcome new economic activities that are compatible with high density urban environments and that thrive on this diversity;

- Have an innovative approach to the creation of urban public spaces, by integrating alternative forms of transport and circulation;
- Promote an urban policy driven by the desire for sustainable development.

Although the project must be undertaken in its totality, it is clear that segmentation of the project into different themes is necessary if the Ile de Nantes is to return to an urban policy.

- Create new public spaces, restore and transform existing ones

Development of the public space is the vital key that will drive the transformation of the Ile, support its conversion and lay the groundwork for the changes to its functions. The aim is to ensure a more equitable distribution of the public space, which is today essentially geared toward automobile traffic.

This will involve refurbishing the river banks and quaysides, restoring all the attractiveness of the banks of the Loire as a place of contact with the river and estuary, by enhancing the green environment, minimizing traffic and eliminating haphazard car parking. The public spaces will be improved by promoting alternative modes of transport (public footpaths and cycle tracks) and implementing a major public transport axis (tram, bus) linking a number of sites that up to now have been separated by a series of north/south “fault-lines”. This also means moving away from the industrial zoning of the 1970’s, by creating new routes to meet the needs of an urban centre open to all. Rejecting the dichotomy of either starting over from scratch or not intervening at all, this approach combining innovation and creation emphasises above all the renovation and reuse of existing features. This flies in the face of uniformity and mono-functional projects by accentuating the richness and diversity of the sites. The ties to the history and tradition of the sites is also omnipresent in the layout of the surrounding public spaces.

- Develop residential appeal; maintain the diversity of the habitat

With the pressure for housing throughout the agglomeration, the Ile de Nantes must provide a significant number of housing units whilst assuring the diversity and quality of the residences available. The under-populated zones, along the banks of the Loire, offer an undeniably attractive residential area, and it is here that a large proportion of the housing is being created (“Live Along the Quayside” project near the Court House (Palais de Justice) as well as the Brossette and Tripode sites). A housing development that includes a large proportion of social housing (at least 20%) will contribute to the overall aim of site diversity. The housing provided will satisfy the demands of the different social groups, notably by offering houses alongside blocks of flats.

- Contribute to the economic development of the agglomeration and create a centre of excellence

The first and second phases of the Ile de Nantes project will coexist in harmony with the economic activities that are mostly based in the south-western district of the island (MIN, Beghin Say, etc), provided they are not incompatible with the demands of an environment that combines all the functions of the heart of an agglomeration: habitat, tertiary sector, recreation activities. Although some businesses, judged to be incompatible with high density urban environments due to pollution and noise levels, have left in recent years, it is clear that major industries that are compatible with urban and environmental progress are welcome on the Ile de Nantes. This is well illustrated by the continued presence of the Alstom site, which has resulted in a redefinition of land distribution.

The development of the Ile de Nantes is based on the desire to both support the development of economic activities already on the islands and to promote the introduction of economic activities that conform to the objectives of the urban project. The Ile de Nantes must be integrated into the development scheme for the Nantes agglomeration and become a driving force for economic, technological and tourist development. The character of Ile de Nantes is yet to be established by the development of a distinct and well-defined service sector. Although existing activities support the economic development of the agglomeration, a balance needs to be found between the requirements of these businesses and the development of an urban project based on the culture of functional diversity in each sector of the town. A major effort will be made to improve complementarity between the products and services available on the Ile and those of the city centre, notably in terms of the small and large-scale commercial activities of the district.

- Enhance the environment and quality of life

The environmental issue should be seen here as a cross-disciplinary requirement offering improvements in quality of life and protection for the environment.

- Reduce **pollution** (noise, atmospheric emissions, water quality);
- Improve **energy efficiency** for new or existing buildings, whether residential or in the service sector (OPATB¹ submission to be studied);
- Choice of **materials** and construction methods, for both **public spaces** (with an emphasis on restoration) and **buildings**;
- Organisation and **management of demolition and building sites**;
- **Waste** management and household waste collection;
- Develop the urban landscape, the **natural environment** and the diversity of species that it harbours.

4. Soil contamination

The history of industrial occupation on the Ile de Nantes shows that there is a potential for residual contamination that clearly must be kept in mind during any operation.

However, the results of soil studies on some potentially contaminated sites have in fact been clean, whereas on other occasions similar studies of allegedly clean zones have shown traces of pollutants.

These studies clearly demonstrate that what is potential is not necessarily true, and that, in terms of soil sampling, it is sometimes advisable to question the assumptions behind certain historical studies. The simplistic approach to soil quality (contaminated/clean) is highly debatable, and here we must address three broad questions: what is the source of the contamination, by what means can it be transmitted, and what is its potential target?

¹ Opérations Programmées d'Amélioration Thermique et énergétique des Bâtiments (Programmed operations for the improvement of the thermal and energy efficiency of buildings)