WEAVING AND INTERWEAVING: THE MULTIFACETED AVENUE

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Abstract

This article proposes a reflection on the regenerative mechanisms that can be triggered in the impoverished former textile industry districts, based on a research-intervention conducted in one of them in Mulhouse, France. After presenting the notions of territory and territory of innovation, this research studies the links that are created between the people the tangible and intangible heritage inherited from the textile industry and favour the emergence of creative collectives. It opens up perspectives on the past textile history as a local innovation and creativity asset.

The relationship between territory, creativity and innovation has been widely studied in industrial and urban environments. But what about the former, now impoverished, French textile industry strongholds? What kind of resources can be used to revive them? Can past textile history be a local innovation and creativity asset?

Study area

Many former French textile districts in the 'Grand Est' region are now impoverished (Cacheux et al., 2016). They are part of a decline process (Baron et al. 2010; Fol and Cunningham-Sabot, 2010) affecting their de-industrialised towns and villages. Because of the joint de-structuring of the urban fabric due to the demise of intra-urban industrial sites, and the onset of a specific social and urban crisis, they have come to epitomise the typical derelict old-time district (Miot, 2015). The peripheral neighbourhoods of the Alsatian town of Mulhouse are cases in point. However, they are opening up to innovation in a transforming textile and fashion economy in a move towards more inclusiveness and sustainability (Assouly et al., 2012).

In the textile heyday, Mulhouse was nicknamed "the French Manchester" (Fluck, 2011) because its cotton manufacturing industry was a "genuine innovation-prone cultural cradle" (Jacob and Reid, 2003). In 1768, the Dollfus-Mieg et Compagnie (DMC) industrial group, who became famous for their 'floral indienne' fabric was established in Mulhouse. They applied a multi-coloured 'mottle' technique called 'bigarrure' and performed cloth printing before specialising in the production of embroidery threads. Out of 9000 workers in 1928, only one workshop of 217 professionals were still in business in 2015.

At the end of the nineteenth century, this massive industry fostered the development of the Avenue Aristide Briand and its neighbourhood with numerous spinners, craftsmen and public warehouses. Renowned brands made the neighbourhood famous to the point that, in the midtwentieth century, it was compared to Paris' Champs-Elysée. However, after long remaining a historical reference neighbourhood in Mulhouse, a dramatic cut in DMC's production in 1990 hastened its demise and impoverishment, and the Mulhousians lost interest in the district.

Since 2017, to highlight the warmth of a welcoming and stylish neighbourhood, steeped in history, the city of Mulhouse has been sponsoring a territorial collective innovation process based on the know-how of the inhabitants of Avenue Aristide Briand (featuring 130 nationalities) and on the physical and cultural assets from the old-times textile industry (Collin, 2017). The collective capabilities for innovation and creation in this former textile district are leveraged through various mechanisms, which will be reviewed below. They highlight the importance of the local actionable resources and of weaving ties between today's dwellers and their inherited resources.

Literature review

Theoretical geographers and specialists in such fields as economics, management, sociology, aesthetics and more study the concepts of territory, innovation and creativity. How do they conceive of the relationship between these separate concepts?

Many alternative approaches of the concept of territory exist. In a geographical perspective, it means the physical and natural bedrock. However, it is also evocative of the social constructions, management contexts (Girin, 1990) and local forms of development (Lévy and Lussault, 2013; Veltz, 1996) of the people who live on it. These dwellers also have their own representations and metaphysical views of the territory which support a feeling of belonging (Di Méo, 1996). The territory has at least three dimensions: physical, organisational, and that of identity (Laganier et al., 2002). The concept of territory covers two interesting dialectics, as Raulet-Croset (2008) points out: one lying somewhere between space and meaning, where the meaning-carrying natural space also has a symbolic dimension; the other standing between the prescribed and the constructed territory, at a point where public spheres of intervention collide with the collective scopes of intervention of the local stakeholders.

In the economic field, the territory is viewed dynamically in innovative contexts (Aydalo, 1986) through formal or non-formal types of cooperation to share knowledge, know-how and actionable resources. While productive and innovative circles regenerate the competitiveness of the territories (Colletis and Pecqueur, 2018), post-industrial innovative circles highlight them in the consumer's eye (Guex and Crovoisier, 2017). The space-territory can be a catalyst of collective innovation (Peres, 2020) by concentrating and interconnecting the innovation assets through an agglomeration process (Porter, 1998). Conversely, Loilier (2010) shows that faced with this geographical proximity, involving a risk of isolation, alternative forms of proximity (cultural, digital, organisational) can support transmission. The territory thus appears as a community, a 'set of projects' made by innovation-driven stakeholders (Landel, 2016; Besson, 2018), a territory where ties can be woven.

In the early twenty-first century, the 'theory of creative cities' considers cities as the ultimately innovative environment. Urban creativity stems from the presence of numerous cultural

stakeholders whose capacity for innovation increases through connections with creative talents (Florida, 2004) and numerous informal circles. The level of intensity (qualitative and quantitative) of the resulting creative atmosphere (Stolarick and Florida, 2006) can be assessed through the quality of its creation outcomes (Paris, 2021). Liefooghe (2010a, 2010b) noted however that creativity cannot be an effective resource for territorial development unless it is "enabled" through social and professional networks ready to be deployed at various scales. Established creative communities operate at different levels, that is underground, middle ground, upper ground (Cohendet, Grandadam, and Simon, 2011), but little is yet known of their embryology, or emergence.

To make up for this lack of data, we may look at emerging creative communities (Dubois, 2015) through the involvement of diverse users of the territories. Such emerging creative communities are looking to solve new societal issues (Torre, 2015) and have common assets (Ostrom, 1992). Thus, territory regeneration through innovation may be performed by activating them (Simon, 2009). This proposal is based on the assertion that the territories include still insufficiently known endogenous resources capable to foster a virtuous development (Besson and Brouillard, 2018). As early as 1903, French geographer Vidal de la Blache stated that a land is a "reserve of dormant energies of which nature has laid the kind, but of which [...] Man [...] reveals the singularity."

Our hypothesis is that creative communities are leaving an imprint. To open up to new practices, their intelligibility remains to be deciphered (Callon and Latour, 1991) and characterised in the former Aristide Briand textile district of Mulhouse. What ties are being 'woven' between the 'inherited' territory and the emerging creative communities?

Materials and methods

A longitudinal case study was performed in the district (Yin, 2004) in a qualitative perspective based on an inductive approach. To be useful to the managers in Mulhouse and generate new findings (Chanal et al., 2015), it was based on an interventionist research (2017-2020) (David, 2000) in the maturation stage of the territorial collective innovation process. Table 1 specifies the consecutive research periods over 42 months. One hundred and eighty local participants, professionals and dwellers were involved through interviews, meetings and a "co-designing" initiative (Dubois et al., 2016). This was a "design-based research" (Wang and Hannafin, 2005) that is, "A systematic although flexible methodology based on a collaboration between researchers and practitioners." Three external designers participated.

Objectives for The Organisation	Research Objectives	Research Methodology And Operations Carried Out
Understanding how to renew	Understanding the emerging	USAGE REPRESENTATIONS - Sequence 1, 6 months (Sept. 2017-March 2018)
neighbourhood practices	dynamic of the creative	20 exploratory interviews with managers 6 meetings with groups of stakeholders

Helping in the design of an open innovation project (PIA3, Anru +) Creating the necessary conditions for innovation Offering various forms of support for innovation in the neighbourhood	communities and the ties being woven with the inherited territory	CO-DESIGNING APPROACH - Sequence 2, 5 months (April-Sept. 2018), with 2 external designers 1 co-designing workshop, 43 participants 2 focus groups (in collaboration with local artists and designers) Tutoring of a social economy (ESS) Master intern (Université de Haute Alsace) Opinion poll targeting women and shopkeepers Visualisation of C1 fresco MODELIING, 24 months (2019 and 2020) 'Avenue Bigarrée' (the multifaceted Avenue) Manifesto Supporting mobilisations (call for expression of interest) Testing the 'seasons of innovation' scheme Impact of Covid 19
		RETRO-ANALYSE - Sequence 4, 6 months (JanJune 2021)
		Reverse-analysis to understand the sequences of the innovation process Processual analysis (Mendez)

Table 1. Objectives, research periods and operations carried out. Source: The author, 2021.

Primary data cumulated into miscellaneous deliverables (notes, meeting minutes, innovation reports, dashboards, commented visualisations) allowed for a retrospective study of a complex process whose central variable was the emergence of creative communities. The embryogenesis of such communities was then studied as a processual analysis (Mendez, 2010). Pettigrew (1990) claims that the project's context should be closely reviewed as it influences its trajectory. While it includes neutral elements, others, acting as "ingredients", will impact the trajectory. Mendez argues that the evolving arrangement of these ingredients feeds off the process, and that changes happening in them may reveal time sequences (Abbott, 2001). The drivers operating such changes will modify the course of the process.

Six types of ingredients were analysed in the Mulhouse process: the defined objective, stakeholders, management tools introduced, artefacts produced, connections with the environment, and the territorial engineering resources used. Four major time sequences were identified: genesis, emotion, manifesto and will to create. The initial sequence for programming innovation by the city of Mulhouse uses the framework of the French public urban renewal policy (Programme d'Investissement d'Avenir PIA3, Anru +).

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¹ Launched in 2017, the ANRU+ approach aims to support the New National Urban Renewal Program (NPNRU), of which the National Agency for Urban Renovation (ANRU) is operator, by amplifying innovation and economic investments.

It included collecting the representations of the 'Avenue' among 'neighbourhood' versus 'city centre' inhabitants, stakeholders and shopkeepers. The second sequence revealed a great measure of collective nostalgia, with a crippling effect on action taken despite the positive representations in the collected feedback. The third sequence showed an evolution in the collective dynamics, due to 'co-designing', the influence of inspiring trends, and the (re) discovery of the physical and cultural assets of the neighbourhood's old-times textile industry. The will to collectively create subsequently generated a 'manifesto for the Avenue', and also a new, still on-going, dynamic involving new project holders.

Ingredients and drives	Sequence 1 - Genesis May 2017-Jan. 2018	Sequence 2 – Emotion JanMay 2018	Sequence 3 – Manifesto May 2018- March 2019	Sequence 4 - Will to create Since Feb. 2019
Management tools introduced	Work with city-centre shopkeepers on their representations of the "Avenue"	Work with city-centre civic councilors and young people on their representations of the "Avenue", and analysis of vacant premises	Setting up an "Air du temps" (Spirit of the times) and "mood boards" and co-designing approach	Prototype of a season of innovation
Artefacts produced	Identity prism of the 'cultural bridge'	Identity prism of the "creative beehive" Mapping out facilities to be reoccupied	Fresco (visualisation C1) and manifesto for a "multifaceted Avenue"	2 seasons of innovation - Test: colours and lights
Connections with the neighbourhood's environment	Collecting the views of local inhabitants and stakeholders	Contacting neighbouring third places: KM0, Open Fab/Petit Manchester,	Discovering the "nice (hi)story": history of D.M.C. and of the emergence of the Avenue	Monitoring provided by Tuba and Alsace Active
Territorial engineering resources	Assignment of the "urban policy" project manager	Launching the innovation and research consortium	General activation of the innovation and research consortium's duties	New urban renovation project manager and new urban policy director
Driver	Programmatic driver: the methodology framework of the	Diachronic driver: "ideas and nostalgia"	Evolutionist driver: the chosen strategy was "The multifaceted	Teleological driver: stimulating

	urban renovation project		Avenue: embellishment and collective creation for innovation"	creative communities
Defined objective	Innovating to block the avoidance mechanisms	Analysing the multicultural dimension	Defining the innovation strategy	Mobilising project holders through a call for expression of interest
Stakeholders	Local inhabitants and stakeholders, shopkeepers, civic councillors	Shopkeepers, young people, associations and third places	Artists, cultural stakeholders and women	Project holders

Table 2. The four time sequences of the territorial innovation process. Source: The author, 2021.

Results and discussion

Beyond the investigation of emerging creative communities, the outcomes of the interventionist research have highlighted the challenges of combining relevant physical and cultural assets. A second level of analysis, that is, the issue of the historical potential, has emerged.

Co-designing tools have a useful, unifying, uniting power, and by establishing a robust designing sphere, they act as a driving force. Users can 'interweave' ideas and knowledge to bring up collectively conceptualised proposals of relevance to the territory. These are becoming large avenues for creative communities to walk down.

The transition from the 'idea-designing process' to the 'final idea' can only happen after the emotional mechanisms at work on such stigmatised territories have been identified and understood. These context-relevant mechanisms are a background process.

Although rediscovering the history of textile revealed an unfailing connection to textile and colour in the collective memory of the 'Mulhousians', such local ingredients do not seem sufficient. Combined external ingredients generate novel driving forces. Thus, the external introduction of a series of management tools lead to several commented visual representations (frescoes, sketches) and a manifesto for a "new pioneering school-avenue with a keen interest in the world and a uniquely multifaceted atmosphere." A request by immigrant women to access a "large cooking and sewing workshop" echoed the recent 'Little Manchester' proximity textile manufacturing mill project managed by textile enthusiasts. The City of Mulhouse has integrated this creativity potential (Florida, 2004) into the territorial innovation process. Such a direct reminder of old-times textile productions was inspirational in the context of an upcoming urban embellishment and renovation policy. Thus, the inherited territory can be defined as a set of links between them know-how, places and living leading to new visible productions, themselves shared with the users of the area.

Although our work is based on full-fledged cognitive interpretations (Schäfer, 2019), the uniqueness of our case study and the fact that the results of our interventionist research are still temporary appear as limitations.

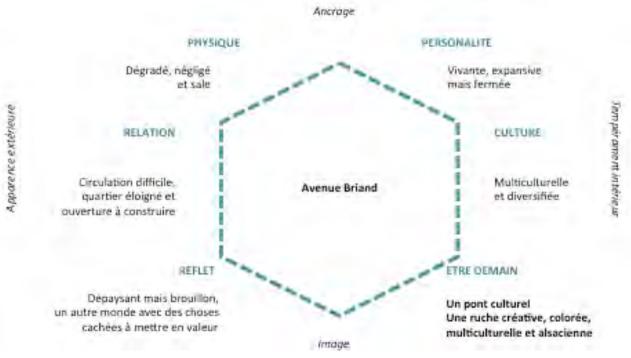
Conclusion

Our study shows that the embryogenesis of creative communities requires an arrangement of ingredients, which bring about a teleological drive based on a unifying theme (Besson, 2018) echoing the inherited resources. In Mulhouse, this was the wish for collective creation in the sphere of textile, multi-culturalism and colour. The restoration of the patterns of past experience (Dewey, 1977) makes it possible to move ahead. The dynamic attracted inhabitants, communities of stakeholders in the field and the city council services. It refined the knowledge and ideas voiced out through thriving exchanges along multiple pathways.

It features a wide pattern of relationships, initiatives and actions related to the innovation initiative sparked by the City of Mulhouse. The concept of "generative metabolism" (Hatchuel 2020) opens up an avenue for research, and our experiment will need to be completed to corroborate this hypothesis. The perspective of the 'common assets' raises the question of what the new artefacts created by these emerging communities really is. Such 'spontaneous' processes construct visible things, which, through little touches, end up transfiguring the territory, and bring it its unique spirit and distinctive aesthetics.

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Identity prism of the 'cultural bridge'



Fresco (visualisation C1)

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