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## *The City Shaped by the Rhetoric of Heritage: Imagining Standardization Away*

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Cultural heritage is a value that seems to count for something in our urban societies. Beyond the professional field of the conservationist, it is above all the idea of a common physical or incorporeal property signalling a form of belonging or of dependence. Arising from the domestic universe and long related to Historical Monuments, cultural heritage has experienced exponential social demand and has undergone significant semantic metamorphoses. It no longer serves the construction of nation states as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nor the invention of symbols by summoning up the memory of what is legitimate to preserve. It has become a subject of communication, much like the development of cultural and artistic events in the public space, because it is useful for economic and touristic attractiveness and for the characterization of social spaces. Are we living in a regime of heritage values related primarily to consumption, materialized by the growing display of heritage for the enchantment of urban spaces? If so, are we also witnessing the emergence of multiple heritage causes induced by a socially fragmented society? Are we confronted with a common property calling for heritage democracy? This paper attempts to answer these questions drawing on the strength of examples from the urban region of Lyon, France.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, memory, urban, communication, enchantment, public space.

### **Introduction**

The heritage of Europe's cities is currently being enhanced seemingly without limits. In France, legislation on historic monuments and national designation schemes<sup>1</sup> (*Ville de Pays d'art et d'histoire, Aire de valorisation de l'architecture, Patrimoine XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle*,<sup>2</sup> *Site remarquable*) together with Unesco and Council of Europe conventions mean that pretty much anything may be made *a common good*, meaning that it may be designated and protected as being of collective, historical or remembrance value. The many institutional arrangements and classification schemes by which heritage becomes heritage are becoming fuzzy and prone to change. It is no longer just monuments and prestigious sites that are defined as heritage; public policy on the question is expanding to include intangible property, cultural and natural landscapes and even the *commonplace*, protecting and (re)characterizing many highly eclectic artefacts (Heinich 2012). This observation is consistent with the end of any rank-ordering of forms of expression and their cultural equivalence (Coulangeon 2011). Even the use of the term 'heritage' is no longer reserved to the central administration with its professional corps of architects, curators and experts. The word is used performatively by elected officials, shopkeepers, community actors, developers and promoters, and even by residents, individuals and 'ordinary folk' to enhance particular geographical areas or urban districts (Rautenberg and Rojon 2014). Is this done to create a sense of belonging and/or dependence in order to counter a sense of being finite? Or is it done out of care for things prompted by a fresh sense of awareness in the Anthropocene era (Latour 2015, Tornatore 2018)? In any case, heritage and

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000032854341&categorieLien=id>

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/memoire/VISITES/labelxx/lieu\\_frameset.htm](http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/memoire/VISITES/labelxx/lieu_frameset.htm)

*what it is imagined to be* seem to be becoming *values that matter* in contemporary societies, much like culture, the art of living, or nature conservation. The resounding success of heritage and its pragmatic uses, outside any scholarly and administrative context, supposedly do not express a new relationship with time, a feeling of loss, the development of neo-conservatism, a shift in what is held sacred, nor changing society; more mundanely, they are the materialisation of new forms of surplus value, with the past becoming a resource for attracting new residents and/or tourists, for instance (Boltanski and Esquerre 2017). Heritage becomes, then, an instrument of communication with which to ensure local development, or to counter, or more often than not promote, the marketisation of contemporary cities. City planning is supposedly intended primarily to produce attractive and creative urban areas, much like a brand to be promoted and consumed. This is consistent with the analyses of Harvey (2012), who emphasizes how capitalism tends to commandeer and take over geographical space and above all to instrumentalize it for its own profit. Urban planning is intended to some extent to impose ways of life, being very much geared to consumerism and the security of property and individuals, but also to the enhancement of old city centres. It is just that this also tends to produce places that are standardized and mass-produced in terms of housing or shops, to reduce diversity and to iron out local specificities. In this way, for Sennett (2001), economic globalisation, the urbanisation of the world and the worldwide spread of capitalism all produce characterless urban spaces, such as shopping precincts and housing estates.

Without denying the value of such structural and critical approaches, the present discussion shows how social actors take hold of heritage-related images and of specific or allegorical rhetoric about ‘common goods’ in order to defend industrial monuments, the urban village, ancient market town or working-class district as unique in their own ways. As we shall see, this is consistent with processes of segregation, gentrification and social recognition. The discussion will draw on case studies from the Lyon urban region, empirical research and sporadic observation and analysis of discourse in the media as well as among the general public and more involved audiences. Lyon seems a relevant field of study because it is emblematic of a city that is keen to remain attractive worldwide, sustain its economic development and keep alive its dream of becoming a leading metropolis (Chenevez 2006). The study areas addressed succinctly and experimentally here are of varying dimensions, ranging from the city centre to the outer suburbs, but all provide a focus for a pragmatic rhetoric about heritage. The investigation addresses the ways in which the term ‘heritage’ comes up in arguments and accounts of projects of urban transformation and how it affects the making of cities today.

### **Lyon’s Confluence District: A Narrative Between Tradition and Modernity**

The recently named Confluence district is located in a former industrial and service-sector land that is undergoing wholesale reconversion in the heart of Lyon (2nd arrondissement), where the Rhône and Saône rivers converge. The site was long used for heavy and polluting industries as well as transport. An urban conversion scheme began in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is emblematic of the grandeur to which the local elected officials aspire for the city — its real or supposed

inclusion in the club of the leading European and world cities. To achieve this aim, for a good ten years a huge urban programme backed by several tiers of local authorities has been underway, including in particular carefully designed housing, an up-market shopping mall, regional administrative offices, high-tech and events management industries and the impressive Confluences Museum (science and society). The whole complex covers some 150 hectares in the heart of the historical Perrache/Sainte-Blandine district and encompasses the adjoining industrial wasteland, a former wholesale market and a prison recently *freed* of its occupants and converted into a private university. The designers claim that the principle is to escape from a period of abandonment and convert old industrial and service-sector areas into a new ultra-modern hyper-centre — a district ‘on the cutting edge, to bring out the city of tomorrow that is sustainable and ultra-high performance in terms of energy’ (interview with an SEM Confluence manager).

When making a film about the district in 2009, I met with managers of the semi-public company in charge of developing the site. The concern of those involved in this urban project was not to save the traces of an industrial decline or a lost world of work. On the contrary, their concern was to write a glorious new chapter for a space that was run-down and had been occupied until then mostly by working-class and immigrant populations.

‘The Perrache district was mostly made up of buildings and wasteland of little value [...] long disused factories. This programme for the area is a whole new chance to come out on top, to be part of a new, unprecedented, up-market district; we are going to write a prestigious page for this district [...]’ (interview with an SEM Confluence manager, 2009).

But what should be conserved and why? What should be protected? Does the term ‘heritage’ arise for specific objects? Or is it a case of ‘wiping the slate clean and starting anew’?

Several material items were selected and saved following a first phase of demolition of the former industrial premises that, apart from a campaign and publication by the Inventory Department (Chalabi et al. 2005), proceeded amid the utmost indifference of cultural heritage groups. A few examples from the former port can be cited. The sugar warehouse was converted into an iconic location for the biennial contemporary art exhibition; it was restored in a highly contemporary and artistic style and renamed the Sucrière. The customs and excise building was gutted to accommodate communication businesses and contemporary art galleries. Next to it, former derricks were saved and rehabilitated on the riverside and a salt storehouse became a high-end restaurant. The whole complex stands alongside comfortable hotels and audio-visual and event organisation companies in buildings marked by an audacious and ‘distinctive’ architecture. Further north in the district, a former prison has been saved and turned into a private university, following a thorough programme of demolition and conversion. The term ‘heritage’ crops up as an essential consideration for the designers of the urban programme alongside a very modernistic discourse about innovation, sustainability, social mixing and usages (a break with the past, severance and the architectural avant-garde).

‘There is a tremendous history that must be saved, buildings we have to conserve, that must be converted of course for a new function but certain volumes are of high quality [...]’ (interview with an SEM Confluence manager, 2009).

Nothing in the Confluence district is listed with the *Monuments Historiques*, there are no protection orders from the administration. But as the website for the SEM Lyon-Confluence urban project states, the *memory of the place* is thought of as the cornerstone of the urban project. It reads:

‘La Confluence’s industrial heritage, from the river port to the market of national interest,<sup>3</sup> has given the area’s constructions a unique character, marked by history. The two prisons it housed have also influenced its heritage. Throughout the redevelopment programme, the district has taken care to preserve its roots [...]’<sup>4</sup>

Here, the heritage issue is not underpinned by protection measures related to some scientific approach backed by specific professional corps. Because it is exclusively material, it is appropriated, used, framed and justified primarily by urban development actors. Conservation choices are made for aesthetic and economic purposes by *making a show* of heritage. There are no mediation features, no plaques to recall the past or other memorial features. The few features of industrial or functional architecture that have been conserved and restored boost interest in the site, thereby enhancing land and property values. They serve as reminders, as totems, like the old derricks that have been restored and that stand beside buildings with highly contemporary architecture to lend them a patina, ‘to look old or industrial’, thereby fostering a sense of fascination and enchantment via a form of industrial and dockside aesthetics in the line of the splendid examples of London, Liverpool and Hamburg. By combining a reconstructed history with modernity, an urban trajectory is mapped out for the area running from abandonment to modernity; it is an imagined trajectory that singles the project out and presents it as the obvious course to follow, while enabling a political reinterpretation of the collective local memory. This is a performative process which the project designers are not always conscious of. Each of the developers involved in the district is called on to respond to the elected officials’ ambition of embedding Lyon in people’s imaginations as being worthy to feature among Europe’s major cities.

A renewed interest in culture, aesthetics and heritage is essential for attracting investors and consumers (Chenevez 2014) as part of a process intended to make cities distinctive, bolstered by the development of financial capitalism and of metropolisation in which all cities are economic rivals in a world market. This makes it possible to reinterpret the earlier industrial and service-sector narrative about the district so that it can fit in an exuberant colourful modernity while giving it a new sheen, or at any rate a customized veneer of age. This is the

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<sup>3</sup> In France a ‘market of national interest’ is a wholesale market to which the authorities grant special strategic status. Such markets are generally located on the main lines of communication and/or in the major cities.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.lyon-confluence.fr/> accessed on 20 February 2017.

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response to the expectations of metropolitan social groups and their concern for being distinctive (Chabrol et al. 2016), meeting the need for competitive big cities to radiate out and the need for consumerism related to economic globalisation — and it is also a response to the ‘touristification’ of the world (Gravari-Barbas and Fagnoni 2015). Here, the rhetoric of heritage is not meant to strike a blow against the market and profit or to counter the enjoyment of individual interest (which characterizes cultural heritage in its legal definition); on the contrary, it is meant to make public space aesthetically pleasing while including it within a discourse about the district’s history designed, among other things, to increase land and property prices. In this way representations of heritage and an imagined past circulate and propagate with the main objective of integrating the urban project into a higher and shared dimension. The objective is to construct a sort of urban mythology, an image of grandeur for a new district, to enable it to draw in the upper middle classes and creative classes and convince them that they have come to the right place to visit, to settle, or to consume.

### **The Montchat District (Lyon’s 3rd Arrondissement)**

The same city but with different actors. The Montchat district in the eastern part of Lyon’s 3rd arrondissement comprises numerous small houses and handsome detached homes built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This area is under substantial pressure from urban consolidation. The city is growing and newcomers are looking for accommodation. The pressure is intensifying for real-estate developers to knock down detached houses and build more profitable blocks of flats. The council for the 3rd arrondissement regularly organizes meetings about the district’s future. In June 2016, together with postgraduate student Laura Villar, I met inhabitants, elected officials and real-estate professionals at some of the meetings about conserving the ‘village spirit’ around which there seems to be a consensus of opinion.<sup>5</sup>

At one of the public meetings, thirty people including residents from the neighbourhood committee discussed the district’s future. There was an elected representative from the majority party, one from the opposition, and a property developer.

One member of the neighbourhood committee complained:

‘We are in Montchat for its quality of life and its village spirit; the houses that give the district its identity are being destroyed, I think [...]’

A representative from the council replied:

‘[...] It is important to preserve the district’s identity but it must not stand in the way of the necessary modernisation [...] We are forcing the developers to keep the surrounding wall and trees. At any rate, we are giving priority to an architecture

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Villar, Analyse architecturale du quartier de Montchat: entre images et réalité, une traduction photographique de mutations sociologiques contemporaine: [file:///Users/Alain/Downloads/BdS-UdL-2016-07\\_Laura%20Villar.pdf](file:///Users/Alain/Downloads/BdS-UdL-2016-07_Laura%20Villar.pdf)

that, through its size, volume and its aesthetics, respects Montchat's residential character.'

An opposition councillor added:

'Montchat is one of the districts with a marked identity in the city of Lyon, with its village atmosphere. However, for some years now it has been undergoing rapid urban change with houses being demolished and a degree of consolidation which could threaten the specificity to which the people of Montchat cling and which the new residents come looking for.'

Also attending were several people from other districts, one of whom added his contribution:

'the district must not be made ordinary and we have to conserve its identity, its history, its atmosphere, its village spirit [...]

Everyone mentioned the words 'village district', 'identity', sometimes even 'heritage', to protest against the changes but also, in a way, to support them. A developer might evoke 'Montchat the village' to sell flats while a member of the neighbourhood committee would do so to prevent such a thing. In other words, everyone used *shared equivalences* (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) — the reference to the 'village', to the 'atmosphere' to be conserved, to the architecture as distinctive. Everyone agreed there was a spatial 'character' that it was essential to preserve and that supposedly defined a shared sense of belonging. 'Heritage' arguments were used to refuse new buildings, promote togetherness and sell new flats. As in the case of the Confluence district, the past and the traces of it were the subject of a narrative and selective discourse that, when used by developers, improved their advertising and ultimately their sales pitches. The objective was to lend distinctiveness to fairly standardized urban buildings and drum up interest by supporting urban change and, in the process, boost land and property values.

### **The Village of Crémieu**

Let us now take a look at another location that will provide a solid basis for our comparison and underscore the incredible interest for the rhetoric of heritage. The village of Crémieu with its 3,500 inhabitants lies some 40 kilometres east of Lyon. Why move out of the city proper? Because this example is representative in part of the phenomenon of suburbanisation, whereby more than 40 percent of the French population and especially the middle classes now live in the outer suburbs.<sup>6</sup> This village was occupied as early as the late 1970s by adventurous urbanites, which foreshadowed the urban exodus, the return to the countryside. Its expansion has not stopped, as this rural space is undergoing wholesale transformation (Charmes 2005).

This densification of peripheral zones tends to make French cities stand out in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Many residents settle in Crémieu because it offers lower property prices, a little freedom, more

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<sup>6</sup> Raphaëlle Rérolle, Le Français, cet 'homo périurbain', *Le Monde*, Rubrique 'Culture et idées', 31 May 2012.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2128977>

space and even a sense of social togetherness. Few inhabitants of Crémieu were actually born there. Most do not work there but commute to Lyon or elsewhere.

I began research on the municipality in 2016 with a special interest in the role of heritage and the way in which the heritage rhetoric could be controlled by local political powers. The question of heritage is very important here, probably more so than elsewhere. It should be pointed out that the town has many old buildings, some dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As the deputy leader of the council told me during an interview, ‘We are a big village, about 3,400 inhabitants, but our influence spreads over a broad region, sometimes from Grenoble to Lyon, thanks to the outstanding wealth of our heritage and our landscape.’ The opposition councillors who invited me for a day of discussion about the municipality’s future in May 2016 drew heavily on heritage in their arguments to emphasize the failings of the current council leadership that is allegedly letting the village develop chaotically. They publish a quarterly magazine in which most of the articles raise questions about the town’s tangible, intangible and natural heritage. At several meetings attended by about twenty inhabitants, there was emotional talk about the need to question constantly the relationship they all had with the past that lives on in the historical centre. One evening in May 2016, my arrival gave the locals the opportunity to voice their concerns, nonstop. Here are a few comments collected during that evening:

‘If you like, our concern is to welcome in new populations, we need them, but without endangering our beautiful historical centre [...] We don’t want to lose our soul, the soul of the place either, the souls for which we are all here around this table [...] How can we find new interest from outside, but not become ordinary, because most people don’t give a damn about our medieval city? [...] We need to do restoration work, especially on the low walls in the village centre, but mind you, if you impose too many constraints through preservation, people are scared off, and we want to avoid that, otherwise they go and live somewhere else, build a soulless house, it’s a shame you see, we want to pass on our fondness for Crémieu, above all keep our struggling shops [...]’

Many inhabitants with whom I spoke at the meetings in 2016 had questions about the passage of time that is no longer enjoyable, about the dangers of the town losing its soul because of impersonal development and present or future migratory pressure. They wondered about the preservation of local history, about what enduring features there should be: an ‘atmosphere’, a ‘spirit’, or walls. Strikingly, the issue of the historical centre of the mediaeval village was the focus of questions from the inhabitants I met. Debate between the council and political opponents was also about how to conserve and enhance the village centre. Some spoke of the danger of ‘spoiling the site’. Others recommended renovating the walls and ramparts with curators and securing the village’s recognition under a state-sponsored scheme as an *Aire de Valorisation de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine (AVAP)*. The inhabitants involved live in Crémieu precisely because they can find this atmosphere, this essential character there. What transpired from these meetings was that the centre must absolutely be protected, restricting uses and controlling the influx of new populations as far as possible. People said, ‘It is vital to

conserve and maintain our heritage.’ ‘We must maintain the charm of our beautiful village, the people who come here must be sensitive to our historic centre.’ ‘The areas without houses should be converted into gardens and no building permits issued because you have to be careful about uncontrolled densification.’ The heritage argument is used in part to avoid accommodating new populations who have little interest in the aesthetic and heritage aspect of the village or in promoting a sense of togetherness; ‘people have to deserve to come here’, I was told, ‘They need purchasing power because maintaining things is an expensive business.’

The arguments listed above are shared by the council and elected officials. The deputy council leader highlighted his concern for economic development and the need to get back to more sustained demographic growth. Heritage is seen as an important asset because it is likely to attract new people. Here, the argument is that development must be backed by the historical past and by the exceptional natural environment. He said, ‘We have to develop better communication about our tremendous assets, the town’s green lung [green centre] and a centre with virtually a thousand years of history [...] so we can develop by bringing in new populations.’ The architectural and natural setting is seen not as a constraint but rather as an asset that holds great promise. For this, nature is showcased, as are intangible features such as the annual ‘mediaeval fêtes’ with their historical reconstructions that are supposed to be the continuation of the local spirit and a way of life.

Sometimes heritage is even given precedence over environmental issues. In Crémieu, as I walked around, I met a couple of home owners who complained about energy policy directives on external wall cladding that would detract from the architecture by covering up the distinctive stucco and sandstone façades.

What stands out in this initial analysis is the consensus that seems to prevail when it comes to statements about heritage. It is not so much scientific character and authenticity that count as function; an enjoiner to use the past to enhance the present and the future, and give value to things. Like nature conservation, heritage now seems to be a matter of common sense; it is no longer the preserve of a body of educated professionals but an essential argument in the enhancement of social and economic environments and a feature that forges a sense of belonging and/or political adherence.

### **Lyon’s ‘Etats-Unis’ District (8th Arrondissement)**

The use of the term ‘heritage’ outside the state’s professional institutions is not one-dimensional. It can be used regardless of any considerations of consumerism and, unexpectedly, to re-characterize areas and their inhabitants in a less staged or less distinctive way. I am thinking here of working-class districts with their social housing developments that are negatively connoted in France. Social housing and above all tower blocks have long been ignored as heritage and are considered primarily as poorly reputed, functional spaces. Working-class districts are stigmatized as being synonymous with unemployment, delinquency, concentrations of ethnic and religious groups, and more recently as hotbeds of radicalisation. They are pervaded with negative images that are often reinforced by the media (Lapeyronnie,



2008); accordingly, for many social groups they are ‘ugly as sin’. These are districts of exile from which memory, heritage and aesthetics are supposedly absent. They are not areas where there is much involvement from the heritage administration, which concentrates instead on socially enhanced districts (Veschambre 2008).

For more than thirty years, public policy in France has recommended establishing special credits for districts confronted with the most serious socio-economic difficulties. These resources are targeted for the improvement of the living environment. Similarly, the programmes of the *Agence nationale pour le renouvellement urbain* (ANRU) take little if any interest in heritage questions. Instead, they all recommend destroying what are considered unsuccessful or defective town planning schemes and rebuilding a less conflicted city through large urban renewal projects meant to meet the challenges of social cohesion and economic development.<sup>8</sup> The public authorities devise and implement the transformation of working-class districts without much consultation or consideration of remembrance features that might symbolically re-characterize such areas.

The inhabitants/militants sometimes use the rhetoric of heritage as a resource with which to combat stigmatisation. Over the last decade or so, ‘social’ heritage causes have been emerging in these areas that use a non-institutional discourse. They are often promoted by academics, artists, or sometimes even residents. The stated objective is generally to counter the negative appraisals and to re-characterize symbolically spaces that are often earmarked for wholesale renovation or even destruction.

The Tony Garnier Urban Museum in Lyon is one of the most emblematic experiences in France in the 1990s and 2000s (Chenevez 2015). The project included monumental frescoes on the gable walls of the 1930s Habitation Bon Marché buildings in reference to their architect but also an interpretation centre staffed by local actors, artists and residents. Those involved in the project then used the rhetoric of heritage quite spontaneously to secure recognition, particularly by Unesco, of both a district and a cultural and artistic democracy project including an exhibition hall and a museum ‘show flat’. This was done with the collaboration of the cultural administration, which was not self-evident. In a sense, this was an unauthorized project that went against the conventions of public heritage in France that at the time specifically promoted material, monumental and socially consecrated spaces but not working-class spaces, and certainly did not support amateurism in its living and non-material dimension.

Since then, things have moved on a little and many experiments of symbolic enhancement in a historical or memorial dimension have been conducted in social housing districts; for example, in Marseille with the *Hôtel du nord* – residents’ cooperative project,<sup>9</sup> which recommends looking into cultural diversity and immaterial questions, or in Saint-Etienne or in

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.anru.fr/>, accessed 15 January 2017.

<sup>9</sup> <http://hoteldunord.coop/>

the Seine-Saint-Denis in the Paris region.<sup>10</sup> These attempts to single out blocks of flats and residents of social housing districts that fall outside the administrative field are partial evidence of a paradigm shift. Experiments are backed and partly legitimized by recent international conventions on the enhancement of heritage, including, for example, the Council of Europe's so-called Faro framework convention or the Fribourg Declaration, or the Unesco conventions on intangible cultural heritage in 2003 and those on the diversity of cultural expressions in 2005. Recent but more relativistic orientations focus less on the exceptional aspect in the definition of heritage and attach, instead, more importance to the need to single out ordinary and non-material things in tune with local communities and avoid *a priori* aesthetic recommendations on constructing heritage values that are 'closer' to individuals.

It has to be observed, then, that reflections on heritage are not completely absent from these areas. Arguments are made in the name of heritage justice (the city centre gets the best deal) and are strengthened up by cultural relativism (we too have our heritage). Both a rhetoric of protection and intangible assets emerge that may modify the outlook of public promoters, city policymakers and even the cultural administration.

That said, observation of these phenomena also reveals a growing difficulty in mobilizing the inhabitants of working-class districts. Heritage initiatives are often supported and appropriated by the cultivated middle classes. As is observed with the experience of the Tony Garnier Urban Museum in Lyon (Chenevez 2004), the number of inhabitants of social housing engaged in such approaches, who are usually women, dwindles as the process of recognition advances. We also observe the very significant absence of ethnic diversity in this kind of initiative. This raises questions about the fragmentation of French society. The issues of mass unemployment, lack of job security, but also religious matters and vote-catching that beset these districts seem to place significant curbs on mobilisation and on any awareness of heritage. Not to mention current projects for reconfiguring working-class districts, demolishing many blocks of flats and dispersing the working classes throughout the urban area in the name of social mixing. This process tends to reduce considerably the autonomy of local community resources.

The use of the term 'heritage' is primarily a political project about recognition and is used especially by the wealthiest categories to protect their space, enhance it in everyone's view and hold out against standardisation. We find the most obvious examples of this in the outer suburbs and in the less central residential districts of Lyon.

## Conclusion

Heritage is still very much a matter for the state, with its specialists, accredited experts and scientists (Hottin and Voisenat 2017). However, these people no longer have a monopoly on it. Although we are not witnessing an end to the discourse about heritage from official and authorized professions, we are also seeing ideas about conservation and enhancement spreading

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<sup>10</sup> See 'Activisme, participation, contestation: la place des habitants dans les processus de patrimonialisation en périphéries urbaines'. *Echogéo*, 33, July-September 2015: <https://echogeo.revues.org/14313>

through a much broader social universe and being implemented, for example, by increasingly individual and sensitive forms of experience of the past. Thus, a rhetoric of heritage is imposing itself in the form of a universe of features and images. This is characterized by more or less mythical narratives and woolly interpretative notions about the value of material and immaterial things. Everyone has their own heritage to preserve — a village spirit, a work of architecture, a landscape, a ‘green lung’, a memory, and so on. These are features that invoke authenticity, specificity, good times, foundations and roots, beauty, harmony, or the revival of the village. Heritage is a system of allegories and equivalences for discussing, arguing, exchanging, or, as the case may be, for building cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Ideas about heritage legitimize and also gloss over urban issues. The often-aggressive encounter between antagonistic interests in the urban space is supposedly appeased and toned down by a sort of higher principle, by conciliatory images that ward off the sense of being finite. What changes perspectives on the making of the city today is the surge in emotions and ideas about heritage that goes beyond scientific expertise (Fabre 2013) and introduces new forms of geographical organisation. This has not materialized through a devotion to the past but through the inspiration of ideas about the social recognition and the economic and symbolic enhancement of spaces and of the social groups associated with them.

So, we are not hemmed in by protection measures, the world is not being made into a museum, preventing contemporary architecture from being creative. Many buildings or former places of work are being demolished especially in old industrial or service-sector districts. Cities in France are not all being protected and aestheticized; rather the opposite. This situation is consistent with extensive urbanisation which is clearing away former working-class or industrial districts (Veschambre 2008). Moreover, the city, which used to be bounded and clearly marked off from the rural world, is now giving way to urban sprawl. Slipways and interchanges, shopping malls and housing estates are eating into neighbourhoods and destroying what were, until recently, rural areas. They form globalized landscapes that embody growing uniformity and segregation. These are the often characterless, standardized urban spaces analysed by Richard Sennet (2001).

Heritage involves a capacity to define a common good, but also to resist the standardized and non-descript urbanisation of the world. In a world permeated by flexible labour and by increasingly standardized, functional urban spaces, ideas of heritage become a ‘higher principle’ by which to ‘make society’, not just to protect the past but to build the future, to single it out, to create a sense of belonging — whether for the purpose of consumption, togetherness, or resistance to the market and to the depersonalisation that it brings. It is heuristic, then, to analyse how argumentative resources are put together and employed to justify heritage claims; that is, to understand how values infused with images and ideas are imparted that mark out our environments, continually shaping new relational, ethical and political templates.

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