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Max Rousseau

► **To cite this version:**

Max Rousseau. Re-imagining the city centre for the upper middle-class. Regeneration, Gentrification and Symbolic Policies in "Loser Cities". *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2009, 33 (3), pp.591-883. 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00889.x . halshs-01237712

**HAL Id: halshs-01237712**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01237712v1>**

Submitted on 6 Dec 2021

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# Re-imagining the City Centre for the Middle Classes: Regeneration, Gentrification and Symbolic Policies in 'Loser Cities'

MAX ROUSSEAU

## Abstract

*This article aims to show how the governments of two industrial cities in France and the UK have now come to the view that middle-class reinvestment in the city centre offers a solution to urban economic decline, and so have encouraged the middle class to move in by implementing 'symbolic policies'. Their objective is to transform the image of the post-industrial city through cultural and urban planning policy, in order to adapt it to the supposed taste of potential gentrifiers. This development in strategy results from both external constraints and internal political changes in these cities. The failure of earlier redevelopment strategies is also a factor in explaining this paradoxical phenomenon, in which a social group that is, in fact, almost absent from the central spaces of these cities has now been accorded the status of 'systematic winners'.*

## Introduction

Over many years, gentrification has been the object of two main explanations. The first has seen it as an essentially *cultural* process, by which the middle classes move in on working-class districts following a logic of free choice and where these gentrifiers' actions are explained by their values (Ley, 1980; 1981; 1986; Beauregard, 1986; Butler, 1997). The second puts greater emphasis on *economic* logic and the effect of the market (Smith, 1979; 1986; 1987): the long-term trend in the ratio of land values to property is said to explain the interest of developers, guided by profit, in reinvesting in undervalued city centres (a theory known as 'the rent gap'). Although each of these approaches reveals one aspect of a phenomenon with multiple causes (Hamnett, 1991), some researchers have recently highlighted the fact that there is also an increasingly resonant logic, this time specifically *political*, to gentrification processes: recent British and American government policies have favoured a new wave of gentrification (Amin *et al.*, 2000; Lees, 2000; Cameron, 2003; Smith, 2003; Atkinson, 2004; Slater *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, very little research has looked at the goals pursued by these gentrification policies. Neil Smith has suggested that they aim to increase local government tax revenues (Smith, 1996). In France, researchers talk about 'left-wing municipalities captured by a Right that wants to tighten its electoral grip by attempting to make the movement towards middle- and upper-class groups irreversible' (Fijalkow and Préteceille, 2006: 9). Other researchers have shown how, in the Netherlands, gentrification policies are intended to strengthen social control in disadvantaged districts (Uitermark *et al.*, 2007).

Translated from the French by Karen George. The author would like to thank Gilles Pinson and the three IJURR reviewers for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

This article sets out to demonstrate that in some declining industrial cities — though the thinking may be extended to other types of cities — gentrification policies fall more within a framework of urban economic redevelopment strategy. It will show how one of the goals now being set for urban policies is to adapt the city centre to the taste of the middle classes, whose arrival — not only to live, but also to consume — is eagerly expected to overcome economic decline. The first step will be to define the theoretical framework of this approach; then the article will offer successive analyses of two examples, Roubaix (France) and Sheffield (UK), in an attempt to explain how gentrification fits into the redevelopment strategies pursued by these cities.

## Towards urban entrepreneurialism

Drawing on regulationist ideas,<sup>1</sup> the change in direction on the part of national states was analysed by some writers as resulting from adaptation in the mode of social regulation, as the system of accumulation developed from Fordism to post-Fordism (Peck, 1996; Jessop and Peck, 1998). Thus, in the UK from 1979 (when Margaret Thatcher came to power) and in France from 1983 (the turn to economic stringency), the 'Keynesian national welfare state' (using policies of supporting demand in its attempts to guarantee full employment in relatively closed national economies) gradually gave way to the 'Schumpeterian postnational regime' (encouraging innovation, flexibility and entrepreneurialism by intervening more on the supply side). Although France and the UK have not taken identical paths in their conversion to the new regime, the fact that both took an early 'neoliberal turn' does permit comparison of ideological trends in these two states (Jobert, 1994). For any European state, moving beyond the Fordist compromise is not without consequences for urban policies.

At the scale of cities, change in the mode of social regulation is expressed through a shift in urban policies from managerialism — which aims to reproduce the labour force through public investments in housing, transport and social services, with the result that urban governments appear to be just 'transmission belts' (Brenner, 2004: 152) for largely centralized economic policies — towards entrepreneurialism, which is characterized by the pre-eminence of local economic development and the search for alliances with the private sector (Harvey, 1989a). Of course, local governments in the UK and France did not swing over to entrepreneurialism at the same time; however, interurban competition now structures local economic policies in the UK, and France seems to be following a parallel trend (Le Galès, 1993). This does not necessarily prevent other objectives, such as anti-poverty or urban social cohesion strategies, being followed at the same time (Le Galès, 2003).

## 'Loser cities'

The concept of 'loser cities' is proposed as a way of illustrating the fact that social, cultural, economic and political upheavals over the last 30 years in Europe have led to a new hand of cards being dealt; this has benefited certain cities or types of cities, but has also made some, broadly speaking, into losers. Those most affected are ports and the longest-industrialized cities (Le Galès, 2003: 222–5). For the purposes of this article, the term 'loser cities' seems heuristic, since it adds a social and cultural dimension — a *symbolic* dimension — to the simple economic and/or political characterization resulting

1 Originated towards the end of the 1970s, regulation theory attempts to understand the rise and fall of the Fordist system using explanations drawn from Marxism, Keynesianism and the Annales School. For an overview, see Robert Boyer (2004).

from the use of terms such as ‘declining cities’ or even just ‘(post)-industrial cities’. More precisely, ‘loser cities’ are defined here as having two types of ‘problem’ — one objective, the other subjective.

The cities to which this research is devoted (Roubaix and Sheffield) are characterized, first and foremost, by the impact of phenomena usually perceived as forming a web of problems — these include pronounced demographic decline,<sup>2</sup> high unemployment rates,<sup>3</sup> low skill levels among the population and high levels of urban violence. This is because they were essentially built on Fordist industrialization. The economic crisis of the 1970s and relocations of industry linked to accelerating globalization affected them intensely and lie at the root of the social problems encountered by their populations. These criteria have made them ‘objective’ losers from recent major socio-economic changes, or, in the language of urban research, ‘declining cities’.

On the other hand, these cities reveal another type of problem, this time ‘subjective’, resulting from the first objective problem, yet distinct from it: they suffer from ‘bad press’ or ‘poor image’ — in short, representations of them, at least in dominant circles, are often ‘negative’.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon, which — through a performative effect — helps to reinforce the socio-economic difficulties of these cities, pre-dated the crisis they have undergone and was already present during the cities’ flourishing industrial past (around the idea that factories were ugly and the working classes dangerous); the crisis, by plunging the cities into economic stagnation, strengthened these negative representations. The latter are constructed and disseminated by journalists, politicians and artists. Therefore, the cities studied here are to be recognized as *losers in the dominant culture*; hence, they are *symbolic losers*.<sup>5</sup> In the eyes of public relations departments and politicians in ‘loser cities’, this situation constitutes a powerful brake on the middle classes settling in their city; it is the main item that influences them to try and construct a ‘counter-image’, presenting their city as a far more attractive product.

## The systemic power of the middle classes and ‘symbolic policies’ in ‘loser cities’

For governments of ‘loser cities’, the attraction of policies aiming to gentrify their cities is to be found in a twofold imperative: first, they themselves must now ensure the local development of their city; second, they have inherited from Fordist industrialization an urban economic structure that is increasingly obsolete in the Western European context, with the advent of a post-industrial society in the form of a ‘knowledge society’ (Bell, 1973).

After their swing to entrepreneurialism, but before turning to gentrification of the central space as a solution to economic decline, the loser cities studied here went through a preliminary phase of supply-side policies, aiming to attract large businesses in order

2 Between 1970 and 2000, Sheffield lost 60,000 inhabitants (12% of its total population) and Roubaix, 17,000 (18% of its population).

3 In 1988, the unemployment rate was 16% in Sheffield; it was 25% in Roubaix in 1990.

4 For example, according to James Symonds (2006), ‘“Steel City” is viewed as a negative epithet, tied to industrial failure and collapse, and to images of immiserated workers and run-down back-to-back houses. It is reminiscent of the film *The Full Monty*, which played upon the comedic struggles of redundant Sheffield steel workers, and thereby reinforced the image of Sheffield as a place of industrial decline and failure for cinema audiences worldwide’. According to a recent university study, the film *The Full Monty* is the image most frequently associated with Sheffield by non-residents (Shibli and Coleman, 2005: 23). On the media and political construction of Roubaix’s poor image, see Lefebvre (2003).

5 This section draws on Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 134–5), who wrote that ‘symbolic capital is nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognized’.

to stem decline. In urban marketing terms, this strategy was expressed through ambitious 'flagship projects'. It was when the difficulties of this objective became apparent to the urban élites that they took a second turn towards 'softer', image-based policies, involving urban planning for the city centre and the creation of cultural policies. This time the aim was to adapt the city not to economic capital, but to *human* capital. Attracting the middle classes, who see themselves as taking part in a mission to boost the urban economy, was the watchword that spread by means of interurban seminars, where the culture-based 'renaissance' of post-industrial cities — as in Glasgow, Manchester and Bilbao — was generally looked on as a model for the entrepreneurial governments of 'loser cities' to follow.<sup>6</sup> Thus, they increasingly envisaged the economic renewal of their city as depending on the settlement of social groups *from outside*<sup>7</sup> in a city centre that would become both a 'loss leader' and an area capable of drawing in the middle classes.

In order to define the power of *potential gentrifiers* over the urban policies of loser cities, it is useful to quote Herman L. Boschken (2003: 809), who, in turn, borrows the concept of 'systemic power' from Clarence Stone: 'As a *symbolic* genre, the upper middle class lifestyle may have affected urban developmental policy making through . . . "systemic power", which indirectly prescribes what symbolic and functional features a city should have and the policy outcomes policy makers should emphasize'. The systemic power acquired by the middle classes, which derives from urban governments' belief that their arrival will make it possible to bring the economy back to life, explains why spatial policymaking for the central districts of declining cities targets this social group, despite the fact that it is almost absent from the districts concerned. Therefore, this article will refer to the urban policies implemented as 'symbolic policies', since they aim to make 'loser cities' into 'winner cities' symbolically — that is, to the *taste*<sup>8</sup> of the middle classes — and, consequently, economically. More precisely, 'symbolic policies' act on the two aspects of gentrification that are traditionally considered by urban research: demand, by changing the city's image in order to adapt it to the supposed tastes of the middle classes; and supply, by sending 'signals' to property developers with the objective of increasing land values, which are low in the central spaces of these cities.

Through two examples of 'loser cities', Roubaix and Sheffield, this article will look at implementation of this type of policy. On the other hand, there is little focus on the effects of symbolic gentrification policies: in both these cities, the arrival of the middle classes in the city centre, although greatly encouraged by local government, is very recent. Moreover, although this text focuses on the 're-imagining' of city centres for the middle classes as a new economic development strategy, it would of course be wrong to conclude from this that the sole objective of the urban policies put into practice in the two cities is gentrification: there are other, coexisting objectives, notably in the area of social cohesion. These are not considered in this article.

6 However, the 'renaissance' of these cities has given rise to considerable critical research into the issue of who profits from a 'renaissance' that, for some writers, has similarities to the advent of 'revanchist cities' on Neil Smith's model. On Glasgow, see, for example, Gordon MacLeod (2002); on Manchester, Kevin Ward (2003).

7 In fact, Sheffield already has a large, prosperous middle class in its Western suburbs. In Roubaix, also a highly segregated city, the middle and upper classes are concentrated in the Barbieux district, in the South of the city.

8 According to Bourdieu (1984: 174–5), taste is what allows an individual to distinguish herself or himself socially through lifestyle: 'Taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs, of continuous distributions into discontinuous oppositions; it raises the differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions. It transforms objectively classified practices, in which a class condition signifies itself (through taste), into classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position, by perceiving them in their mutual relations and in terms of social classificatory schemes'.

## Roubaix

Roubaix, built on the textile industry, was a boom town at the end of the nineteenth century and then bore the full brunt of industrial crisis from the 1970s onwards. As factory relocations and closures followed one another at a rapid pace, the city quickly found itself in serious difficulties, especially with unemployment and dilapidated housing. Economically blighted, in the media discourse Roubaix became the symbol of the ravages of deindustrialization (with the proliferation of derelict industrial sites in the city) and of problems linked to immigration (with the media often stressing the relationship between immigration, unemployment and violence).

### From renovating derelict sites to '*Ville Renouvelée*'

In the 1970s, the city decided to take action in the economic sphere and, to that end, created an Economic Policy Secretariat. Two objectives were then set: to diversify the city's economy, which had previously been based on a single industry; and to develop the service sector, which was almost non-existent in Roubaix. Economic policy then went through a period of action based on urban planning: a *société d'économie mixte* (a semi-public company) was created in 1979, with the task of buying and restoring the numerous derelict industrial sites in the city centre, then selling them on to private investors. But this proactive policy, continued from 1983 by the new Christian Democrat Mayor, André Diligent, yielded only limited results: very little industrial diversification was achieved and the restoration of derelict industrial sites did not live up to its promise in terms of job creation, while the semi-public company rapidly went into serious deficit. By the early 1990s, Roubaix's socio-economic situation was very bleak: a high unemployment rate, a large number of young people forced into labour market inactivity by their lack of training, strong urban segregation between the Barbieux district — a closed space for the city's privileged strata — and the rest of the city, where the poor districts contained seriously dilapidated housing. In addition, at that time, the city was the destination for all the excluded populations of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. This phenomenon resulted, in part, from what Romain Garbaye has described as 'the municipality's policy of gentrification', conducted by the City of Lille, profiting from its dominant position within the Urban Community of Lille (an inter-*commune* structure, of which Roubaix, Lille and Tourcoing are the three main focal points):

[The] overall strategy [of the City of Lille] consisted in working with large businesses in the area to create qualified tertiary jobs and attract middle-class populations, with the inevitable consequence of reducing the working-class population of the city by encouraging the construction of social housing in neighbouring towns . . . There are strong indications that the low-income populations evicted from Lille often migrated to the Roubaix-Tourcoing area, which, between 1975 and 1982, attracted 20 per cent more migrants from the Lille area, most of them very low-income families, than it sent to that zone (Garbaye, 2005: 150–1).

In 1994, André Diligent was succeeded as mayor — in the middle of his term — by René Vandierendonck and this marked the beginning of a new redevelopment strategy designed around the '*Ville Renouvelée*' project, an extensive strategic spatial planning operation to 'recapture the urban and social environment', which Vandierendonck had nurtured when he was deputy mayor in charge of urban planning. Following the failure of policies to bring back business and to train up the population, according to the Director General of the *Ville Renouvelée* and Culture Department:

A third strategy therefore seemed to be needed. This was to improve the urban situation in order to retain the well-off population and to attract new residents. It was a strategy of urban renewal: improving the housing supply through property restoration and new builds, offering more modern education and guaranteeing the quality of public spaces, making them clean and safe (David, 2003).



In order to implement this strategy, Vandierendonck decided, among other things, to change parties; previously a member of the centre-Right UDF, he crossed to the Socialist Party in 1998. As well as being an electoral strategy, this change in party affiliation allowed the mayor to set himself up as a 'broker', attracting a large amount of funding to Roubaix from the region (he became Vice-President of the Regional Council in 1998) and from the Socialist-controlled national government. In addition, when Pierre Mauroy became President of the Urban Community of Lille, this brought a change of strategy to the Community's investment policies, which up to then had been broadly favourable to Roubaix (Desage, 2006). Thus, during Mauroy's second term, the Urban Community of Lille invested 200 million francs (30 M€) in restoring the centre of Roubaix. Finally, national funding for urban renewal, which in the 1980s and 1990s had been reserved for peripheral social housing districts (the *banlieues*), now became available to older inner-city districts with little pressure on land — a change whose consequences have as yet not been much studied by French researchers, even though it raises the issue of 'social exclusion and rehousing ordinary people' (Bonneville, 2004: 15). In total, in the early 2000s, 'two thousand million francs of public funds (300 M€) were invested over five years, of which eight hundred million (120 M€) were for the city centre' (Lefebvre, 2006: 88).

This ability to obtain funds was used to benefit locally designed urban policies, and the City Council's services — largely renewed in the late 1990s — acquired a great deal of expertise. As an official in the Planning Department of the Urban Community of Lille summed it up: 'We don't tell the City of Roubaix what to do — they tell us!' (quoted in Desage, 2006: 144). From then on, Roubaix's urban policies have moved along two axes: upgrading the city centre and developing a cultural policy. These two major projects are linked institutionally (by a General Directorate, exercising overall supervision) and intellectually by the idea that Roubaix's redevelopment must come about through improving its brand image, which, in turn, is linked to emphasizing — through the Council's Public Relations Department — the refurbishment of its heritage.

### Heritage and city centre renewal

Among Roubaix's recent urban projects, the most important for the city's image (and the most generously funded) has been the upgrading of the city centre. Historically, Roubaix was not organized according to a spatial model of concentric circles around the city centre; rather, it consisted of juxtaposed districts of very dense workers' housing, which originally formed around factories and was paid for by local employers in the nineteenth century. (Known as 'courtyards', these places are, in fact, fairly narrow alleyways of terraced houses and have come to symbolize the identity of Roubaix.) Therefore, it was not a matter of re-creating, but of actually creating, a city centre for Roubaix. This heavily financed urban operation focused on the refurbishment of the main square (the *Grand-Place*) to allow an underground rail line in the city; this was followed by the opening of a factory outlet selling designer clothing and of a shopping centre with a large supermarket. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, this upgrading of the city centre through a brand image, managed by the *Ville Renouvelée* and Culture Department, swallowed up practically half the funding gained by the city, to the detriment of peripheral districts, despite the fact that these too were disadvantaged.

Apart from the refurbishment of public spaces, this upgrading of the city centre attempted to exploit the city's heritage, first through urban planning and then through public relations. The genesis of Roubaix's interest in its heritage goes back to the 1980s. The city was going through a serious economic crisis in that period and was attempting — as we have already seen — to bring down rocketing unemployment, through supply-side policies directed at business. In this context, an association called 'Art Action' was created by a handful of young middle- and upper-class professionals (architects, barristers, solicitors). Most were residents of Lille, but the exception was the first chairman of the association, who may be viewed as a 'pioneer' in the gentrification of

Roubaix. Asked about his decision to move from Lille Old Town to Roubaix in the 1980s, he declared, 'I've had enough of being surrounded by people like me' (former chairman of Art Action, May 2005).

The members of Art Action mobilized against the Council's policy of destroying Roubaix's industrial heritage in the name of economic restructuring:

Historically, in the 1970s, there had been . . . a temptation to forget, a temptation to erase certain things. This starts with urban planning; they start by saying: we're going to knock down a whole part of the city centre that is unfit for people to live in . . . At the time, they had to remove everything that might remind people of the old bosses. It's a discourse that you don't find any more nowadays, a discourse that has gone completely out now, but it did exist (former chairman of Art Action, quoted in FSHAA, 2003: 38).

Gradually, however, the association managed, by creating a series of heritage-focused events (giving awards, organizing an industrial architecture walking trail, publishing guidebooks on heritage), to capture the attention of the First Deputy Mayor, René Vandierendonck. This put the issue of the destruction of Roubaix's industrial heritage on the agenda, in the context of a national rediscovery of the architectural value of late-nineteenth-century factories, under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture (which, around the same time, organized several studies on the topic). Following Vandierendonck's elevation to the post of mayor, he offered the chairman of Art Action the post of Deputy Mayor for Culture: the restoration of Roubaix's industrial heritage was thus acknowledged as a political priority. The new Deputy Mayor for Culture very quickly established himself as pivotal in the development of Roubaix's heritage policy and he reversed the process of demolishing derelict factories, preferring to develop them. He managed to mobilize experts and launch a series of measures intended to restore Roubaix's industrial heritage: creating an Urban and Rural Architectural Heritage Protection Area, arranging Town Hall funding for residents to renovate and refurbish façades and, above all, obtaining the label 'City of Art and History' in 2001. This — apart from officially recognizing the value of Roubaix's architecture, until very recently considered synonymous with ugliness and failure — offered the city the opportunity to set up industrial heritage discovery trails and thus sowed the seeds of a policy to attract tourists.

### The invention of Roubaix's cultural policy

Roubaix's cultural policy is also a recent phenomenon. For a long time, 'the Council's political priorities in Roubaix left little room for culture. This was especially the case because, in this "holy city of socialism", held by the Left almost continuously from 1892 to 1983, culture might not seem a legitimate concern, smacking of "the bourgeois"' (Pryen and Rodriguez, 2002: 19). However, the city's new cultural policy did not display the usual characteristics: although 'popular' culture was left to the Leisure Department, the Culture Department established in the 1990s did not pursue a policy actually aimed at developing an 'elitist' form of culture.<sup>9</sup> At that level, Roubaix could not hope to compete with Lille, which had most of the 'legitimate' cultural establishments in the conurbation, even in the region (the Fine Arts Museum, the National Drama Centre, the Opera House). The opening of *La Piscine* (the Swimming Pool Museum of Art and Industry) in 2001 provided a good illustration of Roubaix's approach to cultural policy. This launch was the object of intense coverage by the national and international media, skilfully orchestrated by the museum's curator and the Council's Public Relations Department. This was despite the fact that, in the opinion of specialists, the collections on show were of limited artistic importance.

9 On these ideas, see Bourdieu (1984).



Nevertheless, from this date onwards, there was a clear shift in media coverage of Roubaix. The city is now no longer presented solely from the angle of the negative effects of deindustrialization, but as a dynamic city, and most journalists applaud the curator's bold choice to establish a museum in a former swimming pool. The Roubaix Museum is distinguished by the fact that it mixes elements of 'élitist' culture ('legitimate' art collections) with 'popular' culture (the building recalls the past sociability of the city's workers). The extent of the museum's success led the City Council to focus genuinely and consciously on a new vein of cultural policy, mixing 'élitist' and 'popular' culture for the first time: artists were encouraged to set up workshops in former factories; it was decided to create a second cultural establishment, this time on a more consensual basis, in a former textile mill. As Rémi Lefebvre (2003) has noted in his study of transformations in the identity of Roubaix, 'the instrumentalization of culture is explicit in this local project, which evokes the desire to rely on culture in order to develop social integration, citizenship and the attraction of living in a place through what is on offer culturally'. Moreover, according to the Director General of the *Ville Renouvelée* and Culture Department (David, 2003), Roubaix's local plan covers three issues: 'Enhancing the city's image; working towards improving both the quality of the urban environment and the inhabitants' living conditions; creating the preconditions for economic renewal and the return of the middle classes'.

By combining a culture-based strategy with the restoration of derelict former industrial sites and by establishing avant-garde artists (the choreographer Carolyn Carlson; young contemporary painters) in buildings that symbolize the city's industrial past, the City of Roubaix has consciously helped to create a new kind of cultural policy, targeting social groups in the ascendant, who wish to 'distinguish themselves' — to use Pierre Bourdieu's expression — from the traditional bourgeoisie.

### 'Return to the city'

Thus, following the opening of the museum, the Town Hall devoted growing attention to the arrival of these specially targeted populations; public relations campaigns and tours of 'the lofts of Roubaix' were organized on a regular basis to show off the urban regeneration process under way; the price of property — notably in the neighbourhood of the museum — rose for the first time in a long period.<sup>10</sup> As one developer involved in loft conversion programmes indicated, 'Roubaix is the only city where you're sure you're not going to get bothered, where the Town Hall calls us to find out if our sales are going well' (quoted in *La Voix Eco*, 12 September 2007). The property developers' new attraction to Roubaix's city centre was welcomed with enthusiasm by its politicians:

About 10 days ago, in the regional daily paper, I saw a little insert — it may seem an extremely trivial thing, but in Roubaix, it's not trivial — where you have a developer who is selling loft apartments in an old factory. You have a picture of the factory. And the wording of the sales pitch is: '*In Roubaix, City of Art and History, at the heart of the shopping district and of the city's artistic life, a loft apartment*', and so on . . .

I must say that, for me, that really establishes the city's reputation, because, 10 years ago, not only would a developer not have dared to put out something like that, because it would have just made everybody laugh, but nobody would even have dared to say it. I must say that when I read it, I said to myself '*He's got some nerve!*'; but he'd done it. So, that's a good sign (former Deputy Mayor for Culture, quoted in FSHAA, 2003: 41).

Moreover, observing the middle classes starting to move 'back to the city centre' from the whole Lille conurbation, Roubaix's urban élites changed their discourse on the nearby town of Villeneuve d'Ascq. When this town was created in the 1970s, the then

10 The link between the creation of a successful museum and the gentrification of neighbouring districts has already been proved for Bilbao; cf. Vicario and Manuel Martinez Monje (2003).

mayor referred to it as 'disloyal competition'. There is nothing like that nowadays: over time, acceleration in the competitive logics of distinction has put Roubaix at the centre of the map. Since distinction by lifestyle now relates to place of residence,<sup>11</sup> the urban plan for a restored Roubaix — with its large mansions and its former workshops suitable for conversion into residential property, in a city centre that is now functional and has a strong cultural life — has brought the city 'collective symbolic capital'.<sup>12</sup> This now offers Roubaix a genuine resource in the interurban contest.<sup>13</sup> In its competition with other *communes* in the Lille conurbation to attract the new middle class, which wants to distinguish itself by adopting a 'bohemian' way of life, the 'creation of a loft lifestyle' (Zukin, 1982) in Roubaix city centre, its multiculturalism and its industrial past (as promoted by the Public Relations Department) have all put Roubaix in a better position to vie with Villeneuve d'Ascq, whose urban plan is based on periurban private housing developments, a response to the very long-standing middle-class dream.<sup>14</sup>

As the former Deputy Mayor for Culture explained:

The old factories have been transformed into loft apartments and a new trendy population has arrived. I'm delighted that these 'bobos' — bourgeois bohemian types — are coming to live in Roubaix. They mean that a melting-pot of populations is on its way. The middle classes deserted Roubaix, now they should be coming back (former Deputy Mayor for Culture, quoted in Hossepied, 2006: 54).

There has been no demolition of social housing in Roubaix. On the other hand, the return of property development has translated into a proliferation of private property transactions: in 2006, applications were made to the Town Hall for building permits for 1,400 residential units, of which 400 were student housing and 350 loft apartments; in 1999, there had been none. So the tentative arrival of the middle classes in Roubaix city centre has resulted primarily from ambitious symbolic policies relating to culture and heritage restoration, which have managed to change the city's image within the Lille metropolitan area. The beginning of gentrification has relied not only on the rent gap, but also on the symbolic capital now offered by the city, its architecture marked by industrial history,<sup>15</sup> its multiculturalism and its avant-garde cultural life. Moreover, a recent study of how Roubaix's residents perceive changes in the city shows that fears are developing, linked to the concentration of resources in the city centre to the detriment of peripheral districts, as well as to the rapid increase in property prices (Masson, 2006).

11 As David Harvey (1989b: 270) has indicated: 'To the degree that political economic crisis encouraged the exploration of product differentiation, so the... desire to acquire symbolic capital could be captured through the production of built environments'.

12 This idea is borrowed from David Harvey, who in turn draws on Pierre Bourdieu. See especially his discussion of 'The art of rent' (Harvey, 2001).

13 Satisfaction questionnaires distributed during the organized tours of 'the lofts of Roubaix' show that potential buyers are most likely to be young, economically active members of the upper-middle classes (working in engineering or culture), who come from other municipalities within the Lille conurbation.

14 According to many observers, fear — the refusal to encounter 'the other' — is in fact the driver of the development of periurban spaces; see, for example, Lyn H. Loftland (1998); Jacques Lévy (2003). For a more nuanced view, see Eric Charmes (2005).

15 The ambivalence of gentrifiers towards working-class culture and sociability, which fascinates them at the same time as they are contributing to its disappearance, is well demonstrated by Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot (2004: 83) in their description of the newly gentrified Eastern districts of Paris: 'These young adults develop a positive, ambitious relationship with work, while cultivating a certain social nostalgia. This is manifested through the use of café and restaurant décor that references manual work. This may be compensating for a vague, unpleasant awareness that they have hijacked the streets and housing where others lived and from which they have been more or less furtively evicted. These social groups adhere resolutely to both modernity and nostalgia; perhaps the latter is handed down from their parents, who experienced the convulsions of 1968'.

## Sheffield

While Roubaix was built on the textile industry, the growth of Sheffield — nicknamed 'Steel City' — in the nineteenth century was driven by the iron and steel industry and, to a lesser extent, by cutlery manufacture; and, again, it was specialization that caused its rapid decline from the early 1980s. The city's initial response to the crisis bore the stamp of radical municipal socialism,<sup>16</sup> but in the mid-1980s it was converted to entrepreneurialism (Seyd, 1990). The new focus on the city's brand image by the newly formed public–private partnership, the Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee, was expressed through the implementation of a 'flagship project' intended to promote Sheffield's economic recovery: it was to hold the 1991 World Student Games, which necessitated the construction of a number of international-standard sporting facilities in the Lower Don Valley, the part of the city most severely affected by the crisis in the steel industry. But the games ended in failure, leaving the city to face a sizeable debt<sup>17</sup> that seemed to be an additional constraint on urban regeneration. From the early 1990s, the city's élites changed their strategy: a new public–private partnership was created and this time city centre renewal was viewed as the key to economic regeneration of the whole city.

So, as this article will now show, Sheffield provides a different example of gentrification of a city centre, one led by the authorities. Unlike Roubaix, the strategy here was clearly more planned, the influence of central government made itself more markedly felt and the symbolic policies implemented were different. However, the objective remained the same: to adapt the city centre to the taste of the middle classes.

### 1992–1997: gentrification independent of the political

The city centre, or 'inner city', of any of the largest British cities founded on industry is, unlike its Continental equivalent, a space traditionally given over to industry and commerce, with very little housing.<sup>18</sup> Settlement in Sheffield's city centre by middle-class 'pioneers' goes back to the early 1990s. In this period, the city centre was declining rapidly under the impact of three factors combined: the collapse of the steel and cutlery industries, which led to an increasing number of derelict urban sites in the inner city; the construction of the 'Supertram' tramway; and, finally, the opening in 1990 of Meadowhall, a gigantic shopping centre on the outskirts of the city. These phenomena led to rapid retail closures in the late 1980s.

In this difficult context, however, two entrepreneurs were to create the conditions for sustainable settlement by the middle classes in the city centre. The first was the owner of a poster factory in Devonshire Green, a district lying just to the west of the city centre. Having noticed the development of areas of small shops selling clothes or non-mainstream art objects in the neighbouring cities of Leeds and Manchester, in 1992 he converted his factory into 'The Forum', a high-quality residential complex that included, on the ground floor, several bars, cafés and small shops offering independent label or 'vintage' clothing. The second project was the conversion, in 1994, of a former cutlery

16 In the early 1980s, the Labour-controlled Sheffield City Council, then led by David Blunkett, pursued a policy of trying to combat the industrial crisis, in open opposition to the Conservative central government led by Margaret Thatcher. This municipal socialism, then followed by other major cities in the UK, is known as 'the New Urban Left'. On this subject, see Le Galès (1990).

17 Economic regeneration through holding international sporting events was a strategy commonly pursued by 'loser cities' in the UK at the turn of the 1990s. For comparative examples of the sporting strategies pursued by Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham, and the disadvantages of these, see Smith (2005).

18 This is why, for some writers, 'gentrification' is not an appropriate term to describe the resettlement of a number of inner cities in the UK, since this has not been at the expense of other populations (Lambert and Boddy, 2002). Others, like Tom Slater (2006), argue instead for defining the term more broadly.

workshop in the Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ) into a high-quality student residence. Nevertheless, in 1993, at the time the plan was put forward, the City Council was very suspicious:

The planners did not originally want people living in there, because they had zoned this area for industry. But all the industries were moving out! But they didn't change it, so we had to fight to get them to allow us to do student accommodation. The planning was only for student accommodation, not residential. Because they didn't think that people would want to live there, only students . . . But that proved to be very successful, that was the catalyst, that started it all (property developer, May 2006).

The City Council was initially reluctant to grant planning permission for residential projects in the city centre because, at the beginning of inner-city redevelopment, its perception was that regeneration could result only from attracting businesses and retailers; therefore, its initial action was to 'take the city centre in hand' by excluding undesirable populations.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, expanding the CIQ, created under the leadership of David Blunkett, rather than increasing the supply of residential housing, was perceived as one of the main priorities by the 'City Centre Manager' appointed by the Council to regenerate the city centre (see *Sheffield Star*, 28 September 1993).

However, at that time, Sheffield Hallam University — which, after being under municipal control since its creation, now became autonomous — integrated the CIQ (where its main campus is situated) into its development strategy; a supply of good-quality student housing rapidly became a major resource for the University, necessary to attract students who are able to pay the enrolment fees, which are high in England. It was pressure from Hallam University that first permitted high-quality residential housing intended for students, despite the urban planners' initial desire to privilege expansion of the CIQ's cultural industries: 'Hallam at that time needed good-quality accommodation to attract new students, so they were keen that it should go ahead' (property developer, May 2006).

So, in the ensuing years, a large number of flats, essentially intended for a student population, was built in the city centre, fostering the 'studentification' observed in other UK cities, which is in the nature of a form of gentrification (Smith, 2002). This posed three main problems for the City Council: the first was connected with the architectural quality of the buildings constructed, notably in the CIQ; the second related to the conflict of space between Hallam and the cultural industries in the CIQ; the third was the onset of NIMBY-type conflicts, with the increasingly numerous residents of the city centre becoming decreasingly tolerant of the noise nuisance resulting from alcohol consumption.<sup>20</sup>

### From 1997: moving towards policy-driven gentrification

Before 1997, the resettlement of Sheffield's city centre seemed like the classic gentrification process observed in other big post-industrial British cities (Tallon and Bromley, 2004), explained as much by the rent-gap thesis as by the tastes of the new middle classes. However, from that year, the City Council began to change its strategy and to adopt a proactive policy aiming to promote the burgeoning settlement of the city centre: so the third dimension of gentrification, that of symbolic policies, was added.

19 In 1992, the local daily newspaper, the *Sheffield Star*, which has campaigned fervently for the renaissance of the city centre (where its head office is located), wrote that: 'police have swooped on street traders, beggars and drunks in a bid to clean up Sheffield city centre'.

20 In order to respond to the problem, the pubs in two defined areas of the city centre are obliged to close earlier. These are the districts that include the most luxurious residential accommodation: Devonshire Green and the Heart of the City. As the local newspaper has reported, 'the idea is to allow revellers and residents to be able to live side-by-side — boosting the city's night-time economy and persuading families and older people to consider living in town'. See *Sheffield Star*, 19 January 2005.

Several factors explain this change in orientation of the city's élites. First of all, the success of the earliest property development projects in the city centre (after the conversion of the Leadmill, the same developer undertook a second, similar project in the CIQ: Truro Works) and in a district near the centre (the conversion of Victoria Quays into luxury apartments) had, according to the promoters, won over the City Council. Second, a new chief executive was appointed in 1997, who viewed the population of the city centre as a resource for the city. There had been a public-private partnership in charge of regenerating Sheffield since 1992 and, in 1998, this was crystallized through the transformation of the Sheffield City Liaison Group into 'Sheffield First'; this also confirmed the increasing power of both the city's universities, and of Hallam in particular, in the governance of the city. In the same period, the neighbouring cities of Leeds and Manchester, which were particularly closely watched by Sheffield's urban élites, also saw the beginnings of a 'return to the city'. Finally, and above all, the national context played a major role in Sheffield City Council's change of direction: in 1999, Labour adopted a national policy — *Towards an Urban Renaissance* — that aimed to promote re-population of the centres of the UK's main agglomerations, in order to combat urban sprawl and kick-start their economies. Loretta Lees (2003) described this as a 'gentrifiers' charter' and Rowland Atkinson (2004) saw it as demonstrating that gentrification could be the new regeneration strategy pursued by central government for the declining cities of the North of England.

In the case of Sheffield, however, it should be noted that this turn on the part of the City Council did not initially take the form of a true gentrification policy: having funded a survey of potential city centre residents in 1997, the Council now made do with promoting the development of the residential housing supply to meet a demand that it perceived as coming solely from 'certain sectors of the population, especially students and other young people' (*Sheffield Star*, 30 January 1998). It saw the benefits for the city as being principally the development of its night-time economy, fostered by the '24-hour-city' concept then fashionable in North of England cities. The City Council's initial apparent lack of interest in the quality of the housing built in the city centre at that time is explained by the fact that it was not in a position of strength to impose its own conditions on property developers; a former member of the Planning Department declared that 'the Council were so desperate because they were not managing to attract inward investments that they said OK to every property scheme they were proposed. That's why the projects that happened at this time were such bad quality' (former member of Sheffield Planning Department, April 2006). Moreover, attracting property developers was not the only problem: throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in a system of fierce interurban rivalry, Sheffield suffered from the structural problem of being comparatively unattractive and yet completely dependent on external investments. As Colin Crouch and Martin Scott Hill (2004: 196) explain: 'There has been recognition of the benefits that can be offered to the local economy from small- and medium-sized enterprises . . . On the other hand, capacity to act consistently with these lessons is limited by the sheer and almost desperate need to attract external investment'.

However, the decisive impetus to raise the quality standards of the residential property being built, and so promote gentrification of the city centre, came once again from outside: central government, following the adoption of a new urban strategy, created an Urban Regeneration Company for Sheffield in 2000. Sheffield One's sole responsibility was to regenerate the city centre; it was directed by a public-private partnership headed by the leader of the City Council. From 2001, the agency had a 'Masterplan' to regenerate the city centre: this was the culmination of the process of revitalizing the city centre, which 'topped the policy agenda of the corporatist regime' (DiGaetano and Lawless, 1999: 571) governing Sheffield from the late 1980s. Before studying the symbolic policies implemented by Sheffield One in order to attract developers and the middle classes, a short description is needed of the intellectual framework that came to unite the actors of Sheffield's gentrification after 2003: the theory of the 'creative class'.



In an influential work of 2002, Richard Florida pointed to the importance of ‘creative capital’ for urban growth. Although, for him, certain cities and regions possess the necessary characteristics to attract the creative class and so set in motion the virtuous circle of innovation and growth, it is also possible to fabricate a ‘creative community’ completely from scratch, by implementing certain types of urban policies (Florida, 2002: 283), such as policies promoting safety and crime reduction, the quality of the environment and the ‘authenticity’ of place(s) and creating high-quality public spaces (in particular, pedestrian areas) in the city centre — according to Florida, a site valued by the creative class, which rejects life in the suburbs. Florida’s work has aroused intense controversy among researchers.<sup>21</sup> It involves a radically new vision of local economic development: the labour force no longer follows business, but the reverse; in order to build a successful urban economy, therefore, urban élites must now attract not enterprises, but the creative class. In putting a new population category at the heart of economic growth in this way, and in showing the correct procedure for attracting this category to a place and maintaining it there, Florida’s work has disseminated what should really be called a legitimization of gentrification as local economic development policy.

This found a particularly significant echo in Sheffield, where it was initially through the agency of the CIQ that the theory of the ‘creative class’ was imported, since its director had attended a meeting with Florida in Canada. The theory was then rapidly disseminated throughout all Council departments via the chief executive and became a key element in the urban redevelopment strategy, which at the time was oriented towards students and young working people. Thus, the director of one of the city’s services wanted to invite Florida to carry out a ‘creative audit’ of Sheffield — but had to give up on the idea because of the fees involved — and the agency that took over from Sheffield One in 2007 was named ‘Creative Sheffield’. As adapted by the local actors, Florida’s theory justifies *a posteriori* the desire to recreate the city centre not only for the creative class, but for the middle classes in general. As the director of the city’s investment promotion agency explained it:

If Sheffield wants to be serious as a major city, as we go forward we need a prosperous middle class, much more than just what we’ve got already . . . We need others to come in as well because we need more of an entrepreneurial city, and we need to internationalize the city more. It’s quite a provincial city. It’s a very friendly city, but if you look at other Northern cities — Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool — they have much more of an international feel than Sheffield. And I think that brings benefits . . . It’s really about graduates. It’s getting people who have studied in the city to get a decent job and have their home in the city centre (Chief Executive of Sheffield First for Investment, June 2006).

### Sheffield One’s symbolic policies: re-imaging the city centre for the middle classes

In order to regenerate the city centre, Sheffield One attempted to change its image, notably by promoting the opening of cafés and the creation of pedestrian areas and by continuing the ‘Heart of the City’ project, which had been launched in 1994 and aimed to recreate an easily identifiable ‘heart’ in the city centre by attracting private investment in the wake of public investment intended to increase land values (a high-quality landscaped public garden, the Peace Garden; an art gallery; a Winter Garden). One of Sheffield One’s main tasks was to bring retailing back to the city centre, which had been severely affected by the opening of Meadowhall Shopping Centre in 1990. But not all

21 Among other things, he has been criticized for the weakness of his demonstration of the link — crucial to the relevance of his theory — between this ‘new social class’ and economic growth in places where it has settled. See, on this point, Jamie Peck (2005) or Richard Shearmur (2005).



shops were equally sought-after: the city centre was to be *distinguished* from the neighbouring shopping centre by exploiting the quality of the public space on offer, in order to appeal to a new consumer:

The New Retail Quarter is part of the city, it is high-quality, designed by different world-class architects; it is aiming at the top end of the spend profile, and you can shop in a very high-quality environment . . . Because if we are to compete with Meadowhall, then we have to differentiate ourselves from them. Meadowhall and the city centre can be complementary; Meadowhall can't attract the wealthy younger shoppers nor the wealthy older shoppers . . . They are shopping in Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham. So there is a deliberate push to make the offer very attractive to these sorts of people (Chief Executive of Sheffield One, June 2006).

Sheffield One's entrepreneurialism led to a significant increase in the quality of housing built from 2000 onwards, with developers perceiving a very strong social demand for loft apartments. The Council's desire to attract well-off populations is attested by the fact that the central government directive to build 20% of social housing has not been observed: the City Council's official position is that 'it is currently considered, that there is more than sufficient accommodation in close proximity to the City Centre to meet the needs for affordable housing' (Sheffield City Council, 2004). There is a strong consensus between the main actors of governance in Sheffield: the two universities, whose influence within the public-private partnership that governs the city has increased over recent years, see the regeneration of the city centre as an important asset in the UK context of highly developed inter-university competition.

Very few protests have arisen against the desire to reconstruct a city centre to the taste of the middle classes. The conflict between some SMEs in the CIQ over Hallam University's strategy of concentrating its development — notably its student residences — in this district has gradually been resolved, giving way to project-based collaboration between CIQ businesses and the universities. The principal site of opposition to Hallam University's strategy was a group of artists, activists and cultural associations, known as 'Matilda Activists'; this was broken up following its eviction from its building by the Regional Development Agency, 'Yorkshire Forward', in June 2006. This might lead one to suspect the coming of a 'revanchist'<sup>22</sup> city centre to Sheffield; yet Sheffield city centre seems to be more the rational *creation* of a space intended to respond to the supposed values of the middle classes — including the secessionist tendency — than a *reaction* to threats.

However, an independent city councillor destroyed the consensus by leading a campaign for the construction of social housing in the city centre, declaring among other things:

I'm not against private developments and people returning back to the city centre, but I believe in social housing. I'm concerned it's becoming just for yuppies. I don't want the city centre to be a student or yuppie area; I was led to believe there was going to be a mix of people (quoted in *Sheffield Star*, 26 November 2003).

In the light of the city's recent history, the adoption of this new strategy clearly shows the path taken by the Labour Party in Sheffield, from the rise of the New Urban Left up to the present day. In 1986, the City Council was initially opposed to the Urban Development Corporation imposed by Margaret Thatcher's government and charged with regenerating the North-Eastern area of the city after the industrial crisis; yet the consensus within the City Council when Sheffield One was created reveals a shift in the concept of urban regeneration on the part of the Labour Party, at both national and local

22 Neil Smith (1996: 211) defines 'the revanchist city' as a reaction of the middle and upper classes, 'a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighborhood security'.

levels. Admittedly, the new agency was chaired by the leader of the City Council, unlike the Sheffield Development Corporation, which was chaired by a representative of the private sector. Yet, in both cases, the method for achieving local recovery was identical: injecting public funds into urban projects in order to attract private investors to take charge of boosting the city centre economy. As the leader of the Council pointed out:

We need private sector investments for jobs for the city. We want good-quality jobs. In the first office block that was built just by the Peace Garden, there is a company of international lawyers. But, of course, with the high-quality jobs come a whole series of service jobs. So for the people who are not highly qualified, there is the security, the catering, the cleaning and the other jobs (Leader of Sheffield City Council, June 2006).

This concept of regeneration is the spatial version of the neoliberal economic theory of the ‘trickledown effect’: by promoting the concentration of capital in the highest strata of the social hierarchy, it is presumed that, in the end, limiting taxation will benefit disadvantaged populations as the consequent job creation allows wealth to spread or ‘trickle’ downwards. In the case of the regeneration of Sheffield city centre, it is the concentration of wealth in a restricted *geographical* space that must enable prosperity to ‘trickle’ down — and then out to the neighbouring districts.

## Conclusion

The symbolic policies of gentrification pursued in the centre of both cities result from trends in redevelopment strategies following changes in the cities’ governance: the structuring of the new public–private partnership in Sheffield in the mid-1990s and the arrival of a new team at the City Council in Roubaix in 1994. In Sheffield, however, regeneration strategy has been largely influenced by the new urban policy pursued by central government following New Labour’s 1997 election victory; while in Roubaix it is defined above all at the local level, since the City Council has acquired greater expertise that has allowed it to harness public funds. Their targets are also not the same. In Sheffield, for the public–private partnership, the aim is not only to attract and retain students in order to promote the development of a ‘creative urban economy’, but also to encourage the middle classes to consume in the city centre. In Roubaix, the City Council aims to make the city centre more attractive to live in, in order to draw economically active members of the middle class away from the rest of the Lille metropolitan area, with the objective of halting urban decline.

For a long time, the actual process of middle-class movement into the centres of both cities had been in decline; in contrast, it now seems to have picked up slightly — although it is still too soon to judge, since, in both cases, this new strategy has only recently been established. As yet, it has materialized only in the form of a few pockets of wealth, surrounded by poverty. In 2004, a study by the property agency Knight Frank described Sheffield city centre as a ‘rising star’ on the national property market,<sup>23</sup> with prices having risen by 15% over the previous year. A property agent explained that ‘predictions show that more than 8,000 new jobs will be created in the city’s business and finance sector over the next 5 years. Many of the young, affluent people attracted by these will want to live in the city centre’ (*Sheffield Star*, 15 October 2004). In Roubaix, the local press explained that ‘following the irresistible rise of property prices in Roubaix (+30%), loft apartments are sold off-plan to creative people, not natives of Roubaix, who are buying into the city’s heritage and a particular mind-set’ (*La Voix du Nord*, 8 February 2005). Between 2000 and 2006, prices of older private housing increased by 101% (as

23 Thus, the population of Sheffield city centre rose from only 3,000 inhabitants in the mid-1990s to 6,200 ten years later; in fact, the City Council predicts that 17,000 people will be living there by 2015.

against 92% for France as a whole). This was partly because the Roubaix property market had been weaker in the 1990s; however, prices seem to be continuing to catch up: in 2006, they increased by 11% (as against 7% for the rest of France).

Through the regeneration of the city centre, therefore, a city can be adapted to the supposed tastes of middle-class outsiders, who see themselves as entrusted with a mission to regenerate the declining urban economy. In pursuit of this adaptation, the urban élites of the cities studied here have attempted to re-image their city centres, to endow them with 'collective symbolic capital' that will be capable of attracting the middle classes in search of 'distinction', by means of symbolic policies in the areas of urban planning and culture. These probably represent a second phase in the supply-side policies that have been pursued ever since these cities took an entrepreneurial turn. After making initial use of policies aimed solely at attracting businesses, the élites of declining cities nowadays increasingly also attempt to attract the middle classes.<sup>24</sup> Although it should certainly not be concluded from this that redistributive policies have disappeared, they are nevertheless now confined to areas outside the city centre, which has become the showcase for the 'loser city', presenting it to the population expected to boost a declining urban economy.

When gentrification as a 'global urban strategy' (Smith, 2003) extends to 'loser cities', this is probably less through 'revanchism' than through pragmatic adaptation to a neoliberal logic of interurban rivalry, internalized by the new actors of governance in these cities. Because of this, attracting the middle classes appears to be simply a new economic re-development strategy, where the previous one — looking to attract businesses — has failed. This phenomenon raises many questions: for instance, the beneficial impact of the strategy on the working classes may be queried, by comparison with training policies targeting the local population. Moreover, once the process picks up speed, it is generally not easy for the authorities to contain it. The fact that the middle classes, even when almost absent, have recently been 'systematically lucky'<sup>25</sup> in regenerating Roubaix and Sheffield's central spaces — which nevertheless remain very working-class — could well lead, in the end, to reinforcement of the logic of segregation that is at work in both cities.

Max Rousseau (max.rousseau@univ-st-etienne.fr), University of Saint-Étienne, CERAPSE/TemiS, 2 rue Tréfilerie, 42023 Saint-Étienne, France.

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- 24 In fact, the two objectives are not absolutely contradictory; thus, the creation of a tax-exempt enterprise zone (*zone franche urbaine*) in Roubaix city centre certainly contributed to the beginnings of gentrification of the city centre, since some employees of SMEs that had just set up there moved into the newly restored townhouses of the old bourgeoisie.
- 25 This idea is borrowed from Keith Dowding, who uses it in a sense close to that of Clarence Stone's 'systemic power': for example, according to Dowding, capitalists are 'systematically lucky', that is, 'governments would often do what capitalists want without them having to intervene in the policy process' (Dowding, 2003: 305).
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## Résumé

*Cet article a pour objectif de montrer comment les gouvernements de deux villes industrielles, en France et en Grande-Bretagne, considèrent désormais que le réinvestissement du centre-ville par les classes moyennes constitue une solution au déclin économique urbain, et en viennent ainsi à favoriser leur arrivée par la mise en oeuvre de «politiques symboliques»: par des actions sur la culture et l'urbanisme, l'objectif est de transformer l'image de la ville postindustrielle pour l'adapter au goût supposé des gentrificateurs potentiels. Cette évolution stratégique est tout à la fois le résultat de contraintes externes et de transformations politiques internes aux villes. L'échec des précédentes stratégies de re-développement est également un facteur explicatif de ce phénomène paradoxal qui rend «systématiquement gagnant» depuis peu un groupe social pourtant quasiment absent de l'espace central de ces villes.*