'Weak heritage' and neighbourhood in contemporary cities: capitalism and memories of urban utopias

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Introduction: the nostalgic memory of the former industrial capitalism

In the introduction of his book *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett, quoting Max Weber, defends that industrial capitalism helped form the founding politics of so-called 'social capitalism'. Predictable time was one key-concept of the culture that supported capitalism in factories. "*Time lay at the center of this military, social capitalism: long-term and incremental and above all predictable time. This bureaucratic imposition affected individuals as much as institutional regulations. Rationalized time enabled people to think about their lives as narratives—narratives not so much of what necessarily will happen as of how things should happen*" (Sennett, 2006: 23). For example, it became possible for many workers to consider their career, or to dwell in a fixed place. Whatever our opinion of this heavily critiqued book may be, it is a view worth debating today, at least in regard to recent developments in the study of heritage and its uses to protect from and to adapt to changes in the new capitalism.

Since the deep mutation of capitalism that emerged in the 1970s, a new ideal self emerged in the cutting edge institutions that became a model – often contested- for a whole society: an individual constantly learning new skills, whose potential ability to move from one task to another is more valuable than his skills and experiences in doing his job. But 'these qualities of the ideal self are a source of anxiety because they are *disempowering* to the mass of workers' (Sennett, 2006: 127). Craftsmanship and professional experience, which were the basis of the workers' values and identity, are depreciated by the culture of the new capitalism. 'Skills extinction is a durable feature of technological advance. Automation is indifferent to experience. Market forces continue to make it cheaper to buy skills fresh rather than to pay for retraining' (Sennett, 2006: 98).Workmen and workwomen, who constituted not only the workforce, but also a main part of citizenry and inhabitants, have lost their pivotal place in production. The standard of life of a large part of middle class people is stagnating while capitalists get richer and richer. The former social capitalism became a "nostalgic memory" (Sennett, 2006: 37), the memory of a time when people kept the control of time and when personal skills were a richness. Society was supposed to be more protective and reassuring. This is the guiding argument of this paper: this nostalgic memory contributes to shape some practices and forms of heritage –we will call them "weak heritage"- that people claim in order to preserve themselves from the hardiest effects of the new capitalism. In the following pages I successively discuss what do I call new capitalism and how it impacts heritage, particularly by extending it to social practices and believes; then I explain how neighbourhood and the memory of the basic utopias of a French new town can be considered as "weak heritage". A little team of three persons carried out the fieldwork between 2002 and 2006 with interviews, direct observations, participants' comments and documentary research. The main results have been published in 2010 (Lefebvre, Rautenberg, 2010).

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Heritage and its extension in the new capitalism

Besides the public stream that associates heritage to different identities, we observe an economic trend to bring cities' heritage into an international competition. Following David Harvey (1990), many authors have pointed out that the last third of the 20th century has been characterised by a big shake up in culture as well as in economics. The 'late capitalism', which arose after the decrease of the Ford-Keynesian capitalism of the post-war boom, implied more flexible labour, more competition, a quasi-religion of the market, more mobility, and more consumption practices which involved more and more sectors of human activity.

A substantial number of sectors of human activity – like education and culture- which were more or less set apart from the free market, became henceforth important issues economically. This process produced new conceptions of time and space (Harvey, 1990) which affected our practices of heritage because they were 'accompanied by other social and economic shifts, which have reconfigured heritage (…) including process of deindustrialisation, reconfiguration of the 'tourist gaze' and the emergence of heritage as an element of a new 'experience' economy' (Harrison, 2013: 79). At the end of the twentieth century, the 'heritage industry' that emerged during the Seventies (Hewison, 1987) shifted away from the preservation of collective benefit to neoliberal policies focused on the economically driven desire of heritage dedicated to tourism and consumption. Quite a lot of old buildings and former factories have been transformed into malls and supermarkets since 1976, the year of the opening of the Quincy Market in place of the old Faneuil Hall Market, which had been erected in early 1740 in Boston (USA) (Harrison, 2013: 83).

This extension of heritage is concomitant with contemporary forms of capitalism – which defined themselves as 'postindustrial' - and the arising of a new World Economy (Cohen, 2006). Daniel Cohen explains that the cost of the conceptualisation of a pair of sneakers – or anything else - and of marketing to sell them equals the cost of their manufacture. 'The conceptualisation of goods (…) and the prescription of goods (…) dominate over the cost of their production' (Harrison, 2013: 80). According to Cohen, a second feature of this 'second globalisation' is that it encourages every image to be on display for everybody.

This is especially true for urban heritage. Since the eighties, heritage has been largely included in urban regeneration policies when it started beeing used as a political background in debates between city dwellers and local government (Rautenberg, 2012) and contributed to societal entertainment. Many cities have opened historical festivals, they put on display their traditions, they transformed their vernacular memories into tourist events, they invented new story telling by mingling history, legends and their most famous local figures, they renewed and promoted pilgrimages and they opened tourist tours of their old districts. In a nutshell, they shifted the social value of heritage into economic value.

This conversion of cultural heritage into goods sheds light on an odd paradox that is inherent to the heritage of modern capitalism: heritage is supposed (in the social imagination) to be sustainable, but as a commodity it is supposed to be used and destroyed. In other words, adding to the value of its consumption would be the best argument for valuing tangible or intangible pieces of culture as a part of heritage. This paradox highlights the singular place of culture in producing of goods in contemporary capitalism, as emphasised by Nigel Thrift (2005). According to him, 'three particular routes as the be all and end all of a contemporary capitalism (have been taken). One is to lay an undue emphasis on money and finance (…). The second is to lay an undue emphasis on information technology (...). The third is to argue that there has been a major shift in the regulation of the rules of possession (…). (Consequently) 'new prescriptive and normative frameworks have been coming on apace arising out of new legal orthodoxies, the proliferation of global actors and the assembly of different kinds of commodity' (Thrift, 2005: 5). Within this new context of capitalism, three

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elements can be identified: 'the discursive power of what I call the 'cultural circuit' of capital, the changing from the commodity, and the pivotal role of space and time' (Thrift, 2005: 6). The 'capital circuit of capitalism' is probably the 'chief creation' of contemporary capitalism. It has been constituted by business schools, management consultants, manager gurus and the media. Its strength comes from its capacity to produce 'a feedback loop which is intended to keep capitalism surfing along the edge of its own contradictions' (id). It emphases emotions and game, which are at the core of new sets of markets, the power of virtuality over materiality, and the appropriation of any private exchange which is put on the media. This new capitalism is based on what Boltanski and Chiapello named the 'cité par projet' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999: 154-238).Social life is no more thought of as being based on a social organisation where individuals belong to social groups and organisations that share interests or are in opposition to each other. Social life is regarded as being made up of networks of individuals who are supposed to make up projects. Then, the new capitalism develops a deep redefinition of the public/private spheres, singularly by the extraordinary increase of the spread of the internet. Our private life becomes more transparent, private exchanges have more visibility, and limits between the familiar circle and the public sphere are more porous (Cardon, 2010).

Consequently, we may say that the emergence of 'new forms of commodity and commodity relation' (Thrift, 2005: 7) involved also heritage and heritagisation. Heritage exists in the economic sphere as goods to manage and as immaterial value as well. Its material form is bound up with the mediatisation of everyday life that makes it ubiquitous, 'always present, always on'. It is a new world where materiality is at the same time self-evident and evanescent, located and virtual, past and present (and future). Heritage, as one of many consumer products, is 'becoming part of an animate surface that is capable of conducting thought; thought is increasingly packaged in things' (id). We must then consider that heritage can be present in monuments as well as in the triviality of everyday life and in the name of the memory of former social local linkages that people can mobilize.

Tourism, luxury and sustainability: Heritage in economics and to guard against economics

A report about the inputs of culture in the French economy considered that heritage (museums and monuments) represented €8,1billion of added value to the national economy in 2011 (Kancel et al, 2013). Though, if we have a larger conception of heritage which takes into account all the cultural resources people use to "to light on their choices to build the future" (Greffe, 2011: 936), heritage is involved in many sectors of the economy. Three areas are particularly lightened: heritage in tourism, in luxury and in sustainable development. The relationships between heritage and tourism got tied up at the outset in many cases. For example, in Quebec (Canada), heritage protections were engaged during the 1920s alongside the roads followed by the American visitors (Morisset, 2009). Closer to our time, during the 1980s in Great Britain heritage became synonymous with neo liberal policies and entrepreneurship (Smith, 2006: 39), leading sometimes to its "disneyfication". At the same time and until today, UNESCO undertook to launch several programs aiming to facilitate the management of heritage and the development of tourism at World Heritage properties[1] while trying to preserve local communities interests (Labadi, 2013), but with contested results. The tourism boom of the past 20 years has strongly contributed to the heritagisation of many places, landscapes and cultural practices. They take new values and have a new life. Luc Boltanski and Renaud Esquerre (2014) connect this considerable extension of heritagisation to

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[1] http://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/

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another phenomenon they put on display: in our world, which is both less industrial and more commodificated, heritagisation is used as an instrument to put new values on objects. Former capitalist economy was centred on industrial production; nowadays it is more commodification centred. As the industrial capitalism has migrated to emerged economies countries, in the developed ones the enrichment process moved to other ways of enhancing. Thanks to heritagisation they are introduced into a "collection" in which they become valuable by themselves; independently of their owners and their production process (Boltanski, Esquerre, 2014: 69). It can be a collection of old cars, a collection of painting, a collection of traditional regional products, a collection of places recognized by UNESCO. Any object, any tradition or practice, any place that benefits this process get out the industrial series and reach the patrimonial collections. Shortly said, we can say that heritagisation is henceforth directly associated with new capitalism that can recycle every remainder and ruins of the industrial society by the way of heritagisation. However, we may consider several gaps in this deep transformation of heritage by the new capitalism. UNESCO and European institutions contributed to balance the capitalistic pressure on heritage resources by providing several international conventions. It is also worth highlighting that heritage can go hand in hand with alternative models of development, then strengthening of participatory democracy, broadening the concepts of heritage and developing people-centred approaches. Therefore heritage becomes an "ultimaly being about intergenerational transfer and about the present-day as a bridge from past to future"(Auclair & Fairclough, 2015: 9). Heritage is particularly active through places and landscapes whose everyday aspects and uses that constitute them are also components of social and cultural sustainability. It helps to interact between people, and between people and the materiality of the world.

Indeed, we can draw a parallel between the decline of Weberian bureaucracy caused by the new capitalism and the transformation of the institution of heritage. One the one hand, the new rules of international capitalism and the financialisation of the economy have shaken bureaucracy. On the other hand, the 'authorised heritage discourse' (Smith, 2006), i.e. the national narratives and the cultural institutions that framed the national imagined communities, have been harshly competing with local actors. In the making of heritage, 'communities of practice' are now playing a growing part (Adell & al. 2015). From a wider point of view, those policies are based on the emphasis on proximity in heritage practices, resulting in a revived interest in neighborhoods (Morell & Franquesa 2011). Henceforth the 'authorized heritage discourse' held by states and cultural institutions faces competition from ordinary citizens who view their everyday practices and habits as legitimate as monuments or collections of museums (Smith, 2006).

Another point to be stressed is that heritage supports feelings of continuity while expressing physically these feelings, as pointed out a long time ago by David Lowenthal (1985). Heritage conveys the idea of timeless values and makes sense of the scattered events of life. Heritage witnesses this fundamental, obvious, but often forgotten property of life as it unfolds in time (Micoud, 1996). It is a main component of individual and collective identity (Graham & Howard, 2008). Heritage is now determined by the commitment of communities rather than by academics and experts, it expresses the diversity of cultures, of influences and identities (Internationale de l'imaginaire, 2012; Graham & Howard, 2008). It takes part in the creolisation of the world (Boswell, 2011), in the renewal of local identities (Anheier & Raj Isar, 2011) and in the new modes of dialogical democracy (Harrison, 2013). In short, on the one side heritage contributes to the commodification of the world; on the other side, it is mobilized in order to challenge the social and cultural consequences of the market.

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In that way, I assume that people try to institute the heritagisation of social practices as a symbolic place where economic inputs do not rule our life and where capitalism is not able to disrupt the social. I draw here on ethnographic research we carried in the town of Villeneuve d'Ascq, in the North of France, where some inhabitants were engaged in safeguarding local political devices and neighbourhoods. Those practices, considered as a legacy from the first inhabitants, who call themselves the 'pioneers', belong to what I defined as a 'weak heritage', i.e. everything that people wish to preserve because it is supposed to stabilise the environment where they live. It is made up of everything that people wish to save for the future because they are attached to it (Rautenberg, 2015).

Neighbourhood as heritage

Culture cannot be reduced to its apparatus and the identifiable circulation of its meanings: cultural flows 'only make sense through local mediations and filters' (Assayag, 2005: 277). Most people think and act locally. Social actors always experience the world and imagine the future '*en contexte*', they are not 'insular individuals, mobile and without memory' (Assayag, 2005: 277). In Hannerz' *Cultural Complexity* (1992), this is seen in terms of the notion of 'form of life': 'it involves the everyday practicalities of production and reproduction, activities going on in work places, domestic settings, neighbourhoods, and some variety of other places' (Hannerz, 1992: 47). Cultures usually need places and forms of life in which to be externalized, and cultural flow is not a continuous current that never stops. It takes shape in any place, in the village of Kafachan, Nigeria, or in the urban swirl of Calcutta, and 'rather than a flow of meanings divided into a multitude of separate currents, (it) is an inclusive cultural swirl' (Hannerz, 1992: 204). Neighbourhoods may be considered as main places in cities where culture and form of life develop themselves. They also are objects of interest for public policies. As shown by David Harvey almost thirty years ago, the general movement is to move power in cities from local government to local governance by incorporating business agents of the 'third sector': that's what he called the 'Entrepreneurial turn' in urban policies (Harvey, 1990). Following these policies coming from the top, neighbourhood is better taken into account and dwellers seem to have more weight in the decision making they are supposed to be concerned in. Marc Morel, following other similar expressions of thought, described the consequence of this new topic of urban planning as an emphasis made on place rather than on territory. It also favoured the adoption of 'neighbourhood scale' which 'goes hand in hand with a new political discourse that stresses cultural questions and the idea of participation and citizen involvement' (Morell & Franquesa, 2011: 197). Then neighbourhood becomes a very prolific 'raw material' for reshaping cities by localizing memory, a 'frontier field of frictions between domination and appropriation' because of its unevenness and the potential role it can take in the idealisation of place. Emphasised by the European Union and UNESCO because it is supposed to help the promotion of local democracy and the associated commitment of inhabitants, neighbourhood can be understood as a form of 'community of practice' that we saw above. Revaluating local debate is supposed to help in the revaluation of the inhabitants and their responsibility in the management of the place where they live. In order to achieve this objective, local memory and heritage could provide cultural content. This is typically weak heritage. In Villeneuve d'Ascq, I try to show that neighbourhood constitutes a 'weak heritage', which is made of narratives and collective memories that people tell while drinking a cup of coffee. It is also made of the mundane landscapes of everyday life that people wish to preserve because they retain the essential traces of their personal and collective stories, and common their will to perpetuate some collective practices that favour local sociality.

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Villeneuve d'Ascq: a "new town" looking for its identity

The "New town" of Villeneuve d'Ascq is located on the site of three former communes, very close to Lille, a large city in the North of France. A special public agency, EPALE[2], was created to manage expropriation, public institutions and the birth of the new town. When the works began in 1969, there were nearly 20,000 inhabitants. The first new dwellers settled in 1973. The city was still a big mess: very few pavements, no lights along the streets: 'it was like after the American bombing in 1944' a man we interviewed told us. Moreover, many houses have building problems: cracks in the walls, damp, very bad sound proofing...

In 1977 a new mayor was elected with a very simple program: to stop the development of the town. "We stay as we are; we decide on our own what we want to be." The city's population was around 55,000 inhabitants, but the government subsequently expected 100,000. After several years of conflict, the government decided to dissolve the public agencies and Villeneuve d'Ascq became a fully legal municipality. Nowadays, its population is around 62 000.

The public authorities and professionals who worked on Villeneuve d'Ascq were very concerned to give it a proper identity. Villeneuve d'Ascq was supposed to be clearly different from its surroundings and also different from the other 'Villes nouvelles' that were built at the same period. The French government was pursuing two main objectives: balance the urban development of the country from different regions while Paris was growing very fast by applying a very French "colbertist" (centralised) policy[3] and creating a new model of urban planning to propose to other local authorities. This model was supposed to give local governments more power than before in the decision making process as well as to adapt the national rules to their contemporary social milieu.

On the one hand, the history of Villeneuve d'Ascq illustrates well this national framework. On the other hand, it also denotes a peculiar situation since its local authorities succeeded in excluding the national government from local affairs. However, the main interest for us is that Villeneuve d'Ascq has experimented with the 'grandeur nature' of some urban utopias of the 60s and 70s. It is a place where we could observe practical utopias thirty years later. Based on interviews that we arranged with the architects, some people of the staff who built the town and with the local government, we have identified three main issues of context that can explain how those practical utopias have been implemented.

- The implementation of the project follows more or less Thomas More's thought in his famous chef d'oeuvre, *Utopia*. It is a criticism of what existed before (here the functionalism which was considered as responsible for a 'dehumanisation' of cities); the project of a friendly and harmonious city where local democracy was supposed to be reinvented; a city which blended the advantages of urban facilities and the quietness and leisure of nature (Choay, 1965).

- The city was first planned in the middle of the 1960s, but the project plan began to be drawn up in the early 1970s, that is to say a few years after 1968, which is a very symbolic date for the French: new ways of life and, above all, new ways to deal with politics were popularised. A generation of young people discovered that 'changing their life' was possible, collective dreams could transform into concrete projects. Villeneuve d'Ascq

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[2] "Etablissement Public d'Aménagement de Lille Est '.
[3] Under the responsibility of the " Ingenieurs des Ponts et Chaussée", a typical French corporation of " hauts fonctionnaires" (high civil servants).

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appeared then as a place where it was possible to experiment with new ways of life and new ways to make a city[4].

- A third point rarely mentioned must be recognized: the interconnection between the utopias of the public engineers, of the architects and of settlers of whom good numbers have been political and trade union militants. Several places existed where these utopias were able to interconnect.

I identified two groups of utopias. Probably the most common one concerns the merging of natural and urban landscapes. More exactly, Villeneuve d'Ascq is a very characteristic example of this popular issue: 'bring the countryside into the cities' in order to oppose the harmony of nature with the brutality of the 'cités dortoirs' (dormitory cities) constructed during the sixties. The place of nature is clearly expressed by the several lakes that have been created (most people think they are 'natural'), by the large number of public meadows, by the preservation of few farms on the territory, by the creation of an 'eco museum of mills and rural life'. I noticed a great number of all sorts of associations involved in environmental issues, the success of organic food in external markets and the frequent broaching of all these issues in the local newspapers. When we interviewed inhabitants, this feature of Villeneuve d'Ascq was largely mentioned in order to characterize the city. For many, it was one of the principal reasons to move there.

Another group of utopias relates to the apologia for local democracy. It was inaugurated as soon as the beginning of the construction site when the EPASE invited the population of the three former villages to public presentations of the project. A few years later the local government created different arrangements in order to associate the inhabitants with public policy. For example, the *Commission extra municipales de quartier* were created in 1977 where elected representatives of the municipality and inhabitants debated environmental problems, the relationship with the university that had moved from Lille and the defence of local interests. The municipality also used some public means that were provided by law, as the *Locaux Collectifs Residentiels (collective rooms for the inhabitants).* The law provided any settlement over 2000 or 3000 people to have a place where people could meet for collective activities: association meetings, trade unions meetings, but also any non formal cluster purposing to debate any subject. More than in many other cities, those *Locaux Collectifs Residentiels* have had a real success.

Practical utopias

These elements are intermingled in the narratives that I have collected from the first inhabitants and they cross through the written material I have consulted. These inhabitants have to be interpreted in terms of the social conditions they shared. Most of them were couples with young children. Parents met at school waiting for their children, or during extracurricular activities; they shared common concerns about school, but also the housing, the neighbourhood and the development of public space. They began to help each other looking after children, then join the association of schoolchildren to organise a school feast. When summer time was coming at the end of the school year, , they meet for a barbecue in the garden of one or the other.

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[4] 'Changer la vie' (Change the life!) was the slogan of the socialist party between 1977 and 1981, as they access to the power when François Mitterand became *président de la république*. It has been also the hymn of the party, with a music by MikisTheodorakis.' … Il nous faudra reprendre nos villes/qui ne sont plus que des ghettos géants/où le printemps n'a plus le droit d'asile/où meurent les vieux, les arbres, les enfants/c'est dans nos propres murs qu'on nous exile/changeons la vie ici et maintenant… ' http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDEgNp62jGk
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At that time, there was a very favourable ideological backdrop, a political atmosphere that sustained social innovation and urban utopias. Following the architects, the role of the specific urbanism and architecture can be assumed in the quality of the neighbourhood sociality. Some inhabitants highlight the layout of their house or their apartment that preserved intimacy while fostering social exchange with the neighbour, the private gardens that gave opportunity for discussion, the large number of pedestrian paths that favour walking and bicycle riding. The free urban configuration is considered by many as the main factor of the quality of local relationships: "So, we don't meet very often, because people move a lot, but there are many little places and spaces, between houses, here and there, where the children can play, and open to interaction between inside and outside, with large windows and the prohibition of the planting of hedges around the gardens and the houses". For many, Villeneuve d'Ascq was a place to experiment with dreams of a more convivial life in a town similar to a village.

However, its social configuration and the urban design are not enough to explain why Villeneuve d'Ascq was supposed to be a little bit different. People evoke something like a 'common view' shared by the majority of the neighbourhood, a common will to promote friendly relationships and local exchanges. There was a special spirit that had stamped its mark on the people's consciousness of this generation.

Let's take the example of François, a pioneer who became interested in the project while he was a university student. He does not hesitate to compare this period with the American frontier.

"There was a very common view about what we expected there. This had been going on fifteen or twenty years. Everybody moved more or less at the same time, and I can say that everybody made a real choice to live here, and they came with a real pioneer spirit, as those people who left home to discover a new world, to build a new world, with a new way of life. It was a very exciting thing, very fascinating".

Thanks to this pioneer spirit, to this neighbourly friendliness, thanks also to the subdivision by-law that forbade the building of walls or the planting of tall sheltering hedgerows between each of one's properties," *nobody was isolated and nevertheless everybody's intimacy was preserved."*

In those neighbourhoods and subdivisions of neighbourhoods that had been planned in order to favour social exchange, people will be encouraged to practice local democracy, dialogue between inhabitants, collective activities and solidarity. That generation who had more or less participated ten years prior to the May 68 events, was still full of dreams of a better world and hoped to put them into practice in this new town.

In one borough I have researched, architects built a lot of circle lots that were not common not in France at that time. Property management associations had been created by the EPALE in each settlement in order to manage local problems and to be the point of contact for public authorities. However, several of them became lobbying groups not only for defending inhabitants' interests against promoters, but also against the government agencies and the city's politicians. Rapidly, they also assured the welcoming of new dwellers of the lots and have been the supports of local exchanges. Their members invited one by one each other for a drink, some of them joined together to buy a collective lawn-mower, one could ask neighbours to take charge of one's children or old grandparents. Gardens and children were two great subjects of mutual aid. People also organized regularly local parties: barbecue parties, 'moules-frites' parties (Mussels-French potatoes parties) and jumble sales. The most famous has been the "feux de la St-Jean" (St. John's fires) that were organised on 24th of June every year. Created by the parents of pupils of the neighbourhood, this feast attracted the inhabitants both of the neighbourhood and beyond.

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One element is important for a utopia to be practical: it has to be shared, and it wasin Villeneuve d'Ascq. A shared feature, which connects dreams and reality, is quoted by the pioneers and many of the stakeholders to the social networks we met. Professionals, architects who built the city, activists or ordinary householders use the same formula to characterize the city: the word 'ouverture' or 'openness'. Villeneuve d'Ascq would be 'the city of openness'. Openness to new ideas, to new technologies, to new people. It is also used to speak of the gardens, of the public areas, of the architecture, of the relationships between neighbours. Nevertheless that part of this story-telling has more to do with mythology than with reality.

Conclusion: Memories and heritage in Villeneuve d'Ascq: 'weak exchanges' make 'weak heritages' for preserving local attachments

The story of Villeneuve d'Ascq can be seen or read as a modern epopee. It is the way it is usually reported in some books and articles (Percq & Stievenard, 1980); it is the way it was told by several of the people who have been involved in the project. It is also the story reported by the pioneers.

However, in 2010, the official web site of Villeneuve d'Ascq exposed another story: a town rooted in the most ancient past of the country after archaeologists found a roman villa. Every cross along the roads, every farm, every chapel had been carefully investigated and were exposed on the web site; the dramatic story of the 40 executed people in 1944 by the Nazis in the village of Ascq was largely told. Everything seemed to be made in order to forget the singular history of the town[5].

Actually I can say that several memories of the town cohabit with several heritages. The utopias we are talking about took their place, even if they were not asserted in the official history. They were claimed by the candidates in the electoral period in order to mobilize old and young militants; they were claimed by local associations in order to create a better balance of strength with the local government. All those who defended the idea that Villeneuve d'Ascq must not grow up claimed them, as the opponents to the construction of a new football stadium in 2010. May we qualify 'heritage' as the re-iteration of those narratives and practices?

The narratives we collected have a common point: they refer to the presence of the people in the place, they say that Villeneuve d'Ascq is not a city of politicians, architects and technicians of urban management, but a city appropriated by its dwellers who recognise themselves above all in the ward where they live. That is heritage because it is determined by the commitment of local communities dwelling in the place; it is expressed in the diversity of neighbourhoods, and the memory of those utopias gives people the feeling of getting closer to both the past and their contemporary environment. This heritage does not make any distinction between material and immaterial, between tangible and intangible goods, between social and economic resources for the local social network. Its specificity is to be particularly sensitive to the mixture of social and material exchanges. These take shape by the blending of individuals and collective stories which are considered as worthy of perpetuation for the common good. It belongs to social practices that are barely visible from outside the place where people usually live.

I call them 'weak heritages' because they are micro-local heritages that are not supposed to be known by the local authorities and which are not supposed to be shared by or shown to

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[5] It is to be said that the new web site is very different: the new town seems not to reject anymore its history.

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strangers. This is not really new - it has been the usual functioning of local groups of inhabitants as described by sociologists and ethnographers for decades. But henceforth those appropriations of the environment inscribe themselves in larger frameworks. Discourses on locality, symbols and values are not strictly identical as they use to be twenty or thirty years before because they are irrigated by the mainstream of the heritagization that emerges at every level of the public sphere. The newness is not the expression of local solidarities but the articulations that people make with the past of their community, in their wish to preserve their living environment in the name of a major value that we call heritage. Heritage is supposed to be able to manage the different levels of what one works to save. Through this weak and local heritage, inhabitants do not oppose the 'system'; they create something beside it that they have the ability to keep under control.

People find opportunities in their history and culture in order to defend themselves against 'the spiral of individualization (which) destroys the given foundations of social coexistence' (Beck and Beck, 2002: XXI).Weak heritage is not a weapon to fight against capitalism, but a value that allows adaptation to different levels of social life. In Villeneuve d'Ascq, the heritagisation of utopias recall previous practices that allow the taking of time for social relationships in the neighbourhood. To recall the founding utopias of the town is a manner of instituting the time of the neighbourhood community as an alternative to the stresses and demands of the modern life. One main advantage of heritage is its supposed predictability. It shows that social skills are still useful. The memory of the 'old time' is evoked for preserving the intimacy of the intermediary space that has been patiently shaped by householders between the private and the public spheres. An intermediary space that lays at the front of the home's door and inside the lot, and that is a main stake of the dwellers. In a world characterized by instability of work and the risk of social anomy, housing and its social surroundings can appear as a good investment, far from that of commodification. Better than an analysis in terms of domination, as well as in terms of a dialectic process between top/down and bottom/up movements, as usually undertaken in heritage studies, I observed that it rises when local linkages (i.e. neighbourhood) seem to decrease. It is an adaptation to the merging patterns of capitalism and modernity.

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