

Video transcription

The making of urban projects in France

My thesis focuses on the development of new neighborhoods, and especially the conversion of major industrial areas, including railway sites, into new neighborhoods with housing, businesses, offices, and public facilities and spaces. Such projects can be found in most French cities. Examples include the Clichy-Batignolles project in Paris, which is already half-completed, the Confluences neighborhood in Lyon, and the Euromed neighborhood in Marseille.

What I find interesting about these projects is that they are designed by cities that undertake them as showcases, and are revealing of what elected officials and urban planners currently believe is the future for cities. However, this is not the first time that new neighborhoods have been erected as models, as were garden cities at the beginning of the 20th century and new cities in the 1960s.

The desirable future that these contemporary neighborhoods portend involves environmentally friendly and socially diverse cities with a wide range of activities and functions.

I look at how these neighborhoods are conceived as well as how they are actually implemented. Indeed, as they are developed, some of their objectives are renegotiated or even jettisoned due to economic and political constraints. One of the major constraints is the price of land, which has greatly increased since the beginning of the 2000s, making the projects very expensive.

This economic constraint forces cities to build high-rises even though they had originally planned for airy neighborhoods, and to create more housing for affluent households even though they had sought to house their local working and middle class populations.

An article on the power of architects published in "Sociologie du travail" (sociology of work and occupation)

Designing these neighborhoods is highly technical work that requires architects to engage in complex relationships and to closely collaborate with both traditional professional partners such as developers and contractors, and new actors like environmental consulting firms, which impinge on their jurisdiction. And so I examined the power of architects in these work situations. In this article I show that even in contexts that a priori limit their autonomy, architects are able to defend their vision of architectural and urban quality. They do so by relying on the robustness of their professional status and by using the social relations that shape their working environment.