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Innovation and sustainable urban regeneration: the Lyon Confluence project as a best practice

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Context and aim

The Lyon Confluence project is considered as a best practice in sustainable urban regeneration. Itis an urban regeneration project of unusual scope in Europe as it will double Lyon city's centre and includes the redevelopment of 150 ha of land. It will create a smart and sustainable district with 25 000 employments and 16 000 residents. City planners present the project as an extension of the existing city-centre. The project started in 1995 when former Mayor Raymond Barre saw the availability of industrial land on Lyon's central peninsula as a unique opportunity to develop a mixed-use and sustainable neighborhood that would enhance the identity of Lyon as a major city in Europe. With this paper, we analyze how the governance component of the project and the financing mechanisms have facilitated the implementation of innovative features such as the eco-renovation of a social housing building, sustainable mobility (e.g., car sharing) and the construction of positive energy buildings in partnership with the NEDO (New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization).

The Confluences regeneration project is unique in the sense that it is a smart community demonstration project: an agreement was signed in December 2011 between the Mayor of Grand Lyon, the President of NEDO: "Under this agreement advanced Japanese technology will contribute to sustainable development of the Confluence Site until 2015" (Lyon Smart Community, 2013, p. 5). The partners in this regeneration project are: Grand Lyon, SPD Lyon Confluence, NEDO, Toshiba, Bouygues Immobilier, Transdev, Grand Lyon Habitat. The four pillars for sustainability

are as follows: Hikari, Sunmoov' (a care sharing scheme), Conso tab (resident energy monitoring system), CEMS (Community Energy Management System).

As stated by Bulkeley (2006): To what extent can best practices inform policy-making? This paper analyzes what enables innovation in regards to urban sustainability in the Lyon Confluence project and discusses if those innovations can be replicated in other regeneration contexts. The aim of this paper are as follows: 1.Explain why the Lyon Confluence project is a regeneration best practice; 2.Identify mechanisms (related to financing and governance) that enabled innovation;3.Discuss about the transferability of those innovations into other contexts.

Theoretical background

The concept of sustainable development is a popular concept in both the practice and academia but as stated by Hunt and De Laurentis (2015, p. 1081): "sustainable development is addressing issues of environmental protection, economic growth and social needs but it still means different things to different people." In the same vein urban regeneration is a concept that can have different meanings. Urban regeneration is an important challenge in all contemporary cities, it be can defined as follows: "Urban regeneration moves beyond the aims, aspirations and achievements of urban renewal, which is seen [by Couch] as 'a process of essentially physical change'...regeneration seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area" (Roberts 2014: 13). Different approaches to urban regeneration have been identified: community-based (Thomas and Duncan, 2000), culture-led regeneration (Darchen and Tremblay 2013), business-driven (Porter, 1995). In other words, the concept of urban regeneration can mean different processes that vary from one context to another. In the same vein, different governance models can be identified when analyzing regeneration processes (Darchen and Tremblay, 2013). There is also not currently an evaluation framework available that would make consensus. Therefore the performance evaluation of regeneration is still a research area that is under-studied.

Method

Our main method of data collection were semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the conceptualization of the project: planners, landscape planners, Consultancy firms, etc. We also interviewed stakeholders that could give us some historical background about the project, in total height interviews were performed for a total of 7 hours of interview material. The main planning documents have also been analyzed.

Findings and relevance

The Lyon Confluence project is performing well on the environmental sustainability component (e.g., inclusion of energy positive buildings) and is innovative on this component. The governance structure is unique with the Local Public Redevelopment Company (SPL) having a clear framework about what they expect from developers in terms of sustainability. This clear framework about sustainability expectations creates a competitive climate between developers. It ultimately contributes to enhance the final product. The SPL was informed by a consultancy firm on sustainability to develop a framework that would challenge developers. The French planning system also allows the SPL to acquire land at a lower rate thus enabling innovation in regards to sustainability.