

# THE VALUE OF DESIGN RESEARCH

11TH EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF  
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## « TERRITORIAL DESIGN » OR HOW TO CONCEIVE TOOLS OF TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES THANKS TO DESIGN

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### ABSTRACT

*This conference aims at exploring the methods and issues of design integration in the conception of specific tools for territorial development of public authorities in France. This work rests upon "re-designing" a diagnosis tool commonly used by public authorities that enables to understand a territory's specificities, the issues related to its development and that leads to recommendations of structuring projects. We are working on tools which take into account cultural issues in territorial development ("culturability" – for relation between sustainability and culture, Qian : Design Issue, summer 2007). The conceptual tools are gathered in a sensitive diagnosis which is based on contextual design and "situated" creation. It is made of two types of conceptual tools: one is based on contextual research - centred on the relationship between the creation process's autonomy and heteronomy - and the other one on a propositional research - that connects action and production -. After presenting this diagnosis tool, we shall see, more broadly, contemporary issues of a "territorial design".*

*Keywords: territorial design, contextual design, "situated" creation, sensitive diagnosis, quotation-object*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The territorial development is a rich and complex research area that may involve the relationships between design, context and public authorities. Our study shall more specifically deal with the elaboration and experiment of tools for a territorial diagnosis in the French context. It explores the issue of the integration of design practices in public policies of territorial development through a theoretical analysis based on a local and contextual experience.

### 2 "SENSITIVE" DIAGNOSIS OF THE TERRITORY

A diagnosis commissioned by a public authority enables analysing and understanding territory in development projects. In spite of the diversity of tools, we can define 2 major and often paired up orientations. The first one favours quantitative methodologies based on geographical, socio-cultural or economical markers. The second one favours discussion with local players through more qualitative approaches such as "citizen diagnosis". The diagnosis allows knowing the territory and assisting in the coordination and the dialogue between its players. Its aim is to establish a picture and a strategic analysis to define action. Its conclusion is a program that often proves most important in setting up call for bids responded to by several types of professionals, most notably artists, architects and designers.

Our researches deal with what's at stake in the intervention of design once diagnosis tools are set up. Which means "project culture" is integrated long before strategic pre-orientation. This approach does not aim at replacing or synthesizing existing tools but at completing them in order to open territorial development to a multiplicity of point of views and a multiplicity of actors.

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The conceptual tools are gathered in a sensitive diagnosis. This word can nowadays be found in certain emerging practices in which diagnosis is integrated to processes of creation, experiment and production, right from the beginning. Contextual artist Stephan Shankland set up program TRANS305 between 2006 and 2012 in Ivry-sur-Seine. He created the HCAQ (**Shankland, 2007**) label – High Cultural and Artistic Quality – in reference to HQE – High Environmental Quality – which is now very often used in public projects. Stephan Shankland steps in the phases of territorial diagnosis using the words "*sensitive diagnosis*". Let's notice among similar initiatives currently being developed in France, the Pôle des arts urbains that offers local authorities "*actions-researches*" based on a will to associate, through art, "*new expertise of the urban factory*" (**Polau, 2007**). The integration in preliminary analysis phases of a "culture of making", allow to create a stronger link between analysis phases and fulfillment. That is why such approaches offer a possible link between territory in terms of memories and territory as a transforming entity.

The approach we experiment has in common with these initiatives the decompartmentalization of diagnosis and creation. Furthermore, it builds up from "contextual" design through the integration of designers-researchers. Pierre Litzler - design and architecture researcher – considers the current phase of a "*contemporary design*" that can be distinguished by its "*contextual, mobile and critical*" dimension (**Litzler, 2014, pp.29-31**). Against the background of contemporary design, a *contextual design* can be distinguished by the use of location as creative driving force but also by its strong experimental dimension and its strong links with other creative fields (**Litzler, ibid.**) most notably contemporary art and architecture.

Besides, contextual creation needs to be replaced in a wider historical but also interdisciplinary perspective since it first appeared in the 1970s (**Ardenne, 2002**). Contextual design has to be apprehended within hybrid contemporary practices that infringe traditional classifications and that can be singled out as a "*situated*" creation (**Sagot & Dupont, 2015, being published**). The analysis we could lead in several of these practices in art, design and architecture made us define "*situated*" creation as follows:

- Permanent interaction, regarding creation process, between autonomy and heteronomy (about relation between autonomy and heteronomy in contemporary art: **Ardenne et al. 1999**). Said interaction enables to encompass implication in the context while maintaining a critical point of view.
- Progressive undifferentiation of the traditional categories of praxis – as field of the action - and poïesis – as field of production, particularly the artistic one (about relation between praxis and poïesis in contemporary art: **Tiberghein, 1997**). Said undifferentiation enables to understand the new links, in such practices, between production process and ability to act within socio-political concerns.

This type of diagnosis - based on contextual design and *situated* creation - is characterised by a back and forth movement between a territory – considered as the project's permanent basis – and a project – considered as an investigation tool of the territory. It is made of two types of conceptual tools: one is based on "contextual research" centred on the relationship between the creation process's autonomy and heteronomy and the other one on a "propositional research" that connects action and production. The use of the former precedes the use of the latter but they do not constitute successive phases – they interact permanently.

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We shall now briefly define their main aspects and the methodological tools used.

## 2.1 CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

Contextual researches are determined by the constitution of an interdisciplinary team by designer-researcher and by its immersion in the territory. For instance, in the project on habitability of the river Aveyron banks that enabled experimenting sensitive diagnosis (for detailed analysis : **Sagot & Dupont, 2014**) through collaboration between centre of art and design La cuisine<sup>1</sup> and Midi-Quercy<sup>2</sup>, the pre-diagnosis noted the contrast between the banks' desertification and their activity until the 1960s. In order to favour contextual research, an interdisciplinary team was set up based on collaboration between a designer working on the topic of context as method of creation and an archivist<sup>3</sup>. Let's notice that working on location was made possible thanks to the preliminary collaborative action with local actors in order to cover as much territory as possible.

Contextual researches lean on specific collection tools in order to avoid that the analysis of the existing turn into standardization of the territory. That is why the information taken is considered fundamentally connected to its "semantic ground":

- Information issued from oral interviews implies it is part of a linguistic system and doesn't mix the oral with what's written.

- An image needs to be analysed by visual system tools taking into account the multiplicity of the signs at work.

- A mark or material needs to be integrated to reflection on grade-related systems.

Besides, it is very important to avoid the consequences of "mono-collection" semantics.

- Linguistic mono-collection presupposes the territory is *readable*. The latter is also *laid out*, so to speak, which excludes a series of elements and events that stumble over its wording.

- The risk of visual mono-collection lies in only perceiving it in its ability to be transcribed by images. This implies location derealisation through transformation into icon.

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1. This project was developed by La cuisine, centre of art and design, town of Nègrepelisse, France (direction shared by S. Sagot - scientific and artistic direction - and V. Boé - services direction and cultural action -, K. Marchand - communication officer -, S. Barot - cultural mediation -, L. Vigo - representative -, C. Savoye and M. Guibbert - mediation -, L. Maignan - webmastering -).

2. DRAC Midi-Pyrénées, Conseil Général du Tarn-et-Garonne, Conseil Régional Midi-Pyrénées, European Program 4, Midi-Quercy (sponsors), local associations (most particularly Le Fond et la Forme).

3. S. Sagot (curator), A. Moronnoz (residence designer and creator of "Projet citations"), O. Ponchet (commissioned archivist), Production : La cuisine.

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- Finally, material mono-collection can lead to sclerosing focalisation on repetition and conservation of *savoir-faire*.

In order to avoid such restriction in the perception of the territory, we suggest, on the contrary, to accomplish multiple collections in the media collected and in the types of signification, symbolization and expression systems.

In the example mentioned above, collecting and archiving enabled to avoid mono-collections working on visual, textual, oral sources at the same time and thanks to samples *in situ* (about relation between trace and clue **Thouard et al. 2007**). Besides, this phase directly nourished the creation process. As she collaborated directly with the designer, the archivist integrated the collected data as the project moved forward. Therefore, said data is part of a dynamic project in which "contextual researches" and "propositional researches" interact.

## 2.2 PROPOSITIONAL RESEARCH

Diagnosis's second type of tools uses design's propositional ability and making design as a way of investigating and encouraging dialogue. This phase is distinguished by the fact that in design, the whole creation process is used as:

- proposition enabling to consider new perspectives and to bring local actors to take a stand with clearer stakes
- help to *act out* associating "making" and direct action
- a tool to create a dialogue on design for territory actors

Propositional researches use project culture vocabulary but shouldn't be mistaken for projects in progress. They represent a way to understand better what is at stake contextually – they are a diagnosis tool and public debate object at once. For example, Alexandre Moronnoz has designed for the project on habitability of the river Aveyron banks, three "quotations-objects" he defined as follows:

It's all about the place's memories and about the people who were there and their stories, taking into account current practices on these areas in order to create "Quotations-Objects" which, as another consequence, create new stories. Reference objects, or landmarks, on the banks of the river Aveyron, highlight forms and functions that materialize today in a context of space artificialization and urban extension, raising issues on public areas and shared nature (**Moronnoz, 2012**).

These "quotations-objects" are built on 3 places – the towns of Nègrepelisse, Cazals and Saint-Antonin-Noble-Val – and around 3 quotations linked to past practices: "The diving board", "The taut canvas" and "The skiff". These objects create a modular and combinatory structure that enables taking up the river as a public area again – it had been largely privatized for several years, with restricted access. It means object and project are not an end in itself – one represents a way to secure the place's history and the second creates a debate on the river as a possible common area. They both represent tools of the emergence of a sensitive diagnosis.

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Finally, let's say that in approaches such as this, the mediation of the propositional research is very important. Mediation involves production of meetings, discussions and debates. That's what enables turning the project into an object of dialogue and debate that might lead to possible prescriptions. The project turns into a device to create discussion between people but also between social structures, institutions and territories as well as between local and global entities.

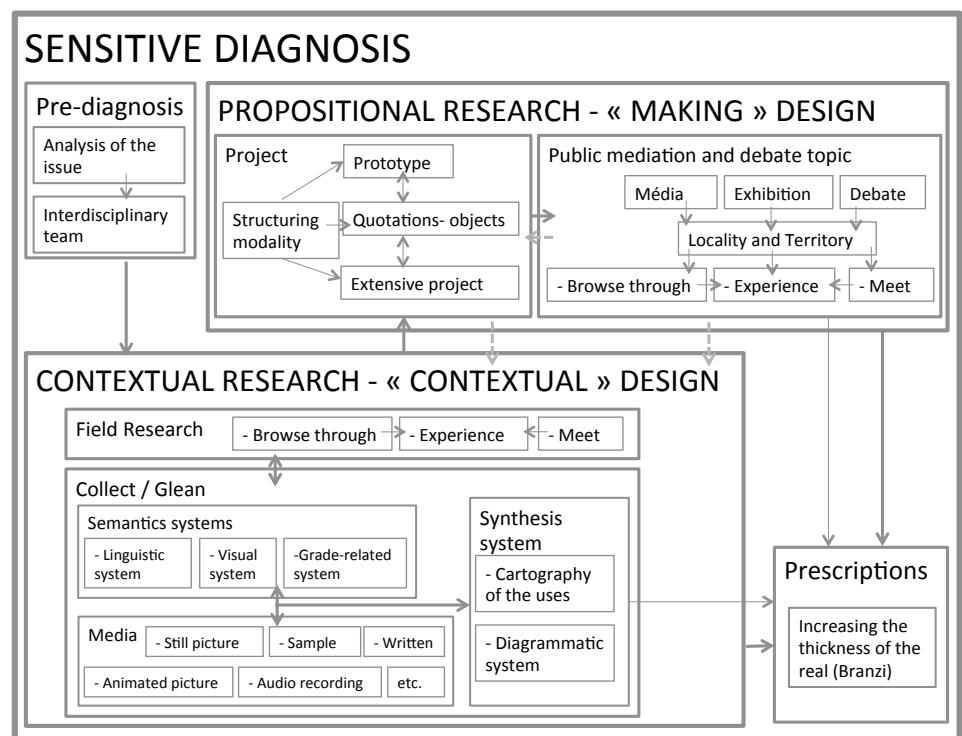


Figure 1- Sagot, S. & Dupont, J. Sensitive Diagnosis, 2014.

Note that this modelling is related to a specific context and is not intended to be a general method.

### 3 TOWARDS TERRITORIAL DESIGN

We just briefly described a few principles that allow creating a working relationship between design and territory. More generally speaking, it is about taking part to the integration of design in territorial development (**SAGOT, 2010**) – the latter's issues are more and more important in France – decentralisation policies and re-configuration of regions by the government – and in Europe – FEDER program. Such practices also allow us to conceive and set up a mediation and awareness strategy to this new practice of design for territorial authorities elected representatives and technicians. Finally, it contributes to a reflection on the future of territories, and on the very part that project culture, creation and design practices might be able to play.

Yet, territories' current evolution raises the question of creation of an area that would be "common" and "singular" at once. This implies leaving behind the local/global dialectics and leads to question design practices and methods again.

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It seems to us that the notions of sensitive diagnosis, of contextual design, of *situated* creation and of quotation-object are trails that take part to the development of a territorial design that should be a sustainable component of public policies and services as well as in the way territories' habitability is planned. More generally speaking yet in that same field, some present researches are following new fertile paths.

For instance, Civic city at HEAD in Geneva is leading an exploration of relationships between design, public institutions and territory. Besides work on *les jardiniers de l'écrit*<sup>4</sup> - "Gardeners of writing" - and several publications dealing with the topic of public area (**Baur & Thiery, 2013**), it also got interested in processes within a project for creative districts of Marseille-Provence 2013. Ruedi Baur, the founder of Civic city, described with much detail the idea of prototype as a tool helping transformation and dialogue (**Baur, 2014**).

Besides, Marie Haude Caraës, along with Elodie Jouve and Claire Lemarchand, led a depth study on social creation in cities as she was head of research for the Cité du design in Saint Etienne. They set up an urban diagnosis based on an art inventory of creative plans (**France, Cité du design. Création et ville solidaire. 2014**). Their methodological positions are most interesting because on the one hand, they chose to develop an analysis that's open to all creative fields in the city – art, design, literature, architecture etc. – and on the other hand they acknowledged emerging projects as basis to define the researches' approach.

As a conclusion, in light of our current researches and experiments, we consider that development of a possible "territorial design" will depend on the development of a "culturable" design ("culturability" – for relation between "sustainability" and "culture", **Qian : Design Issue, summer 2007**). It will depend on the balance between the institutions' and public authorities' unifying and modelling temptation, and the ability to preserve an open and pluralist conception of methods and processes enabling a genuine contextualized creation.

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