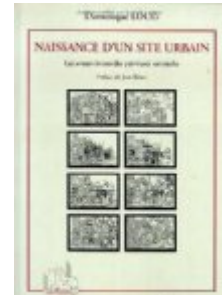


Dominique Louis. *Naissance d'un site urbain. Les avatars locaux des politiques nationales*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996. 256 pp. ISBN 978-2-7384-4710-4.

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Published on H-Urban (December, 1997)



This text studies the development and contemporary transformations of the Tonkin, a neighbourhood of 10,442 inhabitants, in 1990. Located in Villeurbanne, it borders Lyon, forming a transition between the centres of both cities, east of Lyon's Parc de la Tête d'Or. The author, a Lyonese sociologist, proposes two approaches, the first centred on the genesis of an urban space, the second placing its evolution in the framework of national urban planning. The Tonkin lends itself well to such an analysis. "Born" in 1878 as a working-class housing development on land belonging to Lyon's biggest land-owner, the Hospices Civils de Lyon (the private organization that was in charge of Lyon hospitals in the nineteenth century), this district has undergone radical transformations since the 1950s; linked to the national desire to eradicate unsanitary dwellings (the Tonkin was then dilapidated, due to particular rent conditions), and to modernize cities. It also followed the urban policy changes; reflecting in turn rigid functionalism (1961), separation of traffic (1970), return to centrality and street (1978), then concentration and symbolism (1983), which sought to picture Villeurbanne as a modern and prestigious city. Lastly, the Tonkin presents most urban policy problems: how to reconcile re-housing with transformation; how to link true "urbanity" with renewal; how to experiment in a context of legal, national, and financial norms; how to associate residents to planning, etc.

In a chronological approach, the author presents the five principal stages of the evolution, with useful summary figures (pp. 69, 91, 129, 167, 181 and 196). She then presents the explicative factors in the last forty pages, labeled "Interpretation:" the notion of transaction forms its methodological basis; it "induces a research attitude open on the multiple aspects of urban stakes, their interpretations, their mobility (...). Transaction means a dif-

fuse negotiation situation between numerous agents on a common stake, so as better to define evolution regulations" (p.17). This work reflects the multiple questions of a social study in town planning:

- * the paramount importance of land issues (ownership, type of lease, type of building contractors' contracts) upon spatial and social evolution.

- * the complex links between urban morphology (here based upon the grid, briefly analysed) and socio-economic data.

- * the difficult relations between national or international ideas and regulation and the wishes of local authorities and populations. Comparing—even if it remains brief—the Tonkin with primarily Parisian policies is useful.

- * the role of "experts" and "models" (as the "Germe de ville" [city's seed], of Le Vaudreuil new town, near Rouen, p. 98) in the workings of projects.

- * the relationship between private and public logics.

This text nevertheless suffers from some hindrance, which alter its exactness. The style too often is tortuous and allusive, with too many chronological and analytical breaks. There also are misprints, systematic absence of page indication—even of any reference—for citations, absence of any primary source in the bibliography, absence of date for the photographs, and some chronological errors that appear to the local or national reader.

The chronological approach often resembles a linear data accumulation, mixing sociological, historical, political logics, instead of distinguishing levels of analysis (decision process, urban approaches, and techniques,

for instance). The agents are indeed present, but seldom fully analysed, as for the most important, the Société d'Équipement de la Région Lyonnaise (SERL), the public/private society that was conducting the project.

This can be linked to the author's peculiar status. She was part of the Tonkin project as sociologist for the SERL from 1971 to 1983, and is the wife of one of the leading Tonkin's planners. Her analysis, swinging between the "one," the "we," and the "I" is sometimes dangerously close to self-vindication, and tends to favor a purely architectural analysis. Moreover, the author has not fully mastered French urban planning history. In fact, the historical analysis lacks depth, and omits some sources. The relations between the project of a modern campus at nearby La Doua (only separately cited) and the renewal of the Tonkin have been omitted. Yet, the Direction Départementale de l'Équipement's archives show that from 1955, the architects Perrin-Fayolle et Gages worked on both spaces and elaborated in 1956, 1961 and 1965 three successive Plans of La Doua-Tonkin Neighbourhood (not cited by the author). This shows that, although the author states page 219 that 1970 should be seen as the passage from private planning to public planning, the project already strongly bore the State mark during the 1950s and 1960s: plans were drawn under the aegis of the Ministère de la Construction and its local administrations (which also wanted to build an "Expressway," largely breaking into the western part of the Tonkin). Lastly, her study of the 1970s and 1980s retires within the neighbourhood, only briefly citing contemporary national debates, such as the return towards the ancient town centres.

The sociological approach itself is piecemeal (few statistics, only partial surveys, cf pp. 189-194); the image of the Tonkin remains blurred; the study of specific projects (the Small Childhood Center, pp. 157-159 or the Residential Collective Premises, *passim*) only partially explains the difficulties encountered in the building of a real "neighbourhood sociability." The third part intends to give a global analysis and make the Tonkin a national "casebook," when the 200 former pages only were, in author's own words, a "description" (p. 201). However, this part is closer to a tentative methodology of global planning study. The author wanders between long definitions (deviation, limits, morphology, appropriation), references (imprecise), which mostly remain theoretical; this does not allow a real interpretation of the Tonkin's evolution, all the more because the proposed approaches are juxtaposed without coherence. One also has to refer frequently to preceding parts, due to numerous allusions.

Finally, if one can find in this work numerous facts and ideas, useful for the comprehension of Tonkin's history, one can only regret what is left to the reader: a recombining and research work in order fully to understand it. The authors concludes on the Tonkin: "complexity in a half-structured situation" (p. 246). This could apply to her study as well.

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Citation: Christian Montes. Review of Louis, Dominique, *Naissance d'un site urbain. Les avatars locaux des politiques nationales*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. December, 1997.

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