

Reconnecting Districts: The Genesis and Production of a New Urban Model

The dissertation recounts the development of a new urban model which appeared in France in the beginning of the 21st century. Coming under different labels, such as “eco-districts” or “sustainable districts”, a series of local redevelopment projects were initially launched independently in several cities. They eventually acquired a common social reform dimension combining social mixing, neighborly relations and the reconciliation between the city and “nature”. The hypothesis is that such model is inseparable from the economic and political forces that drive such redevelopment projects. Building on valuation approaches developed in economic sociology, the thesis combines investigation on the production of space and on the making of urban policy categories, two issues that are usually examined separately in urban studies. In-depth ethnography of three “reconnecting districts” under construction were conducted in and around Paris and connected with national policies developed in a wider international context. The thesis examines the processes by which those urban operations are first set on local political agendas, it analyzes how some of them become trend-setters in France as well as demonstrators of exportable French urban *savoir-faire* around the world, and finally studies how those new districts’ promises of “reconnection” translate within land and housing markets and take shape through urban and architectural conception work. It shows that the model emerges through an incremental process made up of multiple valuation operations and based on the incessant circulations of reconnection promises among cities, intermediary and national governments as well as economic actors.