RESTRUCTURING AND TERRITORAL GOVERNANCE:

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY

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The aim of this paper is to shed light, in an exploratory manner, on the role of the choices made in terms of governance in reorganisation projects initiated on territories affected by companies' restructuring. Actor-network theory is used to analyse the dynamics present on three territories concerned by the restructuring of a same company. It allows to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the territorial reorganisation's modes of management and to highlight their decisive influence on the evolution of the projects.

KEY WORDS

Territory, governance, reorganisation, conversion, actor-network theory, change management, innovation.

INTRODUCTION

On 24 January 2003, Arcelor announced its new strategic direction: from now on, investment would be concentrated on the most efficient hot lines, situated on the coast, which meant the closure of the hot phase at Liège. Although the decline was foreseeable, the announcement had the effect of a veritable bombshell. The trade union organisations and the workers formed a common front and moved to try to alter the decision taken by the management. They had the closure postponed to 2009. Besides, Arcelor promised that there would be no straightforward lay-offs and that early retirement options would be used to manage the anticipated loss of 2,700 jobs. In addition, Arcelor would ensure the development of the cold operation at Liège and contribute to the economic reorganisation of the Liège region. The announcement of this closure, with the ensuing 10,000 direct and indirect job losses by 2009, seems to force the accelerated conversion of the region.

The aim of this paper is to shed light, in an exploratory manner, on the role of the choices made in terms of governance in reorganisation projects initiated on territories affected by companies' restructuring. Our approach has led us to explore the economic reorganisation initiatives carried out in three territories concerned by the closure of the closure of the hot phase at Liège: Seraing, which houses several hot steelmaking plants doomed to disappear, the Basse-Meuse region, where the Chertal steel-manufacturing site, also condemned, is located, and a larger territory, encompassing the two previous ones, the Liège Region. We will see that the dynamics that characterize these territories can be distinguished by the content of their projects and actions, by the context in which they take place, and by the process through which they evolve.

After a short presentation of the concepts related to territorial governance, we will show to what extend the analysis grid proposed by the actor-network theorists can be relevant to apprehend these modes of management. We will also highlight the fact that the way in which the territorial reorganisation is managed can decisively influence the evolution of the projects in hand. Then we will present the research methodology and the description of the cases (territories) studied. We will finish with an analysis of the cases from the perspective of actor-network theory and with a conclusion about the results of the study.

TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE OR TRYING TO REACH A CONSENSUS

For some years, involving the different actors and taking their interests into account are considered as key success factors in regional reorganisation projects. In this respect, the concept of territorial governance (more widespread as "urban governance" in the Anglo-Saxon literature) seems to be unavoidable in managerial discourses as well as in the scientific literature. Generally, governance means the organisation of collective action (González & Healey, 2005). Through the notion of territorial governance, two phenomena's are usually pointed out: (1) the power decentralisation in favour of local authorities and (2) the increasing diversity of the actors involved in the development of their town or region. For Guesnier (2004), the apparition of a territorial governance in France corresponds to a new form of environmental planning intended to facilitate the end of the crisis by local development. The bottom-up approach takes over from the top-down approach. At the same time, the concept of urban governance refers to the fact that local authorities today have to co-exist and collaborate with a much wider network of agencies and interest groups than in the past (Basset, Griffiths, & Smith, 2002). In this context, socially innovative practices in urban governance and territorial development are associated with the emergence of new institutional forms that draw

heavily on a greater involvement of actors from both the economy and civil society (Moulaert, Martinelli, Swyngedouw, & González, 2005). Regarding this phenomenon, Swyngedouw (2005) talks about "governance-beyond-the-state".

Above all, the concept conveys an idealised and normative vision according to which "governance is a method/mechanism for dealing with a broad range of problems/ conflicts in which actors regularly arrive at mutually satisfactory and binding decisions by negotiating with each other and co-operating in the implementation of these decisions" (Schmitter, 2002: 52 in (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1994). In this perspective, governance systems "are presumably horizontal, networked and based on interactive relations between independent and interdependent actors who share a high degree of trust, despite internal conflict and oppositional agendas, within inclusive participatory institutional or organisational associations" (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1995). This form of governance is viewed as empowering and democracy enhancing, but the lack of rules and regulations that define participation opens up a vast terrain of contestation and potential conflict that revolves around the exercise of (or the capacity to exercise) entitlements and institutional power. As argued by Swyngedouw (2005: 1999), "the status, inclusion or exclusion, legitimacy, system of representation, scale of operation and internal or external accountability of such groups or individuals often take place in non-transparent, ad hoc and context-dependent ways and differ greatly from those associated with pluralist democratic rules and codes."

Swyngedouw (2005) draws our attention to the fact that the choices made regarding territorial governance (assigning "holder" status, defining the rules of participation, defining the scales of governance …) are not politically neutral. In this process, some actors consolidate their position while others are excluded or become marginal. Therefore, territorial governance

should not be seen as the guarantee of the mutual satisfaction of opposing interests. According to Nicholls (2005), the form taken by governance may vary from highly cohesive metropolitan regimes at one end to highly atomised stakeholders operating against one another at the other end.

The study carried out by Basset et al. (2002) appears very enlightening. For several months, the authors have followed the evolution of a waterfront regeneration project in Bristol. According to the authors, "(…) such large-scale regeneration projects are not only intrinsically interesting, but the conflicts that surround them also serve to illuminate many aspects of local systems of governance, such as local power structures, political agendas and forms of decision-making." (Basset et al., 2002: 1758) The description of the process reveals a situation marked by strongly conflicting views and contrasting visions of urban spaces, involving a fierce "battle of the plans" (with no less than three cycles of plan development and presentation). According to the authors, the path taken by the project is mainly explained by factors related to the actors' strategies and power relations: conflicting interests and roles, weaknesses in political leadership, weaknesses in business leadership, the strength of opposition groups, discourses and counter-discourses, the role of the media, inter-party conflicts and the politicisation of development issues. Finally, the project will be handed to a new masterplanner whose propositions will be submitted to a large community dialogue process. Then a consensus seems to take shape. "Many of those who participated in the consultation exercise were impressed by [the masterplanner's] willingness to listen and discuss options with them. He also succeeded in impressing key decision-makers with his personal style. A leading councillor called him "a real showman"—" everyone who talks to him feels that their own personal interests are being addressed". " (Basset et al., 2002: 1772)

The Bristol case shows to what extent taking the interests of the different stakeholders into account has a decisive impact on the success of a territorial development project. To reach a consensus on the directions to follow, territorial governance must be based on a prospective knowledge shared between all the actors taking part or benefiting from the project, which implies a collective and democratic working out. This is only when the consensus is achieved that some actions can be planned and some realisations launched. (Guesnier, 2005)

An analytical tool seems well suited to highlight the positions of the actors and the way they evolve in territorial development projects, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of territorial governance systems: we talk about actor-network theory. Actor-network theory is focused on the construction of innovations and changes of all types. It rests on the model of interessement according to which the fate of an innovation does not depend on its intrinsic properties, but on the alliances it allows and the interests it mobilizes. The innovator has to put all one's effort to interest an increasing number of allies, which depends directly on the technical choices carried out. So he must be willing to see his project evolve with the successive "interessements" that are tried out. The innovation will be successful when it stabilizes an acceptable arrangement between all the stakeholders. (Akrich, Callon, & Latour, 1988a, 1988b)

The interessement usually goes through several translation operations. It means to create convergence between actors with diverging interests, so that gradually, a joint system is built. One of the first translation operations consists of problematising the change. This effectively takes shape in a particular context and responds to a problem, to the need to do things differently. It is therefore a question for the actors concerned of reaching agreement on the definition of the "problem", a necessary step (a "compulsory point of passage") to trigger the

stirring into motion and mobilisation of the actors. Once there is convergence on the problematisation, a project of change can be discussed. It is a question of a new translation operation in the process. It is generally at this stage that the choices must be made and the priorities defined, which makes the operation trickier.

If translation is one of the pillars of the process of change for the authors of innovation sociology, enrolment is another equally important one. It amounts to involving all parties with an interest in the project and giving them a precise role which makes sense for each of them. If enrolment is successful, the actors will be genuinely motivated for the project.

In this model, choosing the spokespersons who will interact is a crucial element. "Since innovation moves, via the reactions which it provokes, from negotiation to negotiation and from redefinition to redefinition, everything depends on the identity of the protagonists who are mobilized (…)" (translated from Akrich et al., 1988b: 24). The innovator must constantly assess the people he meets. This is why the decisions are frequently accompanied by accusations aimed to distinguish between the legitimate, representative spokespersons and those who are not. These accusations sustain the numerous controversies which pepper the innovation process. They allow the innovator to establish his decisions or to explain his success or failure after the event. (Akrich et al., 1988a, 1988b)

We think actor-network theory can allow us to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the territorial governance modes and so explain the more or less quick, the more or less favourable evolution of the projects. In order to define any reorganisation project appearing on a territory, it invites us to ask several questions:

- Is there a consensus on the problem to solve? In other words, do the stakeholders share a same vision of the situation and of the territory?

- Is there a consensus on the actions to undertake?

- Have all the stakeholders of the territorial reorganisation been identified?

- Have they been enrolled in the reorganisation process?

We will try to answer these questions for each territory concerned by Arcelor's restructuring.

METHOD

Our study falls into the scope of an exploratory research and mobilizes a qualitative approach. It aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the modes of governance observed in three territories confronted with the announcement of the closure of the hot phase by Arcelor. In the face of this news, these three territories have initiated, reinforced or redirected some reorganisation or conversion projects. In order to define the different facets of the dynamics in these territories, we have decided to distinguish actors who clearly positioned themselves regarding this announcement from the actions that were concretely undertaken following this event. Our sample of interviewees formed itself as the study advanced, on the basis of the information gathered during the interviews (snowball sampling in accordance with the saturation principle). We have conducted sixteen semi-directive interviews with the main actors. In parallel, we have also carried out a significant amount of documentary research. Numerous press articles have enabled us to increase the validity of the information collected and to retrace the controversies stemming from the reorganisation initiatives presented here. We insist that the aim of our study is not to describe all the current projects in the region of

Liège. It concentrates on actions formally initiated, reinforced or redirected after the Arcelor's announcement of restructuring.

The collected data have been organised according to the contextualist framework of analysis, developed by Pettigrew (1985). The specificity of contextualism is to apprehend change processes without considering them as successive events, with a beginning and with an end clearly identifiable. The focus is more on explaining the mechanisms and the processes through which change has appeared. Therefore, the stress is on the conditions under which change appears, the precedents that give sense to it, while tracing the way it lives on, alters or even disappears. Resorting to the contextualist framework of analysis leads us to take three key concepts into account: the content of the projects and actions that are carried out on the territories, the context in which the territorial dynamics come and the process through which they evolve.

CASE STUDIES

1. THE SERAING REGION

1.1. The territory

Seraing is a Belgian town situated in the Walloon Region, within the province de Liège. The town of Seraing, which comprises a little over 60,000 inhabitants, experienced during the last two centuries a remarkable industrial boom. At the time of the industrial revolution, the combination of coal resources and a waterway encouraged numerous industrialists to set up factories in the Meuse valley in or near Seraing. Up until a few decades ago, this 'Steel City'

was a prosperous industrial town with a strong cultural identity. Today, the area regarded as "Seraing town" itself can be described as an 'at-risk' urban centre. Its population is in decline and in a worrying economic situation. An unemployment rate of 22.3% puts it in tenth worst place out of all 262 Walloon municipalities. In terms of jobs, the breakdown is of course strongly marked by the steel production sector, which accounts for 42% of private employment, compared with just 8% for other types of industry. One specific characteristic of Seraing is its geographical and socioeconomic duality, between the "upper" and "lower" towns.

"Upper" Seraing is residential areas situated on the upper hillsides, close to the university campus and its science park. They are home to an affluent population composed of numerous senior citizens in the higher income bracket and younger middle-class households of a larger size. There are numerous flourishing private estates and shopping centres.

"Lower" Seraing is in contrast a mainly industrial area located where an even more disadvantaged area, due to large-scale industrialisation and dilapidated housing, has been dubbed "the Seraing Valley". This 800 ha area is divided up into numerous industrial zones where the steelmaking activities have left a strong imprint on the landscape. The Arcelor sites there which will soon close their gates take up over half of the surface area. The industrial infrastructure is entangled with residential areas and the industrial transit flow is mixed with the urban flow. It is there that the last active blast furnace can be found, along with "all the social problems in the world" (unemployment, insecurity, dilapidated dwellings, isolation, loss of a sense of a place in society, lack of prospects, dietary and health shortcomings, etc…).

1.2.   The key players

1.2.1.   The town of Seraing

For 20 years, the town of Seraing has sought to take the path of conversion and the creation of a new territorial identity by banking primarily on the development and extension of its science park, a location combining research, new technology and cutting-edge training, and the urban renovation of Seraing centre and neighbouring municipalities.

Moreover, the census statistics show that Seraing town is shedding inhabitants (67,000 inhabitants in 1977, 60,527 in 2003). However, if the population falls below 60,000 for the 2006 census, it will lose its "Major Town" status. This would have significant financial consequences for Seraing such as, for example, the removal of the €4m Federal Plan subsidy which has been paying the action in respect of the strategic plan for the town. It is essential therefore for Seraing to implement a dynamic that encourages its present inhabitants stay and new ones to arrive.

1.2.2.   The AREBS

The AREBS, or Association pour le Redéploiement Economique du Bassin Sérésien, has just celebrated its twentieth anniversary. It was founded by the then burghermeister of the Town of Seraing using own funds, by way of a response to the major steel industry crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Its current activities are structured around two major themes : the economic development in the Liège region and the strategic plan for the town of Seraing

(urban conversion and requalification). The association's board of directors is made up of the burghermeister, aldermen and municipal councillors of Seraing. The AREBS has been given a mandate by the town of Seraing to rethink the mid to long-term development of the region and to propose a guide plan called "Master Plan".

1.2.3. The RCA

As a result of the development of certain factors, it was decided recently that the AREBS would be split into two separate structures. Its activities linked to economic development would remain within the current structure, while its regional development activities would become the responsibility of a public interest body called the RCA, or Régie Communale Autonome. Essentially, in accordance with article 263bis of the new municipal law, a royal decree limitatively determines the activities of a commercial and industrial nature for which the municipal council can create an autonomous municipal enterprise with legal status. Consequently, it will from now on be the Seraing RCA that will take over the role of the AREBS and be responsible for managing all aspects or urban requalification in the Seraing Valley, most notably joining forces with private partners for the realisation of projects.

1.2.4. The GESS

Formed in 2004, the GESS, or Groupe d'Economie Sociale Sérésien, is an informal interest group, without any official institutional structure, made up of companies which subscribe to the social economy. It currently consists of a dozen or so social economy enterprises situated in Seraing, who have decided to join forces with the primary aim of involving the social economy enterprises (more precisely the disadvantaged population found in the territory) in

the conversion work in the area. This essentially amounts to job-based training companies and professional integration companies, i.e. mainly cooperatives and associations whose priority is, just like any traditional company, output, but also the reintegration in the world of work of disadvantaged job-seekers. Several institutional tools have supported the creation of this Group, within the AREBS. The companies on this network function mainly on a partnership basis with the institutions at the basis of its creation and/or local or regional institutions.

1.2.5. Optim@

The Optim@ association was founded in January 2001 on the basis of an initiative of the Maison Médicale, a space reserved for health, functioning at a fixed rate, i.e. not asking for any financial contributions from the patients registered. It works in the Seraing Valley, one of the most disadvantaged industrial districts. Centred right from the outset on social and health issues, this association seeks to offer a practical response to the detection of deterioration in the social fabric of the area. Its current roles cover three specific areas of activity : the socio-professional training of people with few qualifications, housing and health. Optim@ functions on the basis of a vast network of partners currently numbering more than 60 organisations. Originally born out of the social and health action (CPAS, contraception collectives, ONE neonatal care centres, etc.), this network has gradually expanded to involve other social actors in its missions: contributors from schools, training and professional integration bodies (local employment agency, the AREBS, regional employment mission, professional integration companies, …), from culture and housing (Seraing cultural centre, various non-profit associations, neighbourhood committees, etc.). Optim@ aims to be cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary and mixed, combining public and association parties. The intention of the

association is to offer an integrated approach to the region's problems, involving the parties concerned, i.e. the residents, the professional contributors and the political decision-makers.

Optim@ does not receive structural funding from Seraing town council but obtains the majority of its subsidies at other institutional levels : the European Social Fund, the French Community, and the Walloon Region, as they are able to approach the fields of Education, Economy and Employment, as well as Health and Social Affairs. Since 2002, Optim@ has been increasingly developing around the concept of Territorial Intelligence and collaborates to the REIT, the Belgian Territorial Intelligence Network.

1.3.   Initiatives

1.3.1. The Master Plan or the requalification of the Seraing Valley

The "Master Plan" is supposed to be a guide plan, which should constitute the common thread of all the urban transformation activities. In 2001, aware of the problematic socio-economic situation of their region, the local authorities of Seraing authorised the AREBS association to carry out a diagnosis of economic activity, population and housing. This data collected and analysed gave rise to the formation of reflection groups on various themes (development of the region, urban regeneration, training, social economy, communication, funding, culture, etc.) in order to work towards the renewal of the town of Seraing. These groups are made up of a member of the AREBS, an Arcelor manager, members of the general directorate of land, housing and heritage of the Walloon Region Ministry, etc. From this came the definition of the so-called "Seraing Valley" area mentioned above. The aim was to work on the existing situation and on the region's assets (called the "non-variants" of the Master Plan) and to rely

on public participation. On top of these Urban workshops, each week, the AREBS continues to inform small groups of Seraing residents free of charge and in a friendly manner reminiscent of 'Tupperware parties'.

Selected via a European invitation to tender and lead by the AREBS, the study team in charge of the "Master Plan" set up a skills consortium enabling the town to equip itself with a territorial development plan which also envisaged the notions of the cost in terms of development, pollution reduction and construction, together with the impact on municipal finances. In May 2005, the College of Aldermen and Seraing Town Council ratified the phase 1 of the urban planning study on the Seraing Valley. Phase 2 of the study has been more focussed on the priority actions, the "urban sequences". The results were presented in May 2006 to local and regional stakeholders. Overseen up to now by the AREBS, the continuity of its implementation will now be orchestrated by the RCA, the Régie Communale Autonome de Seraing.

1.3.2. Positioning of the social economic actors on reconstruction market

The imminent extinction of the Arcelor hot phase steel manufacturing operation, together with the vast urban regeneration enterprise being triggered by the town of Seraing in its valley, are going to generate a first wave of important work of which the scale, over the coming years, is staggering... This is the reason why the local social economy enterprises do not want to be outdone. They want the population to be able to participate in the renewal of its region. In order to reach this objective, 2 paths are being studied within the GESS.

The first focuses on encouraging the conversion's public operators (Seraing Town Council, the Régie Communale Autonome , etc.) to insert social clauses in their notice of public works by virtue of which parts of these contracts will be reserved, directly or in subcontracting, for social economy enterprises.

The second aims to raise awareness among the conversion's private operators (most notably Arcelor and its contractors, as well as the property promoters) regarding the possibility of entrusting the execution of certain work, directly or through subcontracting, to Seraing's social economy enterprises.

1.3.3. Health observatory and actions for the reconstruction of social link

The actions described below all apply to one of the most highly deprived district of the Seraing's Valley. According to their initiators, they should be understood as a global, participative and cross-sectoral initiative that targets the community development of the region. They have the aim of decompartmentalising the intervention of the professionals on the ground by creating synergies, initiating dialogue between all of the parties present in the region and promoting, as much as possible, the residents of this area by mobilising them around their own resources and leading them to become fully-fledged actors in the process. These collective projects are designed to create a social link of solidarity between the communities present, whether professional or otherwise. These actions were defined by the different institutional partners on the basis of the results of the territorial diagnosis carried out in collaboration with the socio-medical professionals of the district and coordinated by the body that would later officially become Optim@.

The initial aim of the health observatory was to mobilise a local partnership comprising social and medical professionals around an exploratory observation of the region. The first stage consisted of the development of a common data collection guide by the parties on the ground from among their users. The indirect objective was to create a common language within the community of socio-medial professionals, and common identification of the problems encountered on the ground and the tools available to solve them.

The community actions concern the social reintegration and revitalisation of the residents of this severely threatened industrial district and are aimed at mobilising the resources present in this region through a fully participative approach between the professionals and citizens. Their objective is the improvement of the social and health environment of these disadvantaged persons by tackling their most sensitive problems: health, combating isolation, housing, disengagement with school, etc.. It is principally a case of festive events (tasting of mulled wine, organisation of a feast of Saint Nicolas, a sporting afternoon, etc.) for the district during which the inhabitants can intermingle. It is from here that the idea was also born of a Resource Centre and a community laundry, which is dealt with in the following point.

It is important to note that all this takes place in an entirely informal and voluntary manner. These initiatives are based on the making available of resources and equipment by different contacts (citizens, municipalities, associations, etc.). The aim is above all interaction, the realisation that the district possesses resources and that the community that lives in a collective region has identical roots and a common future.

In parallel with the abovementioned efforts to reconstruct the social fabric, the members of Optim@ have conducted a "Job placement" action in the Seraing area in conjunction with

several training operator partners. The aim is to structure the social and health support provided to the disadvantaged unemployed person with the support linked to his socio-professional reintegration, thereby working in the longer term to make the position permanent and improve well-being.

2. THE BASSE-MEUSE REGION

2.1. The territory

While Seraing is generally regarded as the historic heart of the Liège steel industry, the Basse-Meuse region, with its imposing blast furnaces, has also known a glorious past but has unfortunately also been hit with full force by the current restructuring being carried out by Arcelor. Indeed, the Chertal site, located in the municipality of Oupeye, between the Meuse and the Albert Canal, will close its gates in 2009, resulting in the disappearance of 1,200 direct jobs and a significant loss to the municipal coffers (around €6,200,000).

In contrast to Seraing, the Basse-Meuse region is not entirely built around the steel industry, although Arcelor is an important employer there. The region has been able to rely on other "assets" by managing to preserve its natural resources which have allowed it to make a name for itself in the fruit-growing sector. It also benefits from a strategic position, close to the Euregional borders and the water, rail and motorway access routes. Notable among these is the Albert Canal, an artificial waterway designed for navigation. For its development, Basse-Meuse can still count on the Hauts-Sarts industrial zone and the presence of some renowned companies (Techspace Aéro, CBR Ciment, la FN, etc.).

An important project for the region, which started earlier to the closure of Chertal and still in negotiation for the moment is aimed at creating a multimodal platform (water-train-road) downstream of Chertal, the "TriLogiPort". Unfortunately, the necessary funds have not yet been fully collected and the residents are, so far, opposed to the project.

2.2. The key actor

The Basse-Meuse Développement association

In December 2004, the Basse-Meuse Développement association (BMD) was officially created on the initiative of three municipalities. A fourth municipality concerned by the association's missions has rapidly been added. The driving force behind this project is the burghermeister of one of the municipality. He currently chairs the association. Alongside him sit the burghermeisters of the three others areas. These municipalities are not equal from the point of view of their socioeconomic situation. The indicator represented by unemployment rates, for example, varies widely between 16.3% and 25.5%.

A newcomer to the conversion dynamic, the association wishes to make Basse-Meuse's voice heard within the context of the economic reorganisation of Liège. In practical terms, its aim is to create and maintain jobs in the Basse-Meuse region. From this perspective, its primary missions will be to coordinate the existing tools, facilitate the development of businesses and to give the Basse-Meuse area visibility. According to the BMD director, the tools exist but are underused. Whereas 70% of the projects supported are proving successful, only 25% of those carrying out projects are receiving support. It is therefore necessary to facilitate access to this support.

The BMD is also notable for its "joint" method of functioning, based on a public-private partnership. As a result of this, in October 2005, 50 companies and institutions joined the association. Alongside the fifteen political representatives on the management committee, fifteen posts are reserved for private companies and three are occupied by local associations.

2.3. The initiatives

2.3.1. Production of a study on the development of the region

Where the achievements of the BMD are concerned, very quickly, once the bodies had been put in place, a central question was posed : how could a shared vision of the region and its development be obtained when the area concerned covers four different towns?

From this perspective, the association asked the SEGEFA, a laboratory of the geography department of the Liège University, to produce a summary of the different development plans produced or in progress (SDEL, mobility plans, structural diagrams, etc.) in order to study, on this basis, the strategic development themes for Basse-Meuse. The aim is to create the conditions for the harmonious and balanced development of economic activity.

Completed in March 2006, the study seems to have achieved part of its goal, since it has stimulated an important debate within the community. However, it turns out that, while everyone concurs with the diagnosis made, the themes for development are far from being the subject of a consensus. An urban planning study similar to that carried out by the AREBS could soon be launched.

2.3.2. Upgrading of the service in terms of employment aid

The association also plans to open an job centre in Basse-Meuse, providing services to all persons affected by a employment or training problems. It is also working on the creation of a partnership with the AREBS to develop a tool to aid the creation of activity and employment in the Basse-Meuse region, as was the case for Seraing.

It should however be pointed out that these employment aid structures are not of an innovative nature and have long been present in the entire Grand Liège region (Seraing, Liège, etc.). It nonetheless seems important for us to highlight this initiative insofar as it has been presented to us as resulting directly from a raising of awareness stimulated by the imminent closure of the Chertal site.

3. THE GRAND LIÈGE REGION

3.1. The territory

The province of Liège is situated in the east of Belgium, in the Walloon Region, and possesses borders with Luxembourg, Germany and the Netherlands. It numbers 1,029,605 inhabitants across 84 municipalities. Although this province was a very early industrial city, the service sector currently accounts for 80% of jobs, with the public sector outweighing the private sector. Liège city is not only the administrative centre of the province, but also a major educational centre and a leading administrative centre.

It is generally acknowledged that "Liège town made a mess of its municipalities merge" in early seventies. By joining forces with the neighbouring municipalities with which it forms a living unit, Liège could have reached just short of 450,000 inhabitants, which would have given it a critical weight in the regional, national and European landscapes and brought the benefit of much greater resources. Instead of this, one can observe the poor location and duplication of facilities and public investment, a significant imbalance in the financial flows to the detriment of the conurbation due to costs of centrality, and the relocation of populations and economic activity from the central municipalities to the outlying ones. Furthermore, the Liège region is home to around seventy closely or distantly linked economic coordination structures. Their actions are cross-referenced without coordination or consultation, and are sometimes even in competition with each other. The proliferation of actions in the Province of Liège is also linked to regional and/or local political personality's clashes and "baronies" which fragment the region. These personal conflicts are particularly detrimental to the Liège reorganisation.

The Liège region does not escape the trends that characterise the wider Walloon region, such as rising unemployment, increasing poverty and the ageing of the active population. These elements nevertheless have particular resonance in the region, for as a former industrial centre undergoing conversion, Liège also has to deal with numerous specific difficulties connected with a high density of population.

Alongside these not very cheering observations, the Liège region also displays some significant advantages. Its geographical location (at the heart of the Meuse-Rhine Euregio) and the boom in multimodal transport (combination of modes of transport by road, rail, air and water) make it a region attractive to investors and propitious to the creation of industrial

estates. A motorway hub, Liège is effectively an obligatory passage point to the Netherlands, Germany and all of Central Europe. It possesses the third biggest European river port, in direct contact with the maritime ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam. It also boasts a booming international freight centre and will soon be ideally situated at the centre of the Paris-Brussels-Berlin rail axis courtesy of the imminent completion of the TGV lines. Today already, Liège also benefits from a first-class place in the logistics and transport sector. Moreover, the region has developed expertise in the field of biotechnology and spatial engineering. Other sectors are under development, such as the environment and water, as well as cold steel production and composite or coated materials.

3.2. The key player

The GRE-Liège

The GRE-Liège, or Groupement de Redéploiement Economique (Economic Reorganisation Group) for the Liège region, is an association created in June 2004 as a result of the announcement of the closure of a section of Arcelor's steelmaking operation. It's a response to a demand from the trade unions, for which the conversion and regional development was one of the priority planks of the negotiations. Their wish was to have a single actor, an integrator who would unite the different political and economic actors. Initially, the GRE's remit was to verify the implementation of Arcelor's commitments. Rapidly, it was widened to include the coordination of the entire region's reorganisation. For its director of operations, there was no point bringing together so many political and socioeconomic personalities to do what a joint steering committee was doing elsewhere. The GRE aims to rally Liège's powers-that-be, whether economic, social or political (to carry out activity in terms of regional

development, in consultation with the public authorities (municipalities, province) and the different property bodies, to ensure the promotion of the Liège region's image, to be a space for the reception and guidance of economic projects with the potential to create employment). The GRE-Liège's remit is to play a role of integrator for future investors.

It is the GRE management board that has the responsibility of defining the strategies and orientations to be followed for the reorganisation of the region. It has been enlarged every year since its creation and currently numbers… 36 members, including numerous personalities from the main democratic parties of the political world, two trade union bodies, together with the technology industry federation and the body responsible for the regeneration of the Arcelor sites. From this decision-making body comes the Executive Committee, made up of four ministers and the chairman of the Walloon Union of Liège Companies. It also has permanent staff at its disposal, which carries out the coordination of the actions and is responsible for implementing the missions assigned to the GRE-Liège. It acts under the responsibility of a board of Directors, composed of three Liège personalities from the socioeconomic world and responsible for developing the economic operational strategy. The GRE also brings together a certain number of "partners"". The main partners in the Liège redevelopment have their representative in the offices of the GRE. Lastly, the association is supported in its missions by a committee of experts made up of industrialists and scientists. These are responsible for shedding light on the projects and strategic orientations which will then be submitted to the executive committee.

The GRE has also been invited to take part in the discussions surrounding the majority of the innovative and/or reorganisation projects of a certain scale currently in progress in the Liège region. This is the case, for example, for the GIGA project, a centre of excellence in

biotechnology in the field of genoproteomics, and for the project concerning the developments resulting from the construction of the new Liège-Guillemins train station. Visibly supported by the Walloon region's decision-making authorities, it is important to note that, at the start of 2006, within the framework of the Walloon Region recovery plan (Marshall Plan), the GRE-Liège was appointed as the official coordinator of the economic development actions in the Province of Liège.

3.3. Initiatives

3.3.1. The F – M report

On 28 June 2003, in response to a request from the trade union organisations within the framework of the negotiations with Arcelor, the "Avenir du Pays de Liège", an on-profit association with the aim of promoting and developing the Liège region association (whose chairman is today also chairman of the GRE-Liège) decided to create within its structure a working group responsible for coordinating the implementation of a conversion plan to be established for the area affected by the closure of the hot steelmaking plants. The management board also decided to entrust, to the minister for regional development, urban planning and the environment, as well as to the Seraing burghermeister at the time, an exploratory mission designed to gather the views and suggestions of the main public or private actors in Liège.

During the next fifteen weeks, the ministers and their staff held a series of meetings and, on 1 December 2003, they submitted their report to the l'Avenir du Pays de Liège association. It demonstrated strong convergence in the views expressed by the different contacts. "The conviction is very widely shared that the Liège region possesses the assets to succeed, and

that the people of Liège have the necessary abilities and resources. But they will only succeed if they manage to make decisions, to coordinate their actions, to take advantage of all the synergies between them. This warning would also be addressed several times to the key players in Liège's regional development, most notably through the Liège 2020 report, which will be covered in one of the following points. The authors also underline that Liège's reorganisation goes much further than the problem of the closure of the hot steel plants, the element regarded to have triggered a beneficial jolt and reaction. The report also recommends the development of a common frame of reference for all the initiatives.

3.3.2. The SDEL (Liège economic development scheme)

The SDEL, or the Liège economic development scheme, resulted from an idea taken from the F-M report. It applies to a wider scale and covers the eight municipalities of the Meuse Valley. It has no legal power and cannot therefore be regarded as a prescriptive tool. However, it is inspired by the existing normative tools of the SDER (regional development scheme) and the SSC (municipal structure scheme). Its objective is the same: to express development options for a chosen future timeframe (2010-2015). It is also based on the principle whereby the development of the region should provide a framework for economic development, but tries to find the right mid-point between the too limited municipal area and the overly vast regional area. It is a question of finding a "manageable" area where it is possible to develop an economic priority. The SDEL comprises a report, the definition of the study region, the predefinition of a territorial and economic reorganisation project and the establishment of a project for the region. It was produced between October 2003 and March 2004 by two consultancy firms, in collaboration with the office of the minister for regional development, urban planning and the environment. Local institutions, Arcelor and the

representatives of the municipal administrations concerned were also invited to take part in the working meetings.

The SDEL should have led to the support of all and guaranteed the cohesion of the region as a whole. However, this report today seems to have been shelved. Consequently, the municipalities, although invited to take part in the working meetings, contested the initiative, However, the aim was not to develop a definite plan but to stimulate dialogue, most notably between the municipalities, on the basis of concrete proposals. The local authorities, meanwhile, complain that they were not offered the conditions for genuine involvement.

3.3.3. The "Liège 2020" report

In 2002, a prospective study on the development of Liège was initiated by the SPI+, the economic development agency for the Province of Liège. For more than two years, thirty individuals from different backgrounds (business, unions, university, public bodies, etc.) focussed on the region's future under the supervision of Hugues de Jouvenel, director of the Futuribles group and a French prospective studies specialist. Although the study was launched before the announcement of the Liège hot phase steel works, this element formed an integral part of the reflection process.

In March 2005, the study was made public by means of a technical report (369 pages) and a summary (40 pages). Its diagnosis was not very surprising (slow socioeconomic collapse, dual dependence on declining heavy industry and public funds, relocation of the decision-making centres, absence of unifying projects and damaging personal conflicts). The prospective study

does not stop at making observations. It also identifies four future possibilities for the Liège region: two worst-case scenarios and two best-case scenarios.

3.3.4. Reflection groups and facilitation of the projects

Initially, the GRE took under its wing the organisation and coordination of several working groups originally instigated by the AREBS. Depending on the subject, these bring together the key individuals and bodies in the Liège region. However, the majority of these groups are beginning to reach their limits. At the request of the board of directors, their functioning should soon be reviewed, in order to have each project led by a project manager.

SYNTHESIS OF THE THREE TERRITORIES

	Seraing	Basse-Meuse	Grand Liège
Key players	- The town of Seraing - The AREBS - The RCA - The GESS - Optim@	- The Basse-Meuse Développement association	- The GRE-Liège
Initiatives	- The Master Plan or the requalification of the Seraing Valley - Positioning of the social economic actors on reconstruction market - Health observatory and actions for the reconstruction of social link	- Production of a study on the development of the region - Upgrading of the service in terms of employment aid	- The F – M report - The SDEL (Liège economic development scheme) - The "Liège 2020" report - Reflection groups and facilitation of the projects

DISCUSSION

Is there a consensus on the problem to solve?

It is interesting to note that in the three regions, Seraing, Basse-Meuse and Grand Liège, the process is starting with one (of the) study (or studies) aimed at making a diagnosis, which is in fact a problematisation of the change. In Seraing, the observations made by the urban planning study are recognised by all, politics, inhabitants, local associations,… In Basse-Meuse, nobody contests the summary produced by the SEGEFA. Effectively, the most important aspect of this project is to maintain a sense of spatial cohesion. Everybody agrees on the fact that the development should be centred primarily around the Albert Canal, the structural element of Basse-Meuse.

The dynamics of change in these two regions have therefore reached their first "compulsory point of passage", understood as a moment, a place or a statement marking a point of no return. In these two cases, a first translation operation has taken place. By creating or increasing the convergence of interests (whether agreement is implicit or explicit), these compulsory points of passage should allow the actors to go one step further in the conversion process.

In Grand Liège, conversely, there is no common definition of the problem. None of the studies carried out (F–M, SDEL, Liège 2020 studies) actually reach unanimity and cannot be regarded as the result of a problematisation. The studies' conclusions have always been contested by one or other actor, who has generally not been identified as such. For example,

the publication of the Liège 2020 report provoked a fair amount of controversy. Some, for example, commended it for its openness and plain-speaking approach. Other parties in Liège found it too theoretical, pushing an open door by recommending that the different actors in Liège get along together and be dynamic on a project, even in some way insulting. The criticism came also from uninvolved actors. Handed over to the GRE-Liège for its implementation, "Liège 2020" today seems to have been well and truly shelved.

Besides, the lack of legitimacy of the problematisation attempts also makes any appropriation by another actor difficult. For example, the GRE, of which the legitimacy remains to be established (and the creation of which cannot be regarded as an obligatory passage point) has not grasped the results of the prospective study. In the opposite, while the SDEL may not have had the effect anticipated, it is nevertheless possible to see, in the dynamic initiated by the City of Liège's alderman for urban planning, an indirect consequence of the work carried out for the SDEL. This alderman is currently working with all of the municipalities involved on a mobility plan for the Liège conurbation which appears to be stimulating greater union.

Is there a consensus on the actions to undertake?

Once there is convergence on the problematisation, a project of change can be discussed. It is indeed in this limbo that Basse-Meuse remains blocked: while everyone is in agreement on the diagnosis, the SEGEFA's recommendations are obviously causing controversy. The study seems to have stimulated an important debate within the community. However, it turns out that, while everyone concurs with the diagnosis made, the themes for development are far from being the subject of a consensus. This on of the reason why an urban planning study similar to that carried out by the AREBS could soon be launched.

In fact, Basse-Meuse is still seeking its second obligatory passage point, whereas Seraing is at a more advanced stage in the process: priority zones and actions have been defined and formally approved by the municipal council, and a second obligatory passage point can be seen there. Convergence on the dynamic being put in place in Seraing is also linked to the intense communication on the part of the AREBS. Through the different presentations, the urban workshops and the working groups, the AREBS is spreading a vocabulary specific to the initiative: "urban requalification", "Seraing Valley", "Master Plan", "conversion themes ", and "green casting" are all expressions which have been used by all the actors encountered in Seraing. This facilitates the appropriation of the project by its different stakeholders and this in turn contributes to the construction of a shared vision.

Beyond this vocabulary, there are numerous "investments of form" and "intermediates" circulating in Seraing. According to the theory, an investment of form is an agreement between parties on a simplified representation of reality. The intermediate is the tangible result of these choices, the circulation between the parties of the simplified form. The Master Plan is an example of this, particularly the slideshow used by the AREBS to present it. These documents help to give the different actors the same representation of the reality they are faced with. They circulate in different environments and serve as a basis for the debates. They have the effect of "binding" the network's different actors, solidifying the network, and keeping the actors gathered together on the network. The Master Plan is presented as a guide rather than a constraint. The authorities aim to make this Master Plan a genuine negotiation tool, most notably in respect of industrialists, private promoters and also neighbouring municipalities. For example, the programme was presented in March of this year at the international property fair (MIPPIM) in Cannes (France), with the aim of forging contacts at

international level and "selling Seraing" there to potential investors in order to stimulate private/public partnerships.

Concerning the GRE, the presence of numerous ministers at the management board is regarded as an asset, in the sense that they are supposed to act as driving forces. They should give weight to the decisions taken by the GRE-Liège. Conversely, given the number of people around the table, reaching a consensus requires a particularly long gestation period. It is such a beefy system that it is sometimes described by its members as self-blocking. Moreover, since all of the different interest groups are represented in the structure, the body does not face any real counter-power. This deprives it of external stimulation and increases the effect of inertia. The presence of a committee of experts is certainly a strong point, but one wonders to what extent its recommendations are followed by the management board.

Have the stakeholders been identified *and* enrolled in the territorial reorganisation process?

In Seraing, the absence of controversy let us think that no actor has been left aside. Besides, each actor present in the region finds meaning in the town's requalification. Each has a precise role: the AREBS is responsible for stimulating the creation of companies and improving the development of the territory. To do this, it is regularly in contact with Arcelor Real Estate Belgium, of which the role is to prepare and implement the cleansing of the land no longer being used by Arcelor. Optim@ and the social economy enterprises via the GESS are also participating in the town's requalification, with a role which is exclusive to them. The Régie Communale Autonome and the future property investors will also have an interest and

a role in the project. The actions are implemented without competition, courtesy of a process of institutional meshing.

Conversely, the harsh controversies surrounding the successive initiatives on the territory of the Grand Liège seem to indicate a flaw in the identification of the stakeholders and in "the art of choosing the good spokepersons". The criticisms expressed by the outsiders can be regarded as rival translations or ones diverging from the problem. They have even led, at several occasions, to the dismantling of the network which was being built around the change on the territory of the Grand Liège. The aim of the GRE, which present its numerous partners with a certain amount of pride, is however to motivate the different parties around a shared project. In actual fact, the partnerships remain confined to paper. In the absence of a unifying project, they cannot be entrusted with a role that makes sense for them. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the GRE in the region's socioeconomic landscape remains to be established. The association does not intend to superimpose other tools, but rather to structure the reflection process and integrate it in a more general setting, just as the AREBS has done in Seraing. Anyway, the association has been and still is the subject of considerable criticism (redundancy in relation to other institutions, for example, to the SPI+ and Meusinvest in particular, slowness of the projects, lack of efficiency, calling into question of its actual usefulness, etc.). It is also perceived as having dispossessed the existing actors of initiatives which they had carried out, without actually having moved these initiatives forward (reflection groups and Liège 2020 report, SDEL, etc.…).

Returning to the SDEL's initiative, its failure can be attributed to the municipalities' failed enrolment. They were invited to take part in the initiative, but as they didn't find their interests there, they could not see any meaning in the role being given to them in the project.

It was as well the case for the Liège 2020 report. Main criticisms also came from uninvolved actors : the burghermeister of Liège was surprised that the city had not been included in the reflections and the authorities of an other potentially relevant city of the province de Liège adjudged that the authors ignored their region.

Concerning the Basse-Meuse region, the initiative carried on this territory has not been the target of criticisms form forgotten partners There is no doubt that the diversity of the members present on the management board is positive as regards the richness of the debate it stimulates. Remember that the association involved municipalities (three then a fourth, ignored at the beginning, but that appears quickly relevant for the problematic), companies, etc. Nevertheless, it does make reaching a consensus difficult, even if it is only on this condition that the implementation of actions will be facilitated. The underlying idea of the Basse-Meuse association is to give the region overall coherence. In other words, it is necessary to operate in such a way that the members can see beyond their own interests, which is not easy when municipalities all wish to encourage the construction of homes rather than business premises on their land, so as to maximise their fiscal revenue. Unfortunately, as we already said, there is no consensus yet on the actions to undertake, which prevents by definition the real enrolment of the numerous partners displayed by the association Basse-Meuse Développement.

Translation sociology also shows that the success of the innovation depends on the capacity to widen the network to other interest groups. This makes it more solid, insofar as its core is there already. They dynamic of change in Seraing illustrates a movement from the centre to the periphery: the project motivates the municipality, the AREBS, and then gradually, other actors attach themselves to the project: Optim@, the social economy enterprises via the

GESS, etc. It is true that Optim@, as a relative newcomer to the Seraing region, is still seeking legitimacy. However, the association has set itself the ambition of becoming a fully-fledged actor in the reorganisation of Seraing, in conjunction with the other actors present in the region. In this way, it wishes to complement the work of AREBS, by adding a social and health reorganisation dimension to the economic and urban reorganisation.

In contrast, the GRE and Basse-Meuse Développement are seeking legitimacy by incorporating as many representatives as possible from different interest groups into their structure from the outset. This can be understood as premature enlargement, as it does not depend on a minimum degree of convergence around a project. This convergence risks being even more difficult to achieve subsequently, in view of the multitude of contributors. For example, The creation of the GRE has been the subject of lengthy negotiations. The presence of numerous ministers is regarded as an asset, in the sense that, given the number of people around the table, they act as driving forces. Conversely while the management board and executive committee, made up of sa many heavyweight personalities, gives a certain force to the decisions taken by the GRE-Liège, these decisions require a particularly long gestation period. For some actor, this body becomes sometimes self-blocking does not face any real counter-power. Moreover, while the board was initially supposed to meet every three months, it met in May 2006 for only the second time since its creation. It is important to note as well that the main partners in the Liège redevelopment have their representative in the offices of the GRE. This intentionally symbolic geographical grouping was shown as a better coordination of the actions.

CONCLUSION

Through this analysis, we hope to have shown the interest of actor-network theory for understanding territorial reorganisation dynamics. The questions raised by this theory seem relevant to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the modes of governances that are applied on territories. These questions can not be tackled without taking the internal and external context in which they evolve into account. As the actor-network theorists show, any innovation presupposes an environment which is favourable towards it (Akrich et al., 1988b). However, this context can not be considered as the unique structuring factor of territorial reorganisation dynamics. The way the actors will manage change, the choices they will make in terms of territorial governance, can make the difference.

In this respect, the question of the appropriate territorial scale is especially important. From the perspective of actor-network theory, there is no scale to recommend a priori. Everything depends on the actors who feel they are part of the change. To identify them is the only way to delimit a perimeter that makes sense. Of course, the more the territory will be heterogeneous, the more the differences in the representations and in the interests will be strong, the more obtaining a consensus will be difficult, for the definition of the problem as well as for the actions to undertake. In this context, the possibilities to mobilize the actors around a common project are reduced, which explains in some extent the difficulties faced by the Basse-Meuse and especially by the Grand Liège, compared to the territory of Seraing.

Far from the ready-made solutions, actor-network theory offers some general guidelines to manage change processes such as those aimed at the development of territories. In a way,

these principles form the foundations of a territorial governance territory, which presents nevertheless some limits. Indeed, the processes it studies are marked by such unpredictability that no method, even the most sophisticated, could allow to fully control their evolution.

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