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Arrangement



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# Manual of best practices for a blended flexible training activity in architecture for higher education institutions



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This volume returns the results of the Intellectual Output 03 of the research project "ArchéA. Architectural European Medium-sized City Arrangement", with the aim of analyzing and restating the state of the art achieved in the field of flexible mixed training in architecture, strongly encouraged by the emergency period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The result is a collection of good practices carried out internally and externally to the ArchéA partner network, in the context of higher education institutions, made possible by new virtual tools capable of mediating teaching and mixed and flexible learning around the disciplines related to the project.

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# Manual of best practices for a blended flexible training activity in architecture for higher education institutions

edited by Enrico Prandi and Paolo Strina

**Analysis of the Best Practices**

*Call for papers*

Marie Chabrol, Anne Portnoï and Gabriella Trotta-Brambilla  
**Experimenting with a multi-partnership educational project  
 in Cherbourg-en-Cotentin (in the department of la Manche,  
 France)**

*Higher National School of Architecture of Normandy, France*



**Fig.01** The town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin surrounded by its territory [cartography by students from the ENSAPLV : Cléa Behna, Pacôme Brac, Lou Goiran, Lise Monnier]

**Fig.02** Perimeter of the project to revitalise the territory (*Opération de revitalisation de territoire* or ORT) [for the town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, created by : Service SIG I © Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, May 2019 ]

As winner of the state-run program “*Action Cœur de Ville*”, the town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin has made revitalising its town centre one of its priorities. The scheme proposes concrete measures to boost the sustainable revitalisation of the town centre, giving it a more attractive image. This includes focusing in particular on the redevelopment of old housing and shops, as well as on the conversion of emblematic buildings, a part of the town’s heritage, through innovative programs in the cultural and tertiary sectors. The project also aims to rethink the layout of public spaces, improving the accessibility of the town centre for all modes of transport and implementing an integrated system for water management.

In this context, the *Écoles Nationales Supérieures d’Architecture* (National Schools of Architecture) of Normandy and Paris-La Villette were invited to take part in a collaborative process, allowing the stakeholders of the territory to take a step back from the institutional approaches of their respective organisations and giving the students access to a different kind of expertise from that of the teachers-researchers who run the urban and architectural project workshops in the schools. The partnership, financed by three partners from the territory (the town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, the *Secrétariat Général pour les Affaires Régionales* (SGAR) and the *Établissement public foncier de Normandie* (EPFN)) was also an opportunity to initiate a dynamic relationship between the two architecture schools. This relationship developed over two years and involved different years in the Master’s de-gree program (semesters 7 and 9, and students working on their final year project) and different fields of study (“Architecture, Cities and Territories” and “Transform” at the ENSA Normandie, and “Living

in urban spaces” at the ENSA Paris-La Villette). The project workshops at school thus participated in the reflection on urbanisation carried out by local partners, within the framework of the national *Action Cœur de Ville* program, both by questioning how to improve the living conditions of inhabitants of medium-sized towns and also by analysing the specificities of the coastal town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, “a territory forged by its maritime history”. The town has a diversified and dynamic economy, but sometimes suffers from a poor image which thus reduces the attractiveness of the town centre, limiting the positive effects of a demographically and economically favourable situation. (Figure 01-02)

The objectives of the two school workshops were defined jointly by all the partners. These objectives can be listed as follows:

- make students aware of the current issues raised by the *Action Cœur de Ville* program, and also of the role of the different stakeholders in the transformation of the territories of medium-sized towns such as Cherbourg-en-Cotentin and, more broadly, of the issues surrounding sustainable urban development;
- reveal the qualities and potential of the territory of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin and more generally of medium-sized port towns;
- develop proposals for the modification and development of the town, also testing these proposals through projects located in the urban territory;
- communicate using the students’ contributions to help make all the inhabitants aware of the sustainable development challenges of their territory and initiating a debate on the future of the town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin.

Thanks to this partnership, the academic workshops

were able to be developed outside of the school context. Despite the restrictions due to the Covid health crisis, some of the discussions took place in situ during a first day on site, when students and teachers were able to take advantage of visits and presentations organised by the town, accompanied by the town's deputy mayor, the directors of various technical departments from the town council, as well as representatives of the SGAR and the EPFN. (Figure 03) Throughout the semester, there were also discussions on-line (conferences on the

themes of the *Action Cœur de Ville* program or on issues surrounding urban projects, round tables with councillors and technicians from the town council), allowing the students to understand the de-velopment of urbanisation projects from a different angle, other than that of land surveying in the town or talking to the stakeholders and inhabitants. (Figures 04) The on-line discussions were also a way of staying connected with the town which is located three hours away from the two schools. Talks were also organized so that the



**Fig.03** Conversation between Mr. Fagnen, the town council, the EPFN (*Établissement Public Foncier de Normandie*), the DDT (*Direction départementale des territoires*) and the students in the town hall meeting room [photo : Marie Chabrol]

students could discuss certain specific points of their projects with the people specifically in charge of the issues being addressed (such as housing, shops, heritage, etc.). The students also added to the key elements of knowledge on which they based their projects through the study of local urban planning documents, the use of digital tools (Google Earth and Street View, social networks) and brief visits on site, which they organised themselves.

Sanitary regulations made it impossible to set up the three-day workshop on site, initially scheduled for mid-semester. However, half-day round tables

were organised in order to allow discussions between the schools and the local stakeholders. The round tables, which took place on a specific video conference platform, are a revealing example of the development of new modes of interaction within the teaching framework.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and motivation of the town, but also because the meetings were held online and for a shorter duration than that initially planned, a lot of participants were able to meet on the same time slot. The students were able to present the outlines of their projects via videoconference to



**Fig.04** Land surveying with the town council and the DDTM (*Direction départementale des territoires et de la mer*) [photo : Gabriella Trotta-Brambilla]

six councillors and about twenty technicians and employees from the various institutions involved in the project, as well as to teachers from the two schools.

Three sub-groups were created to make the discussions easier and to help respect the available time slots, meaning that each of the three round tables was associated with a major theme and / or type of project:

- Round table 1 - "Historic city centre", focusing mainly on heritage (history and local identities) and economic issues (economic activity, facilities, shops), but also on different ways of living in dense city centres (types of urban forms, how the ground level of buildings are used, different uses for public spaces);
- Round table 2 - "Sustainable mobility and transport", concerning in particular the general organisation of public transport, the development of the strategic area of the station and the unused railways, the place given to cars in the city;
- Round table 3 - "Nature in the city", focusing in particular on strategies for urban resilience (the

transformation and management of flood-prone areas) and on the quality of public spaces in terms of the environment and the landscape, both on the coast (including the evolution of the port and its facilities) as well as in the historic city centre.

The format of the students' presentations was rigorously established, encouraging them to clearly synthesise their remarks in 10 minutes, with the help of ten A4 presentation sheets which were shared on the screen (these documents were then sent to the different stakeholders). Among other things, this allowed:

- to make a maximum amount of time available for discussion, allowing the students to confront the reality on the ground and to ask any questions they had with regard to the strategies outlined at this intermediate stage of the workshops;
- to deepen students' knowledge relating to the field, both directly through conversation and subsequently through documents sent by the departments concerned, as well as enabling them to know the points of view of the various stakeholders involved;
- to more quickly establish strategies for spatial

intervention.

Through formulating a problem relating to the particular situation of the territory of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin and having to meet the objectives set by the partners, the students acquired knowledge in fields which are not always taught in architecture schools in France (for example, natural and industrial risks, the rehabilitation of old buildings, how rights-of-way work in a port). The project was also an opportunity for students to better understand public policies and how local government works, helping them to get a better grasp of the architect's field of action.

Working on this assignment was a great way for students to understand the real nature of urban projects, the challenges of urban development in a particular context, the need to take into account existing buildings and also the complex knowledge and different points of view of the various stakeholders in urban transformation projects. At the same time, the students were also encouraged to take a step back from the discourse of each stakeholder, helping them to shape an independent opinion concerning the development of a project, based on spatial configurations but where a lot is at stake from a strategic point of view. It is a question of gradually building a vision together, and of knowing how to defend this vision of the transformation of the urban spaces involved, even if these have not (yet) been identified as sectors for the project. The students'

work will thus help the town to develop potential ideas for the future of this territory where there are multiple challenges. (figure 05-06)

The experience of the first semester with the students was followed by the town launching a certain number of studies (imagining the rehabilitation of an old cinema and opening up the facilities towards the centre of the housing block, development of the outdoor spaces of a large housing area in the centre of town, etc.). Another expectation of the project partners was that of allowing the students' work to be shown, making this educational experience visible and sharing it with the inhabitants of the territory. A summary of the work has been published as a book and was the subject of an exhibition supported by a local art gallery. The book and videos will also be posted on the Action coeur de ville program website. More than a simple educational experience, this project exemplifies good practice with regard to the *Action Cœur de Ville* program, further testifying to the attractiveness of the town of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin.

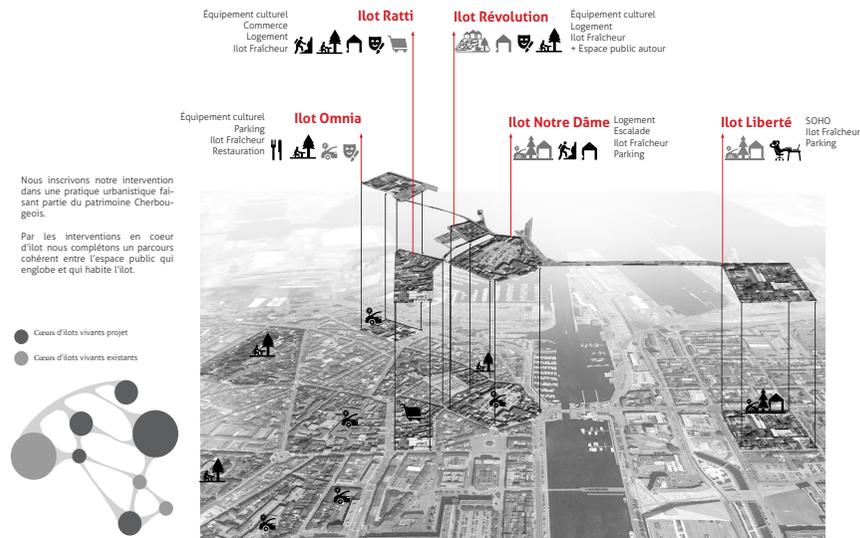


Fig.05 Network of housing blocks [Students from the ENSAPLV : Laurine Dacheux, Anabel Ginesta, Valentine Grandin, Annabelle Nantier, Carla Riccoboni]

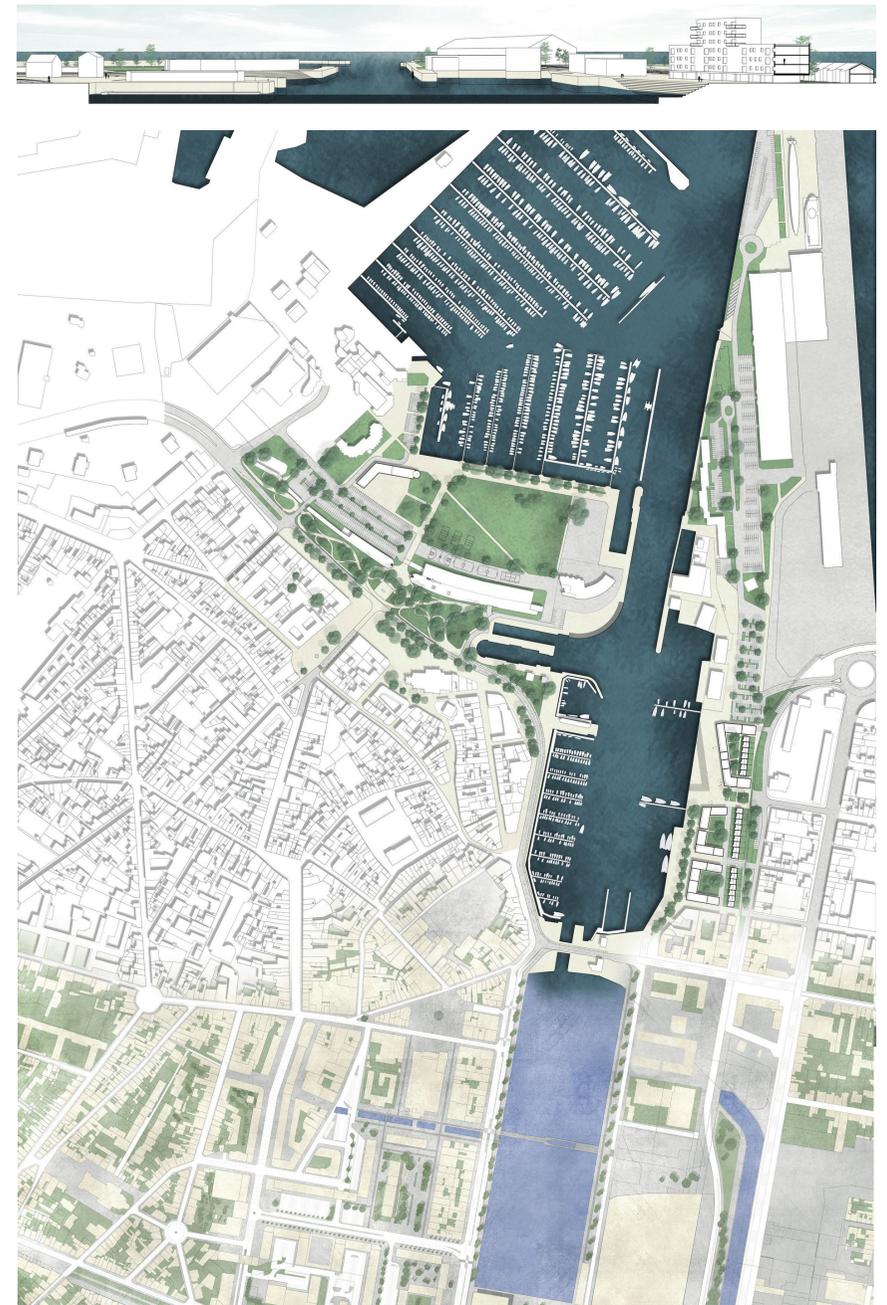


Fig.05 Map and guidebook « Autour des bassins portuaires » (Around the docks) [Students from the ENSAN: Timothé Bahu, Achraf Kherbouche, Mado Michot, Alexis Moello, Mahéva Puntis]