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Cultural heritage in a changing context

Design, a creator of connections. Territory, know-how and heritage in the Champagne region

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Abstract : This article presents a design project developed within the IDIS chair (ESAD de Reims) to reflect the ability of design to be simultaneously a research tool, a means of data collection and creator of connections. The article raises the question of the place and role of the designer not as a simple designer, but as a stakeholder in field research, offering insights on economic, social, environmental and heritage issues with all actors in the same territory, producing with a plastic and creative dimension which is also transformative - in the sense of transition.



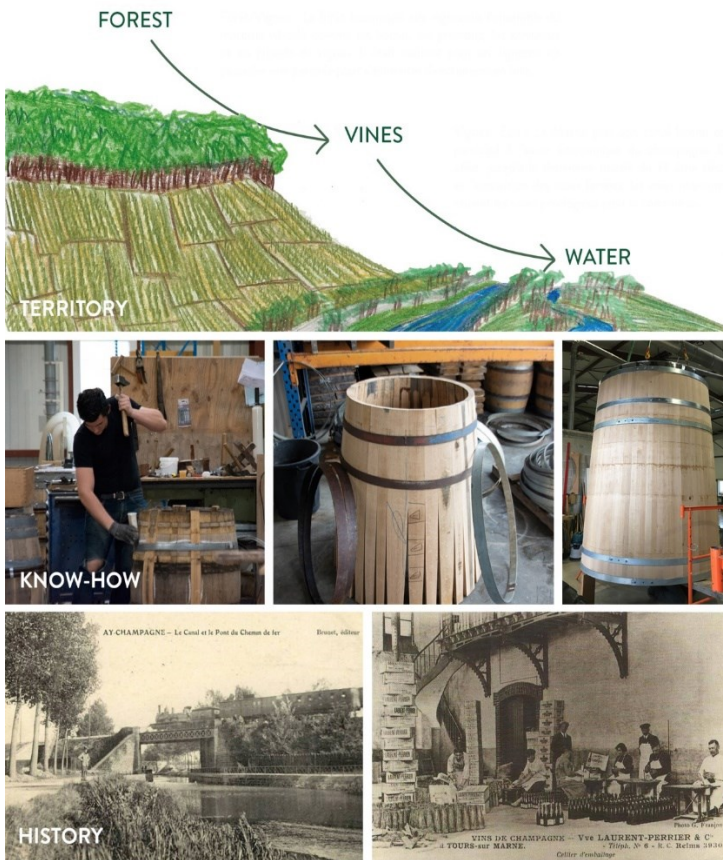
Since 2019, the IDIS chair (Industry, Design and Social Innovation) hosted by ESAD de Reims, has been interested in the specific ecosystems of the Regional Natural Parks (PNR) of the Grand Est region, whose role is to protect and enhance the natural, cultural and human heritage of its territory.

It is in this context that the *filière bois* (wood sector) project was developed. This has made it possible, within the Parc de la Montagne de Reims, to understand the close link that coexists between the forest, the vineyards and the water of a river, and the inclusion of cultural heritage in a landscape.

From the choice of a species, oak - both a material and representative of a local industry - *research-creation* projects have been developed with design students. One of these projects is specifically presented here to better understand the place and role of the designer - in the midst of a *transition*.

Design, revealing porous areas

The TON-NEAU project (by Justine Duchêne) is a floating structure made of oak from the Park's forest by a local artisanal cooperage. Located on the banks of the Marne river, it tells the forgotten story of the role played by the lateral canal of the river in the commerce and reputation of champagne.



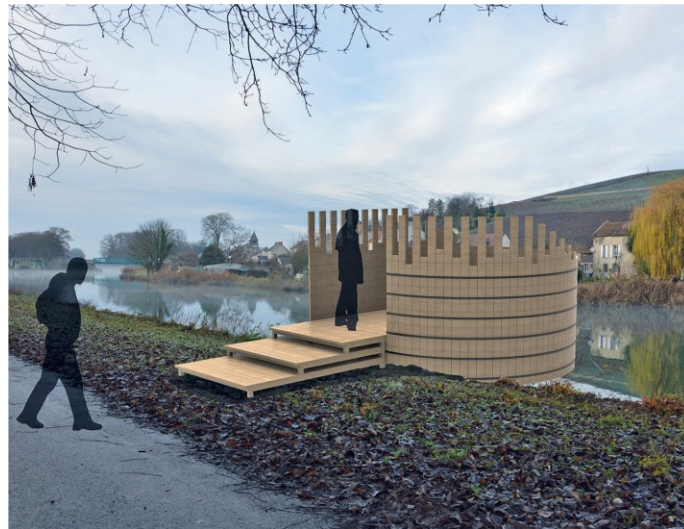
To better understand the purpose of this project, it is necessary to understand its sources: TON-NEAU is the result of a field survey combining observations, interviews and archive work. The project begins with the topography of the territory and the different activities and landscapes that rub shoulders there, precisely the vines, the forest and the water. For centuries, the Marne and later its canal have had a prominent place in the success of champagne. Locally grown wines, then called *vins de rivière* (river wines) and *vins de montagne* (mountain wines) long before they were called champagne, were transported by river to Paris in oak barrels and then bottles. Today the route is no longer the same but wine professionals continue to use barrels made by artisan coopers from local oak.

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The field survey leads us little by little to visualize a past and still-present relationship between vine, forest and water, woven under the effect of both economic actors and flow. This relationship is expressed even in the landscape. From the Marne lateral canal, this proximity between these different landscapes is indeed observable. Thus, the idea of the possibility of reading a landscape appears, crucial in the design project. History and geography are then visibly linked to, and by the landscape. History is seen as if it is projected onto the geographical surface and informs us of its simultaneously past, present and therefore heritage content.

In the design process, this reading of the landscape guides the designer. It has thus made it possible in the current case to determine the place of the installation: TON-NEAU takes place along the promenade which runs along the canal in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, as this location offers an exceptional view of the hillsides of vines classified by Unesco since 2015.

The TON-NEAU project then becomes an object that tells, by its form and its informative content, its immersive position, and by the specific of view of the landscape that it offers, a forgotten story. We see here how design allows, through its investigative approach, the reconstitution of a story from fragmented elements, and through its ability to create a device, to share a reconstituted story, with a dependence on locality and the very significant present context. Therefore, design reveals the porous areas that underlie past and present, history and geography, and so formalizes the existence of a vibrant heritage dynamic.



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TON-NEAU ultimately considers, in its design, both economic and technical, organizational and social, historical and geographical aspects, for an understanding that we could qualify as multi-faceted, and for a contribution of design well beyond the object or the material. The project becomes evocative of a way of doing things in design that finds its substance more in the ability of the discipline to question and deconstruct a contextualized and localized property in order to better understand it, than in a usual construction that could then be qualified as *unrooted*. By restoring a past story for its telling, by using local resources and know-how for its production, by being part of a landscape which offers itself for reading, and by linking local economic actors and users of the structure, TON-NEAU reveals and enhances a cultural heritage by *connecting* the elements that were used in its design.



We see here how design appears as a specific research discipline that practices research-creation. The designer participates today very directly in the design of a future, no longer as a simple executor but as a true reflective eye, a conversing, mediating figure. Design participates in the transition in its ability to create connections, to link and to restore. Design then shows itself as a discipline that is both comprehensive and strong in technical, plastic or even narrative proposals, weaving a common characteristic specific to what we call heritage.

References :

1. Eudes, E, Maire, V., 2018, La fabrique à écosystème, Paris, éditions LOCO.
2. [Filière bois, carnet d'expérience, chaire IDIS, 2020.](#)

This article is published within the framework of the European symposium "Heritage for the Future, Science for Heritage: A European Adventure for Research and Innovation" which will be held on 15 and 16 March 2022 at the Musée du Louvre and the National Library of France (François Mitterrand). This symposium is organized with the support of the European Commission and in partnership with the French Ministry of Culture, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the universities of Paris-Saclay and Cergy Paris. To feed the symposium programme, a Call for Papers was launched in June 2021 and addressed to researchers, doctoral students, and various actors who contribute to the production, valorisation, dissemination and applications of knowledge such as heritage professionals, political decision-makers, international organisations etc. As a result of this Call for Papers, some proposed communications have been selected for publication on the symposium website in the form of short articles.