

# Case study summary report – Brest

## 1.1 History and context

Brest is a city located at the farthest Western point of France in the region of Brittany. In 2016 the city of Brest had a population of 139,342 inhabitants, while the wider metropolitan area had a population of 208,930. The city's population has been declining from 166,826 in 1975 since the oil shocks of the 1970's and army restructuration which affected the city economically and therefore led to demographic decline.

The port of Brest is divided into three broad areas: areas owned by the Navy, the area of the commercial port, and a marina located further east. The port of Brest was born as a national military infrastructure in the during the XVII<sup>th</sup> century. The commercial port was created with the support of the French State in the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century under Napoleon III. The opening of the commercial port allowed the city to expand. New commercial activities emerged, and new inhabitants established in the city. At the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, commercial traffic in the port was constantly growing, thanks to significant efforts to further equip the port and secure its coast. Currently, the port entertains four main functions:

- Trade
- Naval repairs
- Fishing
- Maritime safety

In addition, leisure boating is another activity which takes place in two locations of the port of Brest.

The Second World War almost completely destroyed the city of Brest and its port. A new dynamic emerged in 1946, after the war. The port received more and more cargos and Brest contributed for a large part to the economic revival of the country. The 1960's represented another flourishing period in the history of the commercial port. It grew in size again, aiming to attract new industries, whilst keeping those already established there. The port was entirely reconstructed by the 1970's<sup>1</sup>.

After a period of growth, the oil price shocks of 1973-1974 heavily impacted the development of Brest. By the mid-1980's, the port was once again so derelict that rent prices started plummeting. Private investors extended several trade activities (e.g. coal trade) that quickly led to the degradation of the entire port area. This is why in 1985, the City of Brest started to identify pathways towards positive change in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Port de Brest – CCI Métropolitaine, (2017, Fall). Bretagne Ouest. *Historique*. Retrieved April 02, 2019 from: <http://www.brest.port.fr/en/port-de-brest/historique/7-de-1960-a-1980>

## 1.2 Visions, goals and plans

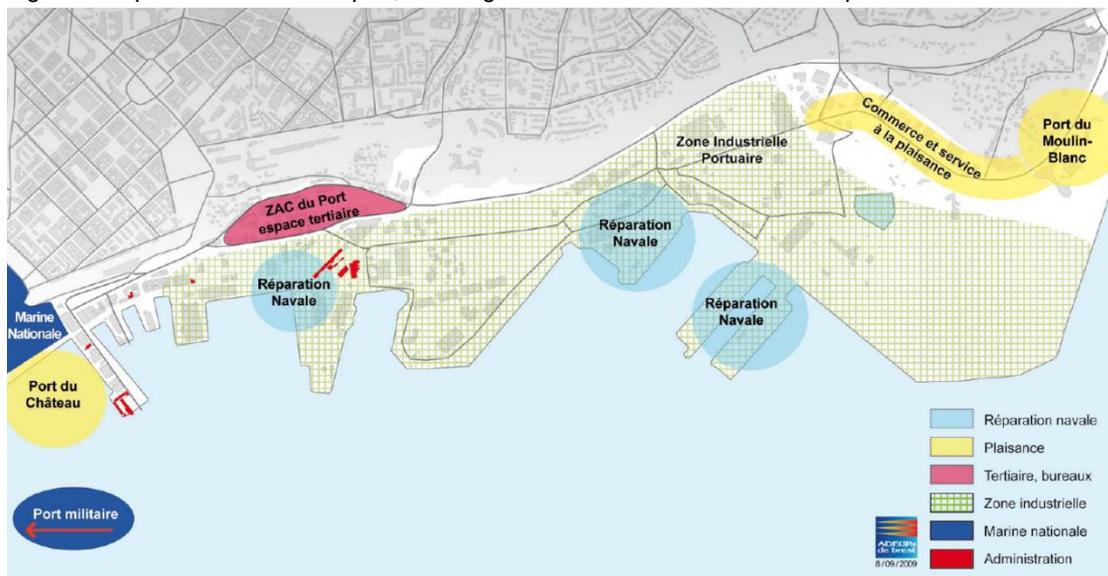
The ambition in Brest has been since the 1980's to reinforce the link between the city of Brest and its port and seafront. This vision was carried by local actors from Brest, particularly city authorities.

The vision was to restructure the main transport access from the city centre to the commercial port. It was also to regenerate the port area such that it would become a place for social, cultural and leisure activities.

Furthermore, the city recognised the importance of its port activities, contributing to the economic development of Brest. Consequently, the intention was also to modernise port activities in line with maritime trends, ensuring adequate positioning and competitiveness of the port.

At the beginning of the definition of this vision, the military area of the port was not a part of this vision.

Figure 1 Map of the commercial port, showing main zones and activities of the port.



Source: ADEUPa, 2009.

The process for defining the vision for the city had started from a consensus between the actors involved that action needed to be taken to regenerate the port area, including urban redevelopment by means of a brownfield regeneration process. Following the will of the city and CCI to support the economic health of industrial port activities, the intention was still to preserve industrial areas to allow for their future development.

The result of this process was a Reference Plan for the port of Brest, signed in 1994. This Reference Plan is a high level agreement on the set of principles and objectives for the regeneration of the commercial port area. It indicates the urban and commercial functions of designated zones of the commercial port area and sets out objectives for the development of these zones. In particular, the Plan aimed to coherently develop and modernise the four main functions of the commercial port (listed above); to develop a fabric of SMEs around port activities; and finally to create a better link between the port and its city.

More recently in 2018 and in parallel to the process of implementing the vision for the commercial port via the Reference Plan, the transfer of ownership of Navy-owned land to the City has led to the development of a new concept and vision for redefining the 'heart' or centre of Brest metropolitan area (in French, Coeur de Métropole).<sup>2</sup> This new vision could be triggered thanks to the opening of the ex-Navy owned areas to public investments and to its citizens, effectively reshaping the boundaries of urban life.

### **1.3 Laws and regulations**

The Reference Plan of 1994 differentiated between the several areas and entities in charge of the port (the City's port urban area, the Navy's military zone, the State's commercial port area managed by CCI). In the commercial port area, a Concerted Planning Zone (in French, zone d'aménagement concertée or ZAC) was created also in 1994 to facilitate planning projects. The status of the commercial port area as ZAC allowed Brest Métropole to intervene by acquiring land, preparing for new development (e.g. brownfield decontamination), and reselling it to private or public actors developing the new project.

In 1998, a Charter for the Port area (in French, Charte de place portuaire) was agreed between the main actors of the Port to create a platform for the planning of complex partnership operations. The Charter was a continuation of the Reference Plan, defining the main activities and strategy for the Port.

In 2000, the Land use plan (in French, Plan d'occupation des sols or POS) was approved. The POS was replaced in 2014 by a Local urbanism plan for the Brest Metropolitan Area (in French, Plan local d'urbanisme or PLU). In France, the local urbanism plan is the main document of urban planning for development at the level of one or multiple municipalities. The purpose of the PLU is to determine a development plan for the metropolitan area (including the various municipalities party to the plan) and the general planning rules that apply to the area and to specific sites. The 2014 PLU for the Brest Metropolitan Area sets out ambitions and actions for the urbanisation and economic activities of the commercial port.

In 2011, the Regional plan for the metropolitan area of Brest (in French, Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale or SCoT) was approved for conceiving and implementing the intercommunal urban plan. The SCoT aims at bringing coherence among the different policies relevant to the territory, and fosters environmental preservation and sustainable development. The SCoT has as its primary feature that of being a reference document for public policies by fixing goals in terms of urban and economic development, movement of persons and merchandise, vehicle parking and traffic regulation. This coherence across documents and policies is ensured by the link between the SCoT and other thematic documents: the local housing program (in French, plan local d'habitat or PLH), the urban mobility plan (in French, plan de mobilité), the commercial development plan, the PLUs, as well as communal maps, commercial exploitation authorizations, land operations and development actions must be compatible

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<sup>2</sup> <https://adeupa-brest.fr/nos-publications/quel-coeur-pour-la-metropole-bretoise>

with the SCoT. The SCoT in this sense provides the framework for the development of the urban area of the city of Brest, including its port.

Since 2017, Brest has engaged in a strategic process named Brest Port 2040 which will continue the urban planning process started in the 1990's and with a short-, mid- and long-term perspective.

These various planning tools are all developed in coherence with each other.

## **1.4 Stakeholders involved**

Brest Métropole (whose president is also the mayor of the city of Brest) is the main actor leading the regeneration of the port of Brest with the support from ADEUPa, the local urbanism agency for Brest, who has been developing the planning documents and monitoring the process. In addition, the city of Brest created several satellite organisations and to whom it delegated the management of real estate development processes in the areas for regeneration (the SEMs, or mixed economy companies).

The main organisations involved in the regeneration of the port of Brest have been identified as:

- Brest Métropole, public authority for the metropolitan area of Brest
- Brest Metropole Aménagement (BMA), a SEM in charge of real estate development processes in the commercial port area
- The State, owner of the commercial port until 2008
- Région Bretagne, the owner of the commercial port since 2008
- The Navy, owner of large parts of the port of Brest (the military port)
- Brest Chamber of Commerce and Industry, operator of the commercial port's equipments
- Société d'Économie Mixte de Portage Immobilier, a SEM in charge of developing residential housing for families and for students in Brest metropolitan area including in the Capucins area (ex-Navy owned area)
- Businesses, including those involved in maritime activities but also services and cultural activities
- Citizens, including neighbourhood councils (in French, conseil de quartier)

## **1.5 From vision to realization**

The regeneration process since the early or mid-1990's was slow and progressive. The process started with the construction of a first office building (Grand Large) just before the signature of the Reference Plan, triggering the progressive reconversion of several spaces in the port towards service sector activities on the one hand and towards leisure activities on the other, in particular an artist space in 1998 (Fourneau), as well as a concert hall in 2007 (Carène), and several cafés and restaurants.

In the 2000's and until recently, the ownership transfer of Navy-owned land to the City also led to new developments: the creation of a public marina in 2009, the Castle's Port (previously dedicated to yachts owned by soldiers), and a new neighbourhood, the Capucins, now also hosting a large cultural and

commercial centre in the Capucins Workshops (previously a naval equipment workshop) which opened in 2016.

The process is now seen as coming to its end in the coming years at least in the commercial port where the concession to BMA is ending in 2023, with perspectives for new developments in the future in the Navy-owned areas.

The long time needed for the process can be explained by ownership patterns between the State, the private sector, and the Navy; preventing the city from redeveloping the port area in a shorter period and requiring multiple land ownership transfer operations.

## **1.6 Overall results and outcomes**

The conclusion by City actors is that the vision to reintegrate the city into its port is positive: the vision has been achieved over time, as evidenced by several key projects considered successful in bringing city life into the port. Consensus and effective public action enabling private investments are identified as having contributed to this result.

The brownfield regeneration process successfully led to the development of several new buildings in the commercial port, particularly office buildings, thus introducing new economic activities in the area. Other cultural and leisure activities were also created (described previously).

Regeneration also took place on land that was previously owned by the Navy and whose ownership was transferred to the City for redevelopment, however this process had not been foreseen at the time of the Reference Plan of 1994 as no one expected the Navy to leave these areas. Regeneration therefore occurred opportunistically.

The objectives relating to the development of the port's economic activities have been partially met: on the one hand new office space has attracted service sector activities, some port activities were retained and the vision did not prevent port activities from developing and diversifying; on the other hand the vision did not lead to attracting small and medium enterprises and industries to support the commercial port's activities. The industrial port is still in reconversion from previous industrial activities which have left following shifts in global economic trends. Recently the Région Bretagne initiated a marine energy project based on a previously undeveloped polder on the far eastern side of the commercial port, intended to build and launch wind turbines and current turbines. Construction is expected to end in 2024.

Finally, the issue of urban transport in the commercial port was not sufficiently addressed and today the use of private vehicles remains the most common mode of transport, creating issues of parking and liveability in the port. This is seen negatively by local urban planning actors and stands in opposition to European and national trends towards active mobility. However, plans to create urban elevators would facilitate access for pedestrians and allow for car users to park outside of the city in the future.

## 1.7 Social and identity impacts

Brest's citizens have retained a strong cultural attachment to the sea and to the port, which were intended to be maintained in spite of the regeneration process. In the commercial port, port service activities have remained reflecting the desire to maintain the historically industrial nature of the port. In the Capucins neighbourhood, the opening of the area to public investments have allowed to reconnect the city with its history and function as a naval industrial place. Nevertheless, the city and its port are undergoing significant transformation as a result of the start of the regeneration process since the 1990's:

- The previously decayed areas of the commercial port have since become attractive places for visitors, offering new cultural and leisure activities to the citizens of Brest. The commercial port has become more integrated with the city, as evidenced by the new type of population (office workers, tourists) which now visits the area, in spite of remaining geographical barriers and lack of transport. Prior to regeneration, the commercial port was mainly attended by workers involved in port activities and citizens would typically not venture in the port.
- The opening of previously Navy-owned areas has given new panoramas of the city and access to the water where it was previously forbidden.
- The City is using the opportunities created by new locations (particularly in the Capucins Workshops) to create spaces dedicated to hosting and promoting novel activities, in particular the digital economy and the blue economy. This is part of Brest's strategy to rebrand its economic identity.
- The Capucins neighbourhood is also the place for the development of projects with social and environmental sustainability objectives: mixed housing for the elderly, students and families; smart energy grids, renewable energy production; access via low-carbon transport options (e.g. an aerial tramway).

## 1.8 Main Barriers and drivers

Planning tools, including the 1994 Reference Plan, contributed to achieving consensus around the objectives of the regeneration process. These plans however did not define a precise and strict vision, which allowed the city to respond to opportunities with agility, and with the aid of strong political will from a cohesive group of various public actors, building a vision progressively. When prompted, the stakeholders could not identify major barriers in the regeneration process. In this sense this flexibility has likely contributed to the relatively smooth process, together with other factors explained below.

The public sector in Brest had a very strong role in driving the regeneration process. One key and unique approach of the City has been the creation of satellite organisations managing real estate development processes (the SEMs, i.e. BMA in the commercial port and SEMPI in the Capucins area) as mentioned previously. These SEMs carried the financial risks of their operations, thus alleviating the burden of risk on the City and the private sector. Indeed, the private sector was not a driver of change

but rather reacting to the supply of development opportunities created by the SEMs. European, national and regional funding also significantly contributed to several of the projects, further underlining the role of public funding as a driver of regeneration in Brest.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, several catalytic events occurred and one pilot project was developed which demonstrated the feasibility for the city to reappropriate space in its port, and therefore encouraging the regeneration process. These were mainly:

- The Port's Thursdays (in French, les Jeudis du Port): a free music and street theatre festival organised yearly in the commercial port.
- The Maritime Festival (in French, les Fêtes Maritimes): a gathering of sailboats as well as cultural festivities (music and exhibitions).
- Grand Large: the first office building in the commercial port and the first physical sign of the regeneration process, piloting the implementation of service sector activities in the commercial port and showing its potential as a place for work and urban life.

Citizens repeatedly showed support to the regeneration process as evidenced by the high attendance and visits to leisure and cultural places and events, including the recurrent yearly festivals mentioned above, but also the Capucins Workshops. Positive feedback from citizens about gaining new access to the port and the waters was a recurrent theme from stakeholders interviewed (reporting this feedback second-hand).

Mobility in the commercial port area remains a difficult issue to address politically due to citizens' and businesses' opposition to reducing private vehicle access. However, plans to create urban elevators would facilitate access for pedestrians and allow for car users to park outside of the city.

## **1.9 Status of case study**

16-18 interviews were conducted during a 3-day field visit mainly with public actors at local and regional level, one group of citizens, and industry representatives. Several more interviews will be conducted in May, and contact with local stakeholders providing information is ongoing.

Documentary analysis is ongoing with several strategic planning documents being reviewed, as well as a compilation and analysis of historical socio-economic data to understand trends in the period of regeneration and possibly identify the impact of the process on demographics and the economy.