

Energy : tackle fuel poverty

In a context of increasing energy costs, the prevention of the unpaid energy bills and a better management of the energetic consumption constitute simultaneously:

1. a social issue: fighting poverty and the inequalities between the population categories,
2. an urban issue: maintaining a healthy habitat for the populations in the city centres,
3. an environmental issue: preserving resources and decreasing pollution,
4. an economical issue: reducing expenses and increasing the attractiveness of the city,
5. a public policy issue: opening up public policy

That's why Nantes Métropole is implementing a fuel poverty strategy based on local studies and social and energy partner's coordination.

An specific action plan will be implement in 2015

Fuel poverty study

The study framework is the 'Île de Nantes' district, which is part of an urban project since the late 80's and is today in a phase of deep renewal with the ambition of taking into account social dynamics and environmental questions. This territory is composed of a plural/differentiated habitat, constituted in small older collective housings presenting a level of thermal comfort not sufficient which potentially can create fuel poverty conditions.

The fuel poverty issued were questioned while studying among households the influences of housing qualities, of domestic equipments, and also of the importance of the energetic practices on the incidence of the fuel poverty.

Regarding fuel poverty, the study refers to the position of a household that experiences a social, economical and environmental vulnerability, that prevents them from heating themselves properly and/or to pay their energy bills.

To characterize environmental inequalities, the study refers to inequalities linked to the roots/inheritance and to the development of urban territories, to inequalities in accessing urbanity and to a framework of quality of life; to inequalities in the exposure to nuisances and risks, and to inequalities in the capacity to act on the environment and call out public authorities.

Objectives

This study has 3 objectives:

Objective 1: Better identify the behavioural and structural causes (energetic quality of housing, domestic equipments, ...) which are the roots of the strong energetic consumption and of the bad level of thermal comfort.

Objective 2 : Analyse the dynamics (public space, buildings and populations) reached within the 'Île de Nantes' project.

Objective 3: Propose an action plan to accompany the populations, owners/landlords and political actors and public services.

Results

-> Prevention of the unpaid energy bills: practice and behaviour related to the different types of energy consumption

Beforehand we can note that, in the studied panel, 4 buildings on 5 present energetic problems; and that 45% of the households that live in housing of class E, F or G devote more than 12% of their budget to the payment of their energetic expenses.

Concerning the households met in the frame of the study, 3 sociological profiles appear: the "constrained users", the "attentive users" and the "serene users". They put in light the usages and different behaviours in using energies, influenced by a number of factors and especially the statute of occupation (tenant or owner).

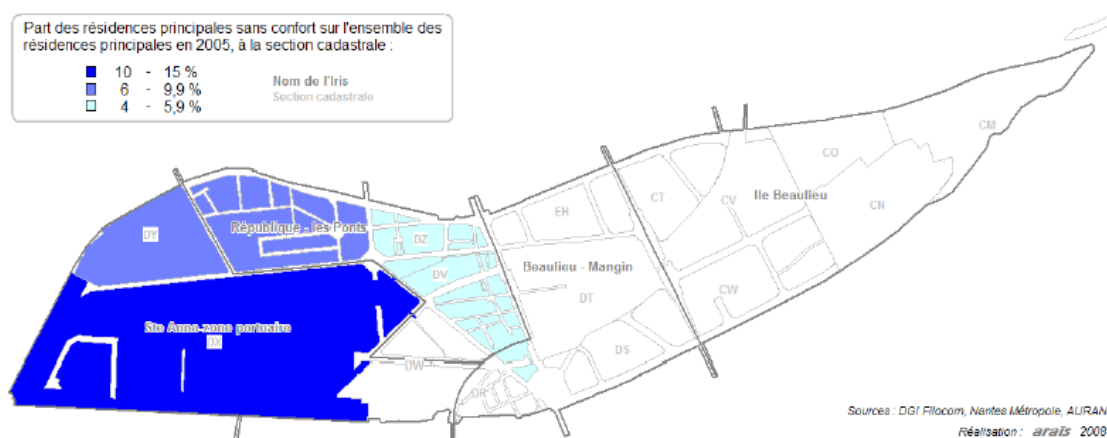
The profiles characterized by a strong social and economical insecurity, "constrained users", cumulate the structural handicaps regarding energy (housing and domestic devices of poor quality) despite behaviours favouring privation and energy saving. Difficulties in paying energy bills are not necessary linked to an increase in the consumption but to other forms of social and economical poverty. The other profiles meet more irregularly this type of handicap.

The economical ratio to the energies strongly conditions the improvement of the energetic quality. The question of the return on investment (ROI) is essential for the household choice. The notion of global cost is poorly apprehended for the profiles despite the fact that the assessment of this notion can differ from one profile to another (everyday pressure, comfort, ...).

While structural data limit the energetic quality, the households from all profiles adopt behaviours more or less "virtuous" motivated by some factors (education, biography, respect of the environment, ...). However the connection to the energies is changing according to the profiles : precarious for the "constrained" and the "attentive" who can sometimes be on the edge of fuel poverty, lax for the "serene".

To prevent fuel poverty conditions the study reveals that public policies have to develop a more sensitive detection of the conditions of damaged habitat which can potentially be source of insecurity and have to face a competence explosion in the identification and the treatment of these questions (CAF, CCAS, associations, energy suppliers, directorship and services of local authorities and EPCI having jurisdiction – habitat, housing, urban planning, energy, environment...)

Housing without energy comfort map



Talking fuel poverty: strategy to action plan

The Nantes Métropole fuel poverty strategy will takes into account three success factors :

- Detecting the problem: in a short term view, to act quickly with appropriate and coordinate answers.
- Resolving the problem: in a mid term view, to transform the inhabitant demand in technical answer : budget management, housing retrofit, behaviours advices, new energy equipments
- Preventing eventual return : in a mid and long term view : to register local datas (social, energies,...) from different sources and put alerts if necessary.