

UN-GENDERING PUBLIC SPACES TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Nadine Cattan*, Antoine Fleury*, Stéphane Leroy**

* Géographie-cités, CNRS, University Paris I and Paris 7

** University Paris XII

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SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PLACES: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES
ON APPROPRIATION, REPRESENTATIONS
AND PLANNING OF PUBLIC SPACES
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Our communication aims at showing
how a gendered approach of public spaces

DECONSTRUCTS

the dominant meaning of
the **URBAN** as a whole.

The main goal

is to re-inscribe

*the representations of **PUBLIC SPACES**
within the **GLOBAL CONTEXT** of the **CITY**.*

Two short theoretical developments 

== WHAT IS A CITY ?

== WHAT IS A PUBLIC SPACE ?

*Mapping, in Paris, the practices of public space
of same sex partners* 

== HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

== RESULTS

Critical theoretical conclusion 

== DISCUSSION ON THE MEANINGS OF
THE APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

== CONCLUDING REMARKS

CITIES

« There are as many ways of representing what a city is than there are cities »

However, the city is generally defined as a space with a **HIGH DENSITY AND DIVERSITY**, in which social and spatial interaction is maximised.

Louis Wirth (1938)

The city is « a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals »

Richard Sennett (1977)

The city is « un milieu humain dans lequel des inconnus se rencontrent ».



This definition underscores the very values of what a city is :

Heterogeneity of the social organisations and social relations.

Anonymous relations,
independent from personal links

CONSEQUENTLY, the city is carrying the values of urbanity, such as **emancipation, freedom, confronting otherness, and modernity.**

PUBLIC SPACE

« There are as many ways of representing what a public space is than there are public spaces »

Public space in Western cities is theoretically defined as
OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL.

Public space is perceived as the main vector for living together in modern societies.

Consequently, public space should embody the very values of the city.

PUBLIC SPACE

Various studies on gender issues have denounced the normative dimension of public spaces.

As a social construct, public spaces and the social relations that organise them take part in reinforcing the dichotomous sexed representations of urban territories.

« *There are not and never have been any truly open public spaces where all may freely gather, free from exclusionary violence* » (Mitchell 1996).

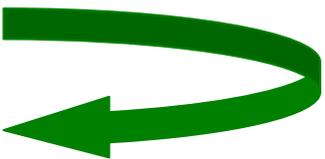
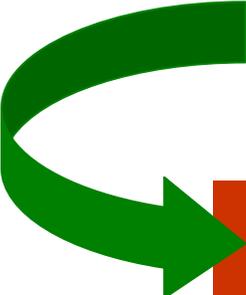
Susan Ruddick (1996)

The 'open-minded public space' is a vision more than a reality and underscore the limits to a celebration of difference in public space.

PUBLIC SPACE

In their great majority, these studies confined public space in an intrinsically local and particular approaches.

Because public space do become an
« ACTIVE MEDIUM » for the
construction of sexual and gendered
identities



the aim of our study is to analyze the practices of public space of same sex partners with regards a global approach of the city and its spatial structure

HYPOTHESIS

There are public spaces **MORE PUBLIC** than others.

The *variation* of the public dimension results from the social practices, the ideologies and the dominant symbols that underlie public spaces.

METHODOLOGY

From direct and participating observation carried out in Paris :

A QUESTIONNAIRE to understand how the homosexuals women and men practise and imagine public space in Paris.

A) Practices : Identify the behavior you have in each zone when you are with your partner.

B) Perceptions : According to you, which behavior two partners of same sex could allowed themselves in each zone.

1- no contact

2- discrete contact

3- supported contact



Our approach is ORIGINAL because :

FIRST

Practices of public space = behaviors of the individuals when they are « in couple »



An « objectified » visibility of the sexual orientation

SECOND

Practices AND Representations of public space



Practices as well as the values and symbols associated to that practices

Our approach is ORIGINAL because :

THIRD

Homosexual
women and men and
heterosexual people



Specificity of the
behaviour of lesbiens
and gay men in public
space

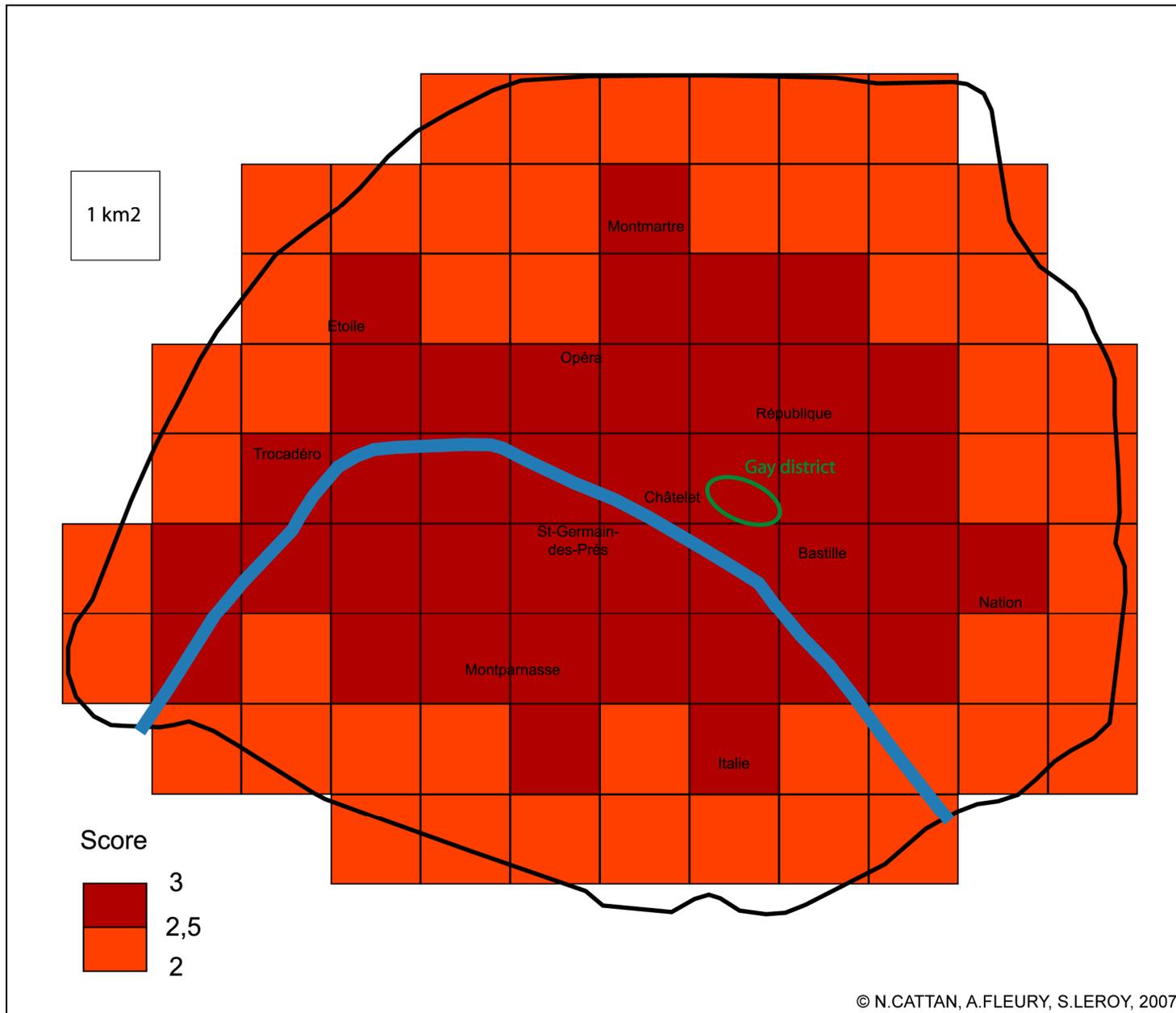
FOURTH

Different geographical
scales

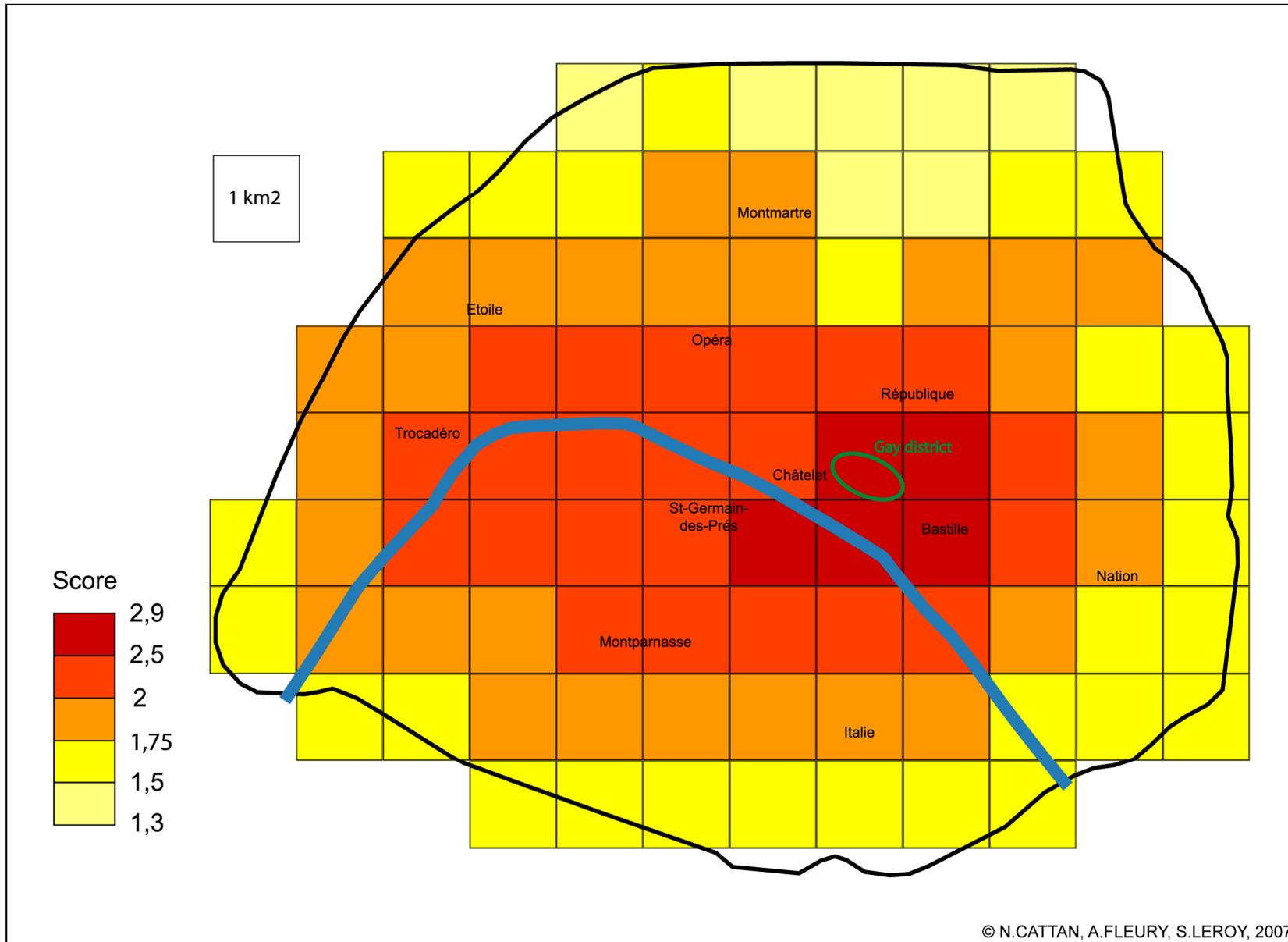


Linking public space to
the dynamics of modern
and contemporary
metropolises in terms of
fragmentation and
segmentation

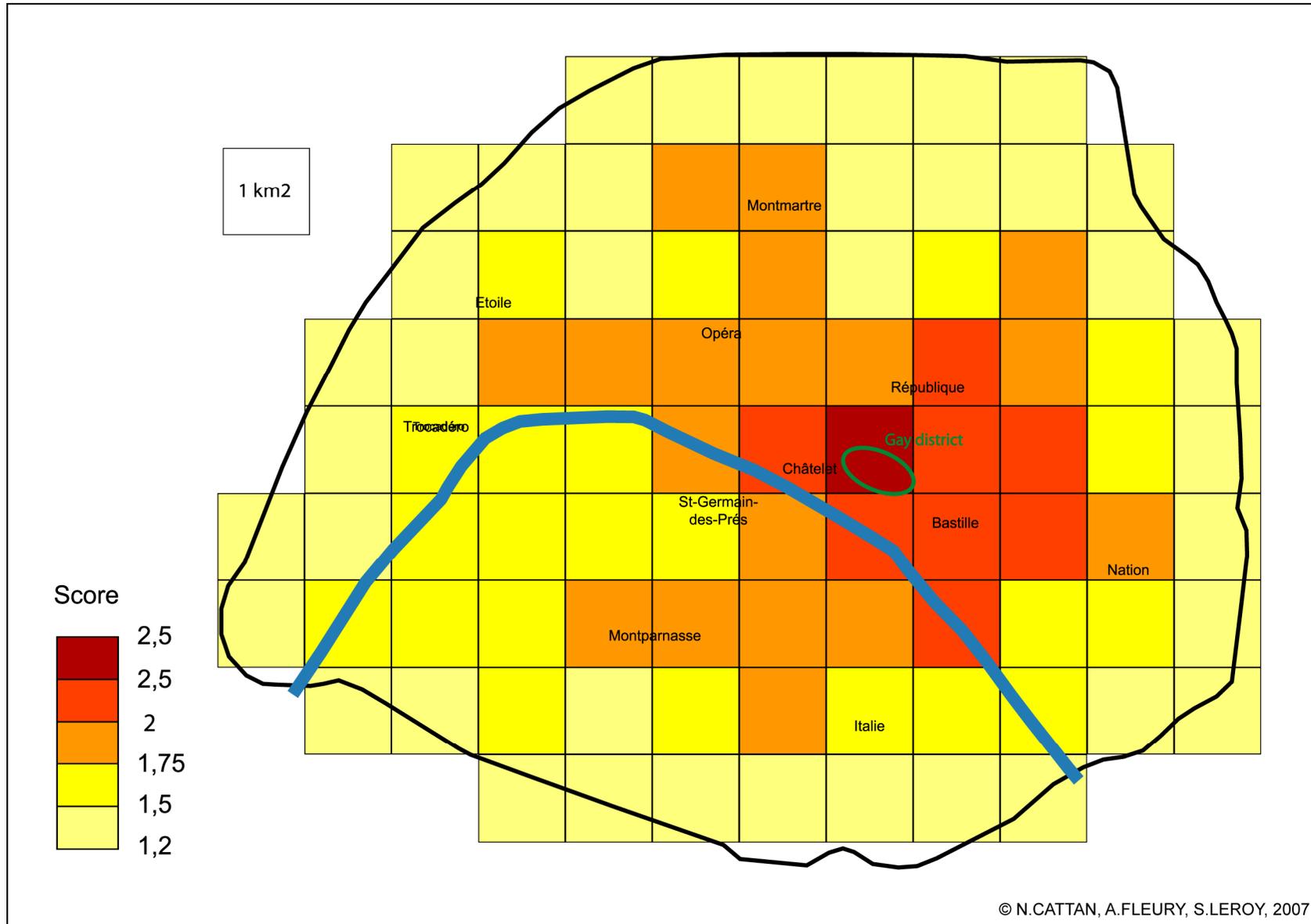
PERCEPTION OF HETEROSEXUAL women and men of possible behaviors of lesbians and gays in public spaces



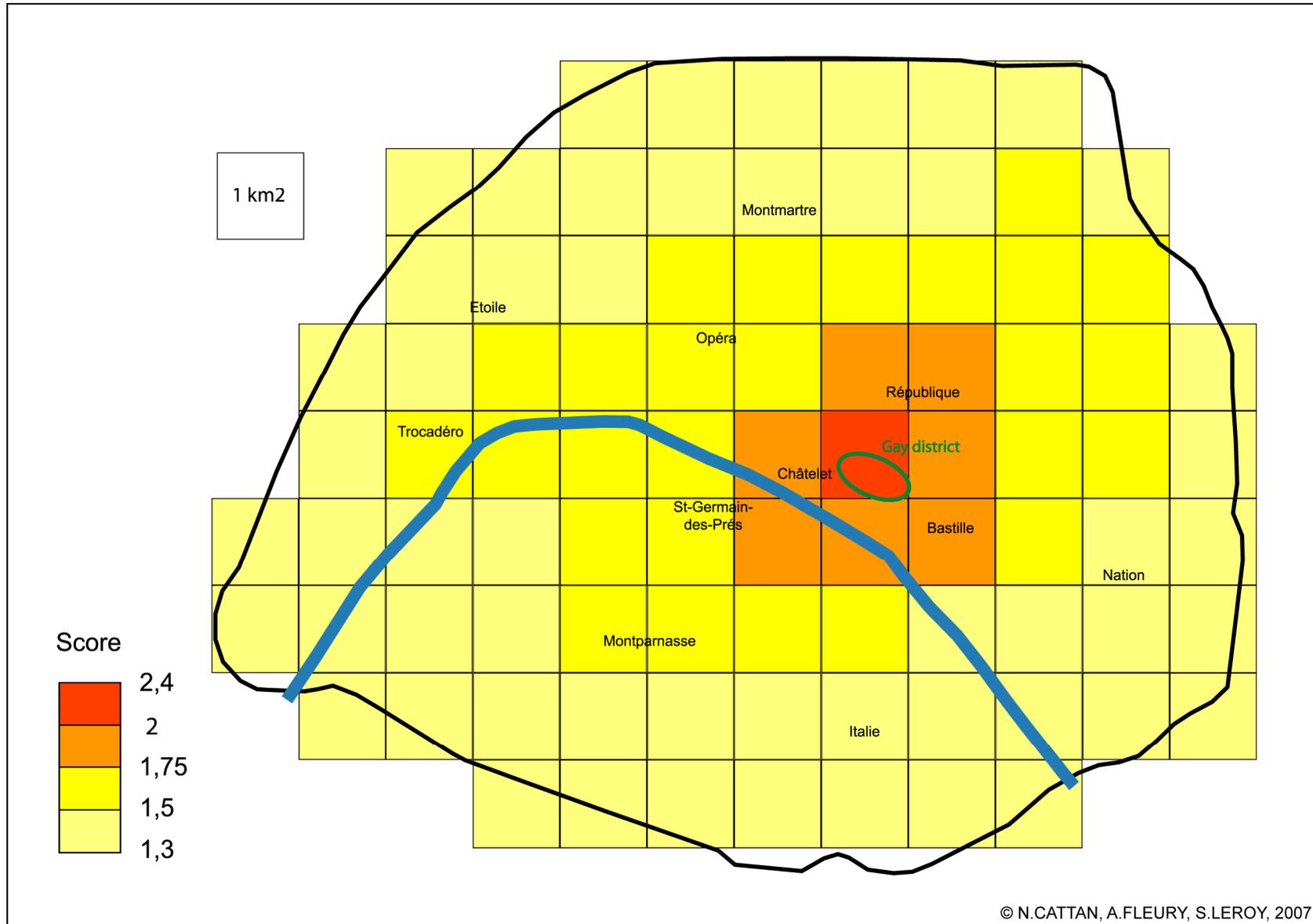
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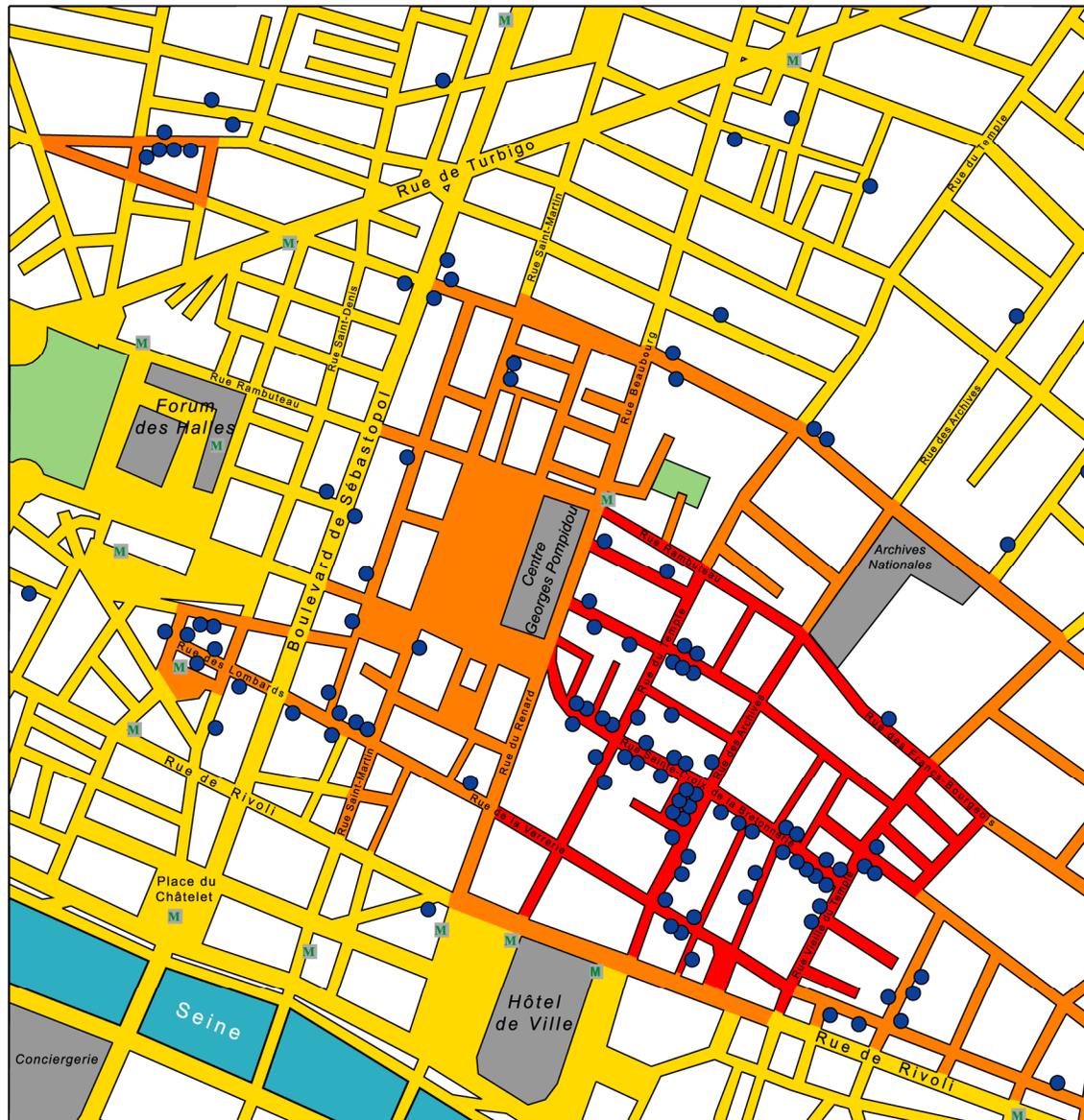
PRACTICES of GAY MEN of public spaces



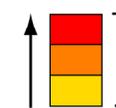
PRACTICES of LESBIANS of public spaces



PRACTICES of LESBIANS and GAY MEN in LE MARAIS and around



Contacts



Caption

- gay & lesbian businesses
- M subway

0 100 200m

Sources : various gay guides.

APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

Our results :

- Unequal access to public spaces
- Cities as fragmented spaces that do not fulfil their integration function anymore.

*The city as an openness to unassimilated otherness represents only an ideal
(Young 1990)*

One should not fall into the trap of a caricatural vision which feeds a feeling of rejection of cities.

CITIES ARE DEEPLY CONTRADICTIONARY *(Bondi 1998)*

- * Potential of equality which supports the expression of cultural diversity
- * Potential of social partitions which reinforce the feelings of injustice and oppression *(Wilson 1991, Saegert 1985, Podmore 2001, Domosh 2001, Zukin 1998, Bondi, Rose 2003).*

We are far from the « Good City » (Amin 2006) BUT the urban remains the supremely visible manifestation of difference and heterogeneity placed together.

APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

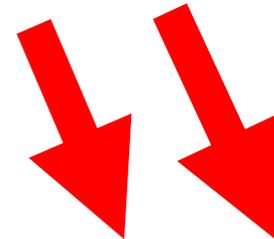
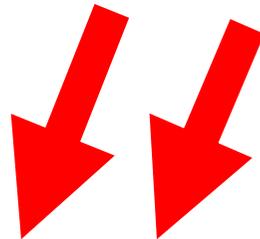
This acceptance of the dual role of cities
does not decrease our report
on urban fragmentation
starting from the practices of public space.

It would only moderate our speech about the
deconstruction of the very values
carried out by
the modern and contemporary city

APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

Whether we agree that urban fragmentation is part of the city, can we still save urban values when we fully assume the second result of our study ?

PUBLIC SPACES that have been **APPROPRIATED** by communities as well as private spaces that are open to public tend to **TAKE OVER** the **ROLE** traditionally assigned to public spaces, and consequently to cities



APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

To say that a portion of public space is appropriated by a particular group, it is to say that the space is extracted from the public sphere.

The degradation of the public character of public space would be due to the invasion of the intimist society and of the identity and community claims in the public culture
(Sennett, Joseph).

To say that the appropriation of public space constitutes a threat for the Western modern cities is to give *VOLUNTARILY* a miss on the fact that a public space open to everyone never really existed.

Few studies focus on:

« who counts as public » and « how is accessibility to public space regulated and by whom » (Mitchell 1996, Belina 2003)

APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

The nature of public space changes and this change takes various forms which is **NECESSARY** to distinguish.

The appropriation by the homosexual women and men does not prevent public space from **REMAINING** a scene where the principles of freedom, confronting otherness and democracy can spread, i.e. the ingredients which make a city a digest of urbanity.

The appropriation :

- is free from any forms of exclusion and prohibition
- results from the emergence of codes of sociability governed by the recognition of similarities between individuals.

The concept of appropriation returns here more to a **TOOL** likely to reinforce the visibility and the integration of a group of individuals who are, because of their sexual orientation, marginalized in the strongly normalized urban public spaces.

APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

To differentiate between the various transformations today at work in public spaces is the only way TO STOP the catastrophist visions on the end of cities as places of integration where can meet the multiple identities of a complex society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A truly emancipatory and integrating city in which all the identities and the differences can be visible and expressed cannot rest only on the claim of an equal access to women/men, homos/heteros to public space.

Only by going beyond or deconstructing gendered categories == *UN-GENDERING PUBLIC SPACES* == it is possible

- to express the process of **HYBRIDIZATION**
- to think and build *sustainable cities and urban territorialities.*

In this context of destabilization of the traditional binary oppositions, the reflexions on the queer strategies in urban public space are a promising avenue