After Barcelone (2014), Amsterdam (2016), Paris (2017) and Athens (2018), Nantes has become the European Capital of Innovation in 2019. The title recognises a new approach to building the city based on active citizen participation and innovation by and for all.

Convinced that solutions to the challenges facing the territory come from the active involvement of all stakeholders, Nantes has developed an open vision of governance and its practice characterised by permanent dialogue with citizens, associations and economic players. It also boasts a thriving community of young start-up and digital businesses contributing to the territory’s dynamism.

INNOVATION BY AND FOR ALL

Citizen workshops, participative evaluation, project offices, online platforms (dialoguecitoyen.metropole.nantes.fr, carto-quartiers [participative neighbourhood data website], Nantes Patrimonia, Nantes dans ma poche [Nantes in my pocket]), etc. Citizen dialogue feeds local authority projects, enabling all citizens to build their city together. Three Great Debates have been organized since 2014: “Nantes, the Loire and us”, “Longevity, let’s open up the possibilities for all” and “Energy transition is up to us !”, the latter embarking more than 55,000 participants and 33 commitments, the implementation of which is monitored by an independent citizen committee.

This approach is also embodied by the daily practice of open and collaborative governance with Nantes City Lab for urban experimentation, the Metropolitan Data Charter, the Creative Factory, the Eco-Innovation Factory, the Eccossilies network of social and solidarity players, Capitale FrenchTech, the NaonedIA group.

THE NANTES WAY

Collective dynamics foster creative friction between players from diverse backgrounds, resulting in the emergence of alternative and original approaches. Such is the case of NaonedIA, a group of researchers, entrepreneurs, journalists and legal specialists demanding ethical, sustainable and responsible artificial intelligence formalised in a manifesto.

Nantes Digital Week, “the week that brings together all digital cultures” (80,000 participants) also embodies the Nantes way, with 250 contributors putting together the programme for this now major annual event.
French Tech Nantes brings together digital sector players to turn Nantes into one of Europe’s most inspiring ecosystems by 2025. Its governance structure is founded on a group of entrepreneurs whose roadmap is hinged around the roll-out of hyper-growth start-ups, the attraction of talent, the Deep Tech momentum and positive impact projects (Tech for Good).

A VIBRANT ECOSYSTEM

Symbolizing Nantes’ working class memory as well as naval and mechanical innovation, the former halles Alstom [Alstom warehouses] are reinventing a future for themselves: in 2020, they will be the nerve centre of a creative district fostering synergies between higher education, research and creative entrepreneurs, following the example of the University of Nantes’ multidisciplinary unit dedicated to digital cultures opened in September 2019 in halle 6 to trial tomorrow’s university.

On a wider scale, the Île de Nantes represents a 350-hectare urban laboratory, the site of an exploratory public space design programme and property projects bringing together residents and users from the outset. The aim is also to launch demonstrator spaces mobilising the skills and creativity present in the location: projects such as “Ilotopia” [designing a new living environment], “Rue connectée” [Connected Street], “Faites le parc !” [Design the Park] (prefigure the future great park on the Île de Nantes), mySMARTLife Horizon 2020.

POSITIVE IMPACT INNOVATION PROJECTS

One of the characteristics that sets Nantes apart is its capacity to lead or facilitate positive impact innovation projects aimed at addressing environmental and social challenges: the 24 metre-long electric e-busway, the “Cinq Ponts” [literally, five bridges] urban poverty project, the Symbiose 5th façade project harnessing the energy of roofs, SmartMacadam for people with reduced mobility, Smile for smart energy networks, mySMARTLife Horizon 2020.

MAKING THINGS EASY TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Building a city that is easy to live in and where immediate dialogue is possible is a daily challenge. Here, technology leads straight to the service, either via Nantes Dans Ma Poche [Nantes in my pocket], the mobile phone app dedicated to mobility and daily life, Nantes Patrimonia, the collaborative platform dedicated to Nantes heritage, or the “Guide des pratiques numériques” [digital practices guide] setting out places and associations offering support in the use of digital technology.

The data charter

Data are increasingly present in daily life and city administration. Nantes took the decision to define a strategic framework surrounding the theme, which is associated with numerous legal, democratic and economic challenges. It has drawn up a data charter setting out ethical principles designed to protect citizens and oversee data usage across the territory. The principal objectives are aimed at ensuring sovereignty over public service data, protecting personal data, guaranteeing transparency and fostering new usages.

50 public and private partners are already actively working alongside the local authority on the charter’s values.

Nantes Citylab

Since 2017, the Nantes Citylab initiative has been facilitating full-scale urban experimentation. The initiative is both simple and ambitious: the entire territory becomes a playground where project leaders can conduct full-scale tests of their innovation in situ (streets, buildings, public spaces, urban furniture, street lighting, etc.).

Nantes CityLab provides engineering support and open governance made up of large groups, start-ups, SMEs and associations, a project labelling platform and a forum for exchange on experimentation issues. More than twenty or so projects have been labelled, including the positive impact Yhnova innovation project, the 1st social housing unit built in 3 days by industrial 3D printing and now home to a family.

A synthesis of Nantes’ application to iCapital awards 2019 is available on https://metropole.nantes.fr/capitale-innovation and #NantesiCapitalAwards.