PESTLE and SWOT Analysis Report

Pilot Area – Saint-Omer, France (Quai des Salines) – Deprived Area

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Project Overview

The Cool Neighbourhoods Project seeks to address the challenges of heat stress and improve liveability across urban areas in North-West Europe. This PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental) and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis focuses on the deprived area of Saint-Omer, specifically the Quai des Salines. As part of a larger urban renewal plan, the project aims to soften and green the neighbourhood to reduce its vulnerability to extreme heat. Key objectives include improving thermal comfort, enhancing the social and economic appeal of the area, and integrating climate adaptation measures.

Summary

The Saint-Omer pilot area, located in a deprived neighbourhood at the heart of the city, is part of a broader urban renewal programme aimed at improving public spaces, particularly the requalification of the Quai des Salines. This densely populated area, situated between two canals and characterised by its mineral-heavy structure, is vulnerable to heat stress and lacks sufficient greenery. The neighbourhood, which includes social and low-cost housing, is part of a safeguarded area for heritage value (PSMV), presenting both challenges and opportunities for integrating climate adaptation measures.

The Cool Neighbourhoods project will build upon previous greening work carried out at Montaigne school under the Cool Towns project. With a focus on softening, water management, and community engagement, the initiative seeks to create a more liveable and climate-resilient space while preserving the area's social and economic appeal. However, limited funding, rising construction costs, and the complexity of the work on the quay pose significant risks to the project's timeline. Despite these challenges, the pilot has strong political backing, proactive community involvement, and multiple opportunities for collaboration with regional and European partners, positioning it well for success.

Picture 1 – Pilot Area for Improvement

PESTLE Analysis

Political

- Saint-Omer is engaging in proactive governance, with citizen participation mechanisms such as consultations and "Mayor's Cafés" helping ensure community involvement.
- The upcoming 2026 elections may accelerate or hinder the project, as environmental ambitions could be scaled back depending on the political climate.
- A clear political focus on climate adaptation, with increased political awareness around the urgency of addressing the effects of extreme heat.
- The neighbourhood is part of the Safeguarded Area for Heritage Value (PSMV), which imposes regulatory constraints but also ensures that environmental improvements align with heritage conservation goals.

Economic

- The total cost of the renewal project is €3.6 million, with Interreg subsidies covering less than 10%, placing a heavy financial burden on the community. Additional funding has been secured from Hauts de France region and the Pas-de-Calais department and especially from the State for urban renovation.
- Rising construction costs, particularly after COVID, have led to a 20% increase in project expenses compared to 2018 estimates, adding pressure on the budget.

- Saint-Omer recognises the area as “priority neighbourhood” (QPV) to be eligible for funding to renovate the sports complex.
- There are opportunities to create economic and social value by making the neighbourhood more pleasant and resilient, but budgetary constraints remain a key concern.

Social

- The area’s low socio-economic status means residents may prioritise health, well-being, and immediate needs over long-term climate resilience.
- Multicultural elements exist, but the sense of community is weak, with 50% of residents having lived in the district for fewer than four years.
- The neighbourhood lacks sufficient spaces where residents can engage with each other, particularly areas that can accommodate both young families and the elderly.
- The redevelopment plan aims to create accessible public spaces for all ages and abilities, while ensuring that the permeable surfaces and infrastructure meet the needs of an ageing population.

Technological

- Technological solutions like vegetated swales and green walls are under consideration for rainwater management and heat reduction.
- Complex infrastructure issues, such as the damaged quay and sewage pipes near weakened canal banks, pose challenges that could delay project timelines.
- A heat stress map of the area is available, providing a clear guide for implementing heat mitigation technologies.

- The project will use the town's social media channels to keep residents informed, ensuring continued public engagement throughout the development process.

Environmental

- Climate change is exacerbating heatwaves, floods, and wind events, making urgent climate adaptation a necessity for Saint-Omer.
- Plans include water infiltration systems and other green infrastructure to improve thermal comfort and biodiversity.
- The project will bring water back to the heart of the city, combining softening efforts with sustainable drainage and water recovery systems in plant beds.
- Regulations such as the Master Plan for Light Management (SDAL) and the Water Law must be followed, ensuring the project's environmental compliance.
- Plant vegetation that is adapted to climate change and suited to the local environment, but not really native vegetation.

Legal

- Numerous environmental and urban planning regulations apply due to the neighbourhood's PSMV status, ensuring heritage protection while implementing green infrastructure.
- Local authorities are familiar with the complex legal landscape, including green funding opportunities and environmental compliance requirements.
- Coordinating with private owners and social landlords is critical for effective implementation, especially in areas where public and private boundaries overlap.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Strong political will to change the city's image through climate adaptation and urban renewal, aligning with broader environmental goals.
- The project benefits from established participatory mechanisms, making it easier to engage residents in co-creating green solutions.
- The neighbourhood already has a framework for community activities, such as shared gardens and civic spaces, supporting social cohesion and environmental stewardship.
- Collaboration with Capso and other partners strengthens operational capacity for completing the project on time and within budget.

Weaknesses

- The area faces significant funding challenges, with limited financial resources available to expand green infrastructure, although funding has been recently secured from the Hauts de France region, the Pas-de-Calais department and especially from the State for urban renovation.
- The weak sense of community and low level of long-term resident engagement could hinder efforts to maintain and manage green spaces.
- The technical complexity of the construction site, including the collapsed quay and its proximity to sewage pipes, may cause delays and increase costs.
- Limited space for integrating green infrastructure with essential services like parking and fire brigade access creates planning constraints.

Opportunities

- Participation in European initiatives, including Cool Neighbourhoods and the Cool Cities network, provides opportunities for innovation in climate resilience.
- The redevelopment offers a chance to create stronger connections between social housing residents and the broader community, fostering social inclusion through shared green spaces.
- Collaboration with regional partners such as the Climapolder initiative could provide additional expertise and resources for climate adaptation measures.
- The project's focus on water management and greening has the potential to serve as a model for other neighbourhoods facing similar challenges.

Threats

- The rising costs of materials and labour could threaten the project's financial viability, particularly if inflation continues to push construction expenses higher.
- Political changes after the 2026 elections may shift focus away from climate adaptation and towards other local priorities, potentially reducing support for the project.
- The complexity of the quay repair and other technical challenges may lead to delays, putting pressure on project timelines and budgets.
- Long-term maintenance costs of green infrastructure could become a financial burden for the local government and community, especially given the deprived nature of the area.

Picture 2 - Engaging Proactive Governance, with Citizen Participation

Conclusion

The PESTLE and SWOT analyses for Saint-Omer's Quai des Salines neighbourhood highlight the challenges of balancing heritage preservation with climate adaptation. While political support and community participation present opportunities for success, the area's socio-economic and budgetary limitations pose significant risks. The project offers a clear path towards improving the area's livability, providing cooler, greener spaces for residents and enhancing the overall social and economic fabric of the neighbourhood. Careful planning and collaboration with partners will be key to overcoming financial and technical constraints, ensuring long-term success in climate resilience efforts.

Recommendations

Strengthen Political and Community Collaboration

- Enhance community engagement by establishing regular feedback mechanisms such as neighbourhood workshops and public consultations. This will strengthen the sense of ownership and ensure that green infrastructure aligns with local needs.
- Improve collaboration with regional partners like Climapolder and other municipal authorities to share knowledge, leverage resources, and align climate adaptation goals across neighbouring areas.

Focus on Cost-Efficient, High-Impact Green Solutions

- Prioritise cost-effective solutions such as rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and green walls that offer immediate climate benefits while being financially feasible in the short term.
- Leverage green and blue infrastructure subsidies from European and national initiatives to alleviate financial pressure, while seeking additional co-funding from private stakeholders where possible.

Mitigate Construction Risks

- Pre-empt technical challenges by conducting detailed feasibility studies for the damaged quay and sewage system, ensuring that any engineering solutions are cost-effective and sustainable.
- Stagger implementation phases to address key infrastructure problems first, such as the quay, while allowing for gradual expansion of green spaces, reducing disruption to the community and controlling costs.

Create Long-Term Maintenance Strategies

- Develop a community-based maintenance plan that involves local residents, social housing managers, and schools in the upkeep of green spaces. This will help ensure that the infrastructure is well-maintained over the long term.
- Establish a local fund dedicated to the upkeep of green infrastructure, supported by a mix of municipal budgets and public-private partnerships.

Integrate Green Spaces into Broader Urban Plans

- Work closely with urban planners to ensure that the greening of Saint-Omer complements broader city objectives, such as the creation of green corridors and connections to existing parks and waterways.
- Align climate adaptation measures with heritage conservation efforts under the PSMV, finding ways to integrate greenery into the fabric of the historic neighbourhood without compromising its heritage value.
