

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The BPO's building in Montgermont, an iconic piece of contemporary architecture and an exceptional construction in Rennes' countryside, is now being seriously threatened by a demolition permit.

It is time to act and react. At stake is the urgent need to save a major building of the 20th century.

Conceived by architects Odile Decq and Benoit Cornette, the BPO's building brought international recognition to its authors with a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1996. Their innovative approach of mixing architecture, engineering and industry in search of a new spatiality was highly acclaimed at the time.

Technically exceptional with its architectural experimentations, the BPO's building embodies the "high tech" movement at the same level as the HSBC Tower in Hong Kong or the Lloyd's Headquarters in London.

With its suspended double glazing facades, the BPO's Building represents an exceptional collaboration between architects and engineers. Peter Rice's team within RFR found, in Rennes' countryside, an experimental playground like no other, just after the Villette's glasshouse project.

The rise of such a piece of art in the French landscape, so rich in details, was a real historic event by its way of totally renewing the tertiary architecture language and standing out as an alternative to the banality of filling up suburban zones with boxes of no architectural interest.

This exemplarily building, made up of innovative concepts, has been awarded with no less than 12 major national and international prizes (among them the Benedictus Award in Washington DC in 1994). As an additional proof of its high interest in matters of experimentation and research, the building was the object of several thesis and its committed bibliography can be found in worldwide libraries

This piece of art can also be admired in the modern and contemporary gallery of the “Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine” in Paris. Its model is exhibited at the “Palais de Chaillot”. This reveals how the BPO’s building has marked a decisive stage in the tertiary architecture evolution. Beyond its technical innovations, the building showed a brand new interest in environmental issues like the questions of comfort and quality in working spaces. The building’s elevators, totally panoramic and first of their kind, add to the building’s striking performance of its time.

Unfortunately, the BPO’s building is not an isolated case. For some time now, several major buildings, from modern to contemporary history, are in real danger and are victims of financial analysis and economic profits. Yet, those building are most often reusable. In the BPO’s case, this is obvious when you consider its 7 hectares and their incredible potential. So why demolish it? Why not reflect on its reusability instead?

This is why we are launching an international emergency action, to save this building from its promised demolition, and by extension, arise the issue of the conservation of this 20th century, iconic architecture, which is different from the usual patrimonial sites, but nonetheless precious to conserve.





## **1.0 Identity of Building/Artifact/Object/Place**

BPO Building - Banque Populaire de l'Ouest

### **1.1 Current Name and Original Name.**

B.P.O.

### **1.2 Address/Location, Town, Country, Street**

15 boulevard de la Boutière CS 26858 - 35768 Saint-Grégoire/ Montgermont-  
Département Ille et Vilaine  
Région Bretagne  
(France)

### **1.3 Classification/ Type of Place**

The main building is an administrative and social center of the BPO employees: offices and spaces for technical activities; a multifunctional building with restaurant, a training centre and accommodation for the employee board, trade unions and medical department are located in additional four buildings. The main building is the very important one to be saved. The three others could be demolished to win some space for new building.

### **1.4 Current Heritage Protection Status**

The main and very important building is not listed as historic monument in France.

## **2.0 Statement of Significance and History**

### **2.1 Statement of Significance**

The BPO building was inaugurated in 1990, in Rennes, after Odile Decq and Benoit Cornette won the Competition launched by BPO in 1988.

This building brings together technical innovation and spatial research.

Using spatial analysis strongly related to the site of the building, and with its main facades stratification, they developed notions like "in-between", "paths", "dynamic spaces", "movement" and "transparency", and use the tension between perception and physical materiality of space.

Spatial research was also used in a more concrete way regarding the quality and comfort of working spaces.

The building features several technical innovations, as a result of very close partnerships between architects, engineers and industrials.

The most famous and iconic innovation being the double-glazed, screwed, suspended facade, specifically developed with Peter Rice and his engineering office, RFR, which followed the experimental single glazed facade conceived for the Villette glasshouse in the 80's.

The innovative back glass facade of the building is the first to be made without "profiles", and with edge-to-edge glazing for a total transparency.

In addition, Odile Decq and Benoit Cornette, developed products in close partnership with industrials for the project's needs.

The building features the first-ever panoramic elevator in France, developed with elevator industrials and glass specialists, and soon after was re-used by Norman Foster at Carré d'Art in Nîmes.

With Hydro Aluminium, they also developed the aluminium profiled, extruded, interlocking stairs steps and walkways, an aluminium brick system for the walls, javelin luminaires later commercialized by LUCEPLAN, and a specific carpet with Interface company.

The result of this approach radically distinguishes the BPO building from French Architecture of its time and places it at the top of this transitional, tertiary, architectural era, when environment, comfort and quality working spaces were not standardized like they are nowadays.

As the first building in France to be made in complete steel structure, this building symbolizes a rare process of construction (at least in France) by combining Architecture, Engineering and industry, at a level of precision that perfectly embodies the British Architecture that Odile Decq and Benoit Cornette restlessly studied during their trips to the UK in the 80's.

### **2.3 Date of Original Project/ Date of Competition**

Concours Banque Populaire de l'Ouest- BPO in 1988, won by Odile Decq et Benoit Cornette.  
Building inaugurated in 1990.

### **2.4 Architect/ Designers**

Architects: Odile Decq, Benoit Cornette  
Engineers: Peter Rice (RFR group)

### **2.5 If Architect Designers are Still Living Provide Address, Country of Birth, and Contact Information**

#### **Odile Decq (1955-) and Benoit Cornette (1953-1998) both born in France**

Studio Odile DECQ architectes urbanistes  
11, rue des Arquebusiers - F - 75003Paris  
[communication@odiledecq.com](mailto:communication@odiledecq.com)

### **2.6 Original and Current Use of Building/Place**

Original use: social and administrative center of the Banque Populaire de l'Ouest which includes offices, spaces for technical activities, restaurant, a training center and accommodation for the employee board, trade unions and medical department.

Still used as such today.

### **2.7 Changes, Additions**

Building in original state. Extraordinary authentic.

### **2.8 Current Condition**

Buildings' condition: regularly serviced and well maintained, the building is in good condition and still actively in business operation.

### **2.9 Original Design Intent**

In its conception and design, by the choice of construction methods structure and materials, by the technological innovations of the facade in structural suspended glass and the innovative nature of the spaces themselves, the administrative centre expresses the rigour, the precision, the technology and the activities undertaken by the BPO.

By the complete transparency of the south facade, devoid of any internal frame, the administrative centre radically expresses the wish of the bank to open out to its surroundings (countryside consisting of gently undulating groves) and to express, further that nothing is hidden...

### 3.0 Description (History, Technology, aesthetic values)

#### 4.0 Source of Aler

international petition: 1 000 signatures within two weeks.  
ICOMOS France

#### 4.1 References, Contacts

##### Contact persons:

ICOMOS France, president Jean-François Lagneau ( [jf.lagneau@lagneau-architectes.fr](mailto:jf.lagneau@lagneau-architectes.fr))  
French board ISC20C, Christiane Schmuckle-Mollard, voting member for France ( [csollar@gmail.com](mailto:csollar@gmail.com))  
Isabelle Palmi, directrice d'ICOMOS France ( [i.palmi@icomosfrance.fr](mailto:i.palmi@icomosfrance.fr))

**References and sources for documentation: see appendix 2.**

#### 4.2 Groups Supporting Alert and/or Nomination, Contacts

The following organisations support the initiative:

ICOMOS international ( [gaia.jungeblodt@icomos.org](mailto:gaia.jungeblodt@icomos.org))

ISC20C

ICOMOS France ( [i.palmi@icomosfrance.fr](mailto:i.palmi@icomosfrance.fr)),

Docomomo international ( [ana.tostoes@tecnico.ulisboa.pt](mailto:ana.tostoes@tecnico.ulisboa.pt))

Docomomo France ( [agnes.cailliau@wanadoo.fr](mailto:agnes.cailliau@wanadoo.fr))

UIA, secrétaire general Thomas Vonier ( [uia@uia-architectes.org](mailto:uia@uia-architectes.org))

#### 4.3 Groups Potentially Against Alert Action

The president of the Banque Populaire de l'Ouest, which is advocating for the demolition of the current building, in order to build a new one. He had already asked for authorisation to demolish the building. This permit is planned to be delivered on the 3d of September 2015.

#### 4.4 Local, Regional, International Significance Citations

*Lord Norman Foster, London, UK via change.org:*

The Banque Populaire de l'Ouest in Rennes by Odile Decq and Cornette is a significant work of architecture in the history of French Modernism and is an important edifice in the regional context of Brittany.

On cultural grounds it deserves to be preserved for generations to appreciate now and in the future.

On environmental grounds there is a strong imperative to recycle an existing building for present day use rather than destroy it. So in summary there are powerful cultural and ecological reasons against the proposed demolition and I am pleased to add my voice to those advocating its preservation.

*Frank Gehry, Los Angeles, CA, via change.org:*

Although I have been practicing for over 60 years, I still consider myself a student of architecture. Being curious with open eyes and mind has been essential to me. Seeing architecture in person, to experience it in the flesh is the best education.

Great buildings like the BPO by Odile Decq should be available for all to experience and to learn from now and in the future.

To lose an example of architecture like

this would go against education and inspiration, and who would want to be responsible for that.

#### **4.5 Letters of Support, Newspaper Articles, etc.**

- A thousand of professionals have signed the international petition  
Many artists, architects, designers, engineers from all over the world have already signed the petition against the destruction of BPO building.  
See the petition: <http://savethebpobuilding.com/petition-english/>

#### **4.6 Publications that describe the Work/Place, Bibliography, etc.**

See 4.1 Bibliography Attached

#### **4.7 Time Constraints for Advocacy (immediate action/delayed action)**

The threats on the building require immediate and urgent action: the demolition permit will be delivered by the mayor of Montgermont to the president of BPO on September 3rd 2015.

All advocacy initiative should be taken as quickly as possible and directed primarily to the president of BPO and the local authorities.

#### **5.0 Recommended action**

The International Scientific Committee for Twentieth Century Heritage of ICOMOS, Docomomo and Docomomo France, ICOMOS and ICOMOS France urgently ask the French Authorities and BPO and its president, owner of the site, to take the significance of the building as a 20th century emblematic work into account when giving consideration to the demolition proposal.

We ask the French Ministry of Culture and communication for:

. Immediate adjournment of the demolition permit. This will leave time to proceed to an assessment of heritage values.

-We ask the owner, Banque Populaire de l'Ouest through its president to:

- stop the demolition process

- Assess all viable solutions to expand its activity:

1. Concerning the main building: preserve and maintain the main building

2. explore possibilities to give a sufficient constructability to the five BPO hectares.

**ICOMOS France is willing to assist in any way.**

#### **5.1 Heritage Alert: International/National Distribution via ICOMOS?**

Yes

#### **5.2 Letter (s) to? (Provide Names and Full Contact Information)**

Eric Sauer

Président, Banque Populaire de l'Ouest

15 boulevard de la Boutière CS 26858 - 35768 Saint-Grégoire

Ms Brigitte Le Men, Montgermont Mayor

Hôtel de Ville

35760 Montgermont

M. Emmanuel Coüet, President of Rennes city,  
Hôtel de Rennes Métropole  
4 avenue Henri Fréville  
35207 Rennes Cedex2 – CS20723

Ministère de la culture  
3, rue de Valois  
75001 Paris  
FRANCE  
Ministre:  
Mme Fleur Pellerin  
e mail: [fleur.pellerini@culture.gouv.fr](mailto:fleur.pellerini@culture.gouv.fr)

Directeur général des patrimoines  
M. Vincent Berjot  
email: [vincent.berjot@culture.gouv.fr](mailto:vincent.berjot@culture.gouv.fr)

### **5.3 ICOMOS National or Scientific Committee, or International Website Upload?**

The Heritage Alert is published on ICOMOS France, ICOMOS international, and ICOMOS ISC20C websites, DOCOMOMO and UIA websites.

### **5.4 Affiliated Distribution? (such as UIA/Docomomo/TICCIH)**

Docomomo and UIA

### **6.0 Desired Outcomes\***

#### **6.1 Impose Legal Protection or Improve Legal Protection?**

Legal protection for the building (classified or listed)  
Require the protection in the PLU (local plan of urbanism) by forbidding demolition.

#### **6.2 Stop Work that Will Alter the Heritage?**

No danger at this moment. Demolition is asked by the BPO owner but the permit is not already delivered. We are in time to react.

#### **6.3 Stop Permits that Would Result in Irretrievable Loss of the Heritage?**

Refusal of the demolition permit within the next two weeks.

#### **6.4 Impose Minimum Maintenance to Stop Further Decay Pending Conservation Work?**

The site is well maintained and in good conditions. Maintenance is not a problem.

#### **6.5 Modify the Project to Make it More Respectful of the Values for Which the Building or Site Received Legal Protection?**

The BPO project of demolition should be stopped. A solution can be proposed: new construction on the site (5hectares) by modifying the PLU (local Plan of Urbanism).  
ICOMOS France experts are mobilized to support all actions on this matter

#### **6.6 Stop Demolition?**

Demolition will begin in the next month. An international alert could help to stop this process.

#### **7 Other? (Please Specify)**

See 6.5