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“Associative Action in Urban Planning: Cases Studies from Marseille, France”

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Introduction

'Community planning' (as an instrumental action, pursuing a public good) may initially appear inappropriate to the French situation with regards to urban planning. Although associations founded on a platform of voluntary action - like the *Fondation de l'Abbé Pierre* or militant groups like the DAL (*Droit au Logement* – the right to housing) and the action of collective movements meeting irregularly on a regional or city-wide basis - are accepted and sanctioned by the State, these associations are often regarded, both by those who initiated them and by those who have been confronted by them, less as vehicles for self-help and more as expressions of opposition to authorities which are seen as abusing their powers or failing to address the concerns and needs of minority or dominated groups. They are viewed as militant, often mobilising in the face of perceived threats from urban development or the practice of urban planning. It is from this viewpoint of general consideration that we shall examine the relationship between basic urbanist actions and the authorities in power, in France and in the region of Marseille, and several specific cases. Our concern in this chapter is with the challenging context for 'community' action, and the struggle to secure basic rights and representation, in some of Europe's poorest and most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Let us assimilate those entering the country

(to the tune of '*Allons Enfants de la Patrie...*', *La Marseillaise*, Rouget de L'Isle, 1792)

The republican conception of French society

In the French understanding of society, the notion of 'community' generally refers to a group distinguished by ethnic or religious origin, and which may possibly be part of a well-defined region. Alternatively, the idea of community may simply be associated with the 'commune' (the lowest level of territorial governance), in which case there is no allusion to religious, ideological or ethnic basis. The community merely comprises the residents, French citizens, of a particular place. So conceptions of community divide into two types: the first looks for particular traits that bind people together; the second is 'socio-spatial' but does not assume any particular bonds between individuals; they are merely co-located. The community discourse in France has been dominated not by the positive interactions between community actors (which has been the focus throughout much of this book), but by a fear of the introverted nature of some communities and by the social tensions that arise from a lack of cultural integration.

Thus the term 'community' is viewed differently in France than in many Anglo-Saxon countries. Its meaning is ambiguous and even suspect, being associated with a pejorative form of 'communitarianism' which threatens national unity. The existence of minorities - sometimes with their secessional ambitions (e.g. Corsicans, Bretons or Basques) or displaying a tendency to retreat into ghettos (e.g. those from the former North African colonies) - fuels irrational fears amongst Republicans, leading both national government and local authorities to deny these regions and groups the means to do more for themselves, for fear that it will accelerate social

disintegration. This is clearly a very different context for community action: one in which that action, if undertaken in areas of severe social need or political ambition, is viewed with suspicion and a force for undermining the state. There is a tradition of interventionism in France, exercised by and in support of a strong state, and this colours attitudes towards the idea of community and perceptions of what rights and responsibilities should, or should not, be assigned.

Assimilation as a model, and social mix as an approach in the field of housing

Assimilation has been a key goal of the French immigration model. After World War II, immigrants arriving in the country to assist with reconstruction (especially from the former colonies) and who helped achieve the 'Trente Glorieuses' - the thirty years of economic growth after the war - were repatriated once their periods of employment had ended. This approach was slowly phased out and immigrants exercised their right to stay in France. The state then set about housing immigrants and their families in the large public estates of the 1960s, moving to a policy of integration (Kepel, 2012) which aimed to achieve social mixing. The goal of this strategy was to realise the republican vision of social assimilation, and it initially yielded some positive results with French and immigrant families integrating well. Evaluations at the time pointed to the many benefits achieved: upward social mobility through a sharing of contacts; effective integration of children within the school system; and clear socio-economic advantage for the longest-standing immigrant families, who enjoyed many social benefits over the previous generation.

The strategy was particularly effective for the first waves of immigrants from the Maghreb immediately after the war. But it seemed to work less well for immigrants from more distant cultures (those from Vietnam, China or 'black' Africa). The growing economic crisis of the 1970s, combined with departure of the now more affluent immigrant (and non-immigrant) families from the great housing estates during the same period, triggered the socio-economic decline of these places. They became 'sink' estates from which the previous social mix of residents disappeared, to be replaced by an ethnic mix whose common denominator was extreme poverty.

From suppressing local co-operation...

Co-operative action has ancient origins in France, but its development in the twentieth century was hampered by the strong intervention, noted above, that has orientated the structuring of French society. There has been a concern to steer social development in a particular direction: policy-makers have not celebrated difference, and nor have they promoted different approaches to development in different places. At the beginning of the twentieth century, public bureaus were established, under the Bonneville Law 1912, to fund public housing. As in other parts of Europe, the rate of public housing production accelerated in the 1950s as part of wider reconstruction efforts and in response to economic growth. That growth followed on from a period of acute shortage of housing just after the war, which was highlighted by Abbé Pierre (founder of the Emmaus movement, which helped homeless people and refugees) and which the state responded to with an authoritarian policy of property requisition and industrial construction, based predominantly on the model set out by the Modern Movement. An enormous 'public housing enterprise' (Raymond, 1984) was set in motion which was mainly concerned with building and management, relegating social programmes behind this primary mission. Other initiatives were suppressed, including the self-build schemes being promoted at the time by trade unionists (Pinson, 2012).

...to resident mobilisation

Requisition became a catalyst, however, for unrest. After 1968, many inner-city neighbourhoods became stages for popular struggles against evictions, and these struggles gave residents the opportunity to unite and collectively organise the defence of their homes. The immediate impact was often non-eviction; but the longer-lasting legacy was a changed vision of the city and new forms of social organisation within these neighbourhoods. The struggles also prompted a reappraisal of public housing policy and a softening of what had previously been a very centralised approach to housing delivery and management. Suddenly, there were calls to focus on the 'social development of neighbourhoods' (Blancherie et al, 1972) and the subsequent 'Public Housing White Book' of 1975 asserted for the first time that the mobilisation of residents and their active participation in neighbourhood affairs should be a key goal of future public policy. It added that the mere maintenance or physical renovation of housing could no longer be the sole occupation of that policy, but that it should extend its reach into the social, economic, cultural and educational life of neighbourhoods. Very soon, a raft of initiatives were launched that aimed to address these concerns.

During the years that followed, however, the attention given to 'problem neighbourhoods' tended to have a stigmatising effect. For that reason, the focus switched - by 1990 - to whole town policies which avoided targeting particular areas. These tried to create a level playing field of social and economic opportunity without advertising any 'priority geography' or setting any particular 'urban boundaries' for intervention. This meant that much of the targeted funding for social programmes, created after 1975, started to dry up and the organisations that had formed in the early 1970s began to look for direct funding from the state. This was subject to strict conditions and proved difficult to access. It did little, therefore, to promote social development.

This brief narrative says much about the French resistance to supporting community development and initiative and the preference for strictly controlled interventions. Early promotion, forty years ago, of social development at a neighbourhood level was quickly reined back and straitjacketed by funding restrictions, which had the aim of restricting activities according to particular central policy objectives. Neighbourhood organisations found themselves corralled into specific areas of activity, seeking support from the ANRU (*Agence Nationale de la Rénovation urbaine* - National Agency for Urban Renovation) for physical regeneration, or the ACSE (*Agence nationale pour la cohésion sociale et l'égalité des chances* - National Agency for social cohesion and equal opportunities). Neighbourhood activities became tightly 'administered' from Paris. Local groups needed the support, but it came with many strings attached, as government sought to steer the types of projects and activities of those organisations emerging from the protests of the late 1960s.

Challenging representative democracy

However, the crisis in representative democracy - felt throughout Europe and beyond - has given further impetus to local activism. Since the 1980s, the rate of abstention in most local, regional and national elections has been increasing. In response, new opportunities have been created for citizens to express their views on changes or developments affecting their environment or daily lives. A series of laws - beginning with the Bouchardeau Law 1983 (requiring that all projects likely to impact on the environment be subject to public inquiry: [European Conference of Ministers of Transport, 2003: 83](#)) and then moving through the Solidarity and Urban Renewal (SRU) Law 2000 and Local Democracy Law 2002 - have gradually strengthened the requirement to consult and involve residents in transport and development decisions. The 2002 Law, for example, created *Comités de Quartier* (neighbourhood committees) in cities with more than 80,000

inhabitants. This followed on from the creation of a National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP) in 1997, with responsibility for facilitating engagement around large-scale developments.

These legislative changes have given rise to an important debate within the political and research communities. This has focused on the motives behind the move to a more open democracy in which there seem to be greater opportunities for input and discourse. Is the aim to genuinely compensate for the limits and failings of representative democracy, delivering real empowerment, or is the actual goal simply to diffuse local conflict, with minimum impact on top-down interventions, and in order to protect government from the accusation that its mandate is increasingly fragile?

A number of research networks in France are now focused on this critical question, including the 'Democracy and Participation' (GIS) group, formed in 2010. More broadly, the '*Collectif Pouvoir d'agir*' - comprising individuals, local associations and national research groups concerned with the political responses to social exclusion - was created in the same year. *Pouvoir d'agir* or the 'power to act' is taken to have the same meaning as the English term 'empowerment'. The collective published a key report in 2013, advocating a 'democracy of involvement' (Bacqué & Mehmache, 2013) though it is too early to say whether such mobilisation will any effect on urban policy.

So far in this chapter, we have drawn a picture of neighbourhood action in France growing from the urban protests of the 1960s, but in a broader context of official resistance and an overarching philosophy of centrism and interventionism: ideas that support the republic conception of statehood and national unity. However, the crisis of democracy and the risk of a weakened electoral mandate for central intervention has provided an added impetus for more open democracy in France over the last 20 or so years. In the remainder of this chapter, we examine how participation and the *pouvoir d'agir* is able to express itself in the region of Marseille and in particular in the working-class areas to the north of the city.

The City of Marseille

Marseille has always been considered a 'special case' amongst French cities. It is a city of pronounced segregation, with the historic line of the *Canebière* running from the Vieux Port separating the very poor north from the wealthy south. In recent years, this line has become perforated as the middle classes flee the city, bringing a penetration of poorer households into the south. Marseille is now the most impoverished large city (with a population of more than a million inhabitants) in France. A third of the population live beneath the poverty line and within the working class areas, more than half of all young people are unemployed. At the time of writing, a long and slow journey towards socio-economic recovery (assisted by the *Euroméditerranée* project focused on the rejuvenation of the city's port area) which seemed to be given momentum by Marseille's designation as European Capital of Culture in 2013, appears to have been brought to an abrupt end by a fresh outbreak of violence and gangland killings linked to drug trafficking. An almost apocalyptic picture has been painted of the city, within the media and by a number of politicians. In that climate, it is difficult to detach oneself from the everyday drama and to think critically about what has been achieved through experimental participative urbanism in Marseille's working-class neighbourhoods. In the sections that follow, we examine the story of the 'MOS', later 'MOUS', a housing renewal intervention with the attendant aim of promoting and co-ordinating social development and community organizing, firstly in Marseille and then in other French inner-cities.

The Petit Seminaire experiment and the repowering neighbourhoods

The MOS (which later became MOUS) was born in Marseille; it grew out of the work of the *Centre d'Etudes, de Recherches et de Formation Institutionnelle du Sud-Est* (CERFISE), a research unit founded in 1975 by the sociologist Michel Anselme. The unit's focus was on bringing about a transformation of social housing areas in the city. Anselme was influenced by Michel Foucault's work on the 'equipment of power', and the struggles that individuals engage in against exploitation, undertaken during the 1970s (later published in 'The Subject and Power', Foucault, 1983). CERFISE and Anselme worked, in the early to mid-1980s, on the '*Petit Seminaire*', an area of social housing built in 1959 which had become blighted by a range of problems. In that project, focus was put on understanding the lives and the values of inhabitants. Anselme began by inventing a fictional city in which people could express opinion freely without fear of ridicule or repression. He offered that vision to the bureaucrats in charge of Marseille's public housing, challenging their view that residents' articulate only confused and contradictory opinions and therefore that the role of bureaucrats, as public landlord, should be to replace lay 'irrationality' with an informed and expert vision of a 'good neighbourhood'. CERFISE eventually acted as an intermediary between the landlord and the tenants. It tried to convince these groups that residents are not always irrational, and intervention is not always negative, eventually proposing to create a 'public space' (or 'public sphere' in the sense used by Habermas to describe an area that promotes social life, where individuals can congregate to work through their problems) which would be a place of ritual and drama and with great 'power attached to it' (Anselme, 2000). The aim was to establish the interactional infrastructure of the city, which was hitherto lacking, and which could be used to draw out shared values and, in the long term, assist in 'community development'.

The specificities of the Marseille social world

However, social unity (and therefore the potential for community development, as understood elsewhere in the world) is perhaps more difficult to achieve in Marseille than in many other cities. Anselme believed that family networks, underpinning criminality, had become an '[...] inescapable reality for those wishing to understand [...] the dynamics and specific management problems facing authorities', adding that Marseille was witnessing a 'reappearance or perpetuation of a type of Mediterranean sociability' (ibid.), based around the family and fuelled by poverty. The more recent consequences of this have been the creation of a volatile and violent 'gangland' in which families compete for monopoly control of various criminal activities. There is great solidarity within the gangs, which could be said to possess an abundance of 'social capital', but not always wielded with positive ends in sight (see Rydin, this volume).

It is not only the criminality which poses a significant challenge in Marseille, but also the reality of spatially diffuse family and ethnic networks being stronger than local bonds. This means that the sense of belonging, locally, to a place is weaker in these poorer neighbourhoods: the reality is of a city comprising a complex mosaic of affinity with sometimes dozens of different ethnic groups living in close proximity but displaying limited sociability with one another. This weakens any sense of a 'socio-spatial community', making it difficult to achieve the dialectic goals of an open democracy or Anselme's fiction of the ideal city.

Obstacles to democracy in Marseille: the economy of drugs and corruption

Marseille is a city of multiple unofficial economies, from the makeshift economy of repair services (Tarrius, 2002) to the international trade of people trafficking. These activities can be highly profitable for their participants (Péraldi, 1999) but, alongside the drug economy, they have

a hugely detrimental effect on the urban society (Duport, 2012). These activities come to dominate economic life and come to be seen as ‘normal’ by many young people. Rather than having school, apprenticeships and career aspirations as their reference points, those growing up in these areas can quickly become drawn into the unofficial economies and this acts as a brake on open dialogue as people become locked into crime and increasing fearful, as a result, of engagement with authorities. There seems to be little point, in this context, of investing in the interactional infrastructure called for by Michel Anselme. The interactions that do occur have not always been positive: the structures of local power have occasionally been drawn into some of the criminal activity that festers in Marseille’s working-class neighbourhoods. The president of the *Conseil General des Bouches du Rhône* was found to have given out a procurement contract for waste treatment in return for bribes; members of a specialist unit of the national police (the BAC Nord), since disbanded, was found to be guilty of protecting some drug gangs in return for a percentage of the profit from trafficking. Such episodes do little to build trust between the neighbourhoods and the local state and creating an obviously challenging environment for positive community development.

Self-development in the Marseille region

However, despite this sombre picture there have been a number of localised community development initiatives. Some of these started with very modest ambitions but have been assisted by national agencies. The ‘*Compagnons Bâtisseurs*’ (or ‘building companions’) came together to assist new immigrants (principally Comorians) develop the skills needed to improve the very poor and neglected private accommodation they found themselves in when arriving in France. They provided not only the technical skills for undertaking immediate repairs, but also skills that might be of use in the labour market. In some instances the building companions have been called upon to assist middle class households, residing elsewhere in the city or even further afield, in group build projects. In recent years, small complexes of typically 10 to 12 apartments, built by their occupants, have sprung up all over France.

But back in Marseille, there have also been more broadly focused ‘self-help’ initiatives aimed at improving the social, economic and physical circumstances that immigrants find themselves in. The success of these initiatives has been circumscribed by a number of factors, as we shall see in the two examples that are now presented.

Participation and choice in two Marseille estates (Bellevue 3^e and Bassens 15^e)

{Insert Map 1 here}

The illustrative cases used in this section draw from research into participative processes in the Bellevue and Bassens areas of the city (Messaoudène, 2010; 2012). Both look at the way in which the *pouvoir d’agir* is expressed, its outcomes and the limits to this form of power and action. The cases also say something about the degree of acceptance of difference and different needs within French society and by the state.

Bellevue is in the third *arrondissement* of Marseille, in the Saint-Mauront district. The example of participation concerns engagement around a top-down intervention leading to the demolition and rebuilding of part of the existing public housing in very rundown area with what is a diverse population, but dominated by settled North African immigrants who have been joined by an influx of Comorians since the 1990s. Bassens is in the fifteenth *arrondissement* close to the Arnavaux industrial estate. The example here is of a small housing estate with a ‘transitory’ population. It was built in the 1960s and has since become home to an Algerian population with

very dense social networks that have impacted strongly on the form and outcome of residents' initiatives. Like the Bellevue case, this example also involved mobilization and participation around housing renewal.

The Bellevue and Bassens Interventions

Bellevue in the late 1990s was subject to the '*Plan de Sauvegarde*' (1999-2004) which aimed to reduce housing density in the area by removing 132 apartments from a total of 814, and thereafter renovating and improving the remaining stock. This was a top-down intervention, but one that sought to engage with an existing residents' association – the '*Amicale des Locataires*' (the Tenants' Friendly Society) – which, however, was largely inactive and seemed to represent very few of the area's residents. From the point of view of the local authorities, the objective in Bellevue was to generate trust in the process, by spreading information about the project and by being receptive to local concerns. It was generally felt that dialogue between residents and the institutional stakeholders would quicken the pace of development and reduce friction and potential conflict. To that end, a total of 54 meetings took place. Yet attendance at those meetings was not always high and it proved difficult to connect to some groups: the established North African community was easier to mobilize, but the newer Comorian migrants tended to distance themselves from the orchestrated participation. A particular issue in Bellevue was the 'cultural distance' (and trust) between more settled immigrants and the public authorities and between the newer arrivals and those same authorities.

{Insert Image 1 Here: *Bellevue (Messaoudène, 2005)*}

In Bassens, participation was again prompted by proposed housing renewal in the form of a MOUS intervention. Originally built in 1964 to replace what had been a 'shanty town', it was decided in 1991 that the complex of apartments on the site should be demolished and that residents should be decanted to homes outside of Bassens. The 1964 development had comprised 110 apartments each of less than 40 m². This number was reduced to 56 by an earlier intervention in 1975. In some ways, the story of Bassens is more complex than that of Bellevue. Some of the Algerian residents, incensed by the plan to demolish their homes, refused to move, which prompted prolonged engagement and more spontaneous forms of local action. It also led to a further project by the Marseille-Habitat public housing body between 1998 and 2004 aimed at allowing the remaining 31 families on the site to be rehoused *in situ*, in 40 apartments (built in two phases) in a low-rise 'maisonette' style.

{Insert Image 2 Here: *Bassens (Messaoudène, 2005)*}

Processes

In this section we wish to focus briefly on the experience of participation in the two study areas, drawing on observations from meetings between representatives of the local authorities and resident groups. It is sometimes said that participation is an opportunity for those who have already taken key decisions to merely persuade 'community actors' of the wisdom of those decisions: to convince them at an early stage that the right decision (i.e. to 'educate') and therefore avoid later conflict. Meetings in both areas were sometimes confrontational. In one instance, a resident objected to the replacement of communal windows in the apartment blocks (in Bellevue) with metal bars. Irritated by the criticism, the local authority representative said that the replacement had become necessary as many residents elected to throw rubbish out of the communal windows, often breaking them, and displayed absolutely no respect for their homes or the communal spaces. There was no focus on working with residents to change

behaviour (perhaps by installing new means of disposing of rubbish quickly from upper floors), but rather the imposition of what appeared to be punitive (and cheap) measures that might well have resulted in rubbish piling up in corridors.

It was clear in the meetings that residents were concerned about their living environment. Many wished to see the installation of automatic watering systems for flower beds and green areas, rather than infrequent manual watering. This was dismissed as too expensive and ‘technically difficult’. The Bellevue residents appeared to have little capacity to understand costs and lacked the knowledge needed to rebut what were clearly flawed technical arguments from the local authority. The clear intention was to drive the project through, making only minor tactical concessions to the residents. The only ‘victory’ won by the *Amicale des Locataires* was the naming of a new access road to the site.

The entire engagement at Bellevue appeared tokenistic: the local authority provided basic information on the operations underway, and displayed little concern for promoting genuine involvement. But the core problems lay with the residents themselves. Their *pouvoir d’agir* was critically constrained by their own internal divisions. The North Africans were tentatively engaged with the *Amicale des Locataires* but the Comorians were entirely absent from this organization. This might simply be explained by the short period of time they had spent in the area, relative to their North African neighbours. But detailed research with Comorians in Marseille (Direche-Slimani & Le Houerou, 2002) has shown that patterns of sociability are shaped by ‘dense, complex associative organisation’ sometimes expressed in extremely closed social and cultural events. In other words, these recent immigrants keep themselves to themselves and may be suspicious of broader social engagement, not being familiar with its rules and rituals. They expend their energy, instead, on internalised activity and a ‘veil of invisibility’ has therefore hung over Marseille’s Comorian ‘community’ for a number of years. For reasons of protection, it is closely knit and difficult to penetrate. In Bellevue, the particular division between the North Africans and the Comorians may appear odd as both groups are Muslim, but they participate in different Islamic practices and are not therefore joined in common worship.

The Bassens area displayed no such divisions, and the Algerian population was accustomed to fighting for its rights. Since the Beurs’ March for equality and against racism in October 1983 (‘Beur’ being French slang for people with North African roots) the attitudes of many North Africans against the ‘host’ population had changed. A belief developed that protest offered a real means of changing attitudes and outcomes, and from the 1980s onwards, immigrants from this part of the world became much faster to mobilise and to voice opposition to unwanted interference, or claim particular rights. The right to better housing had become a regular battle cry, which was quickly heard in Bassens. From the very first meeting organised by the newly-formed residents’ committee in Servières, it was clear that there would be conflict. The local authority’s aim was to demolish Bassens and relocate its residents away from the nearby industrial estate. In the face of stiff opposition – galvanised behind a local man who emerged to lead the committee and mobilise the area’s residents – the authority offered a range of incentives, none of which were accepted by the Algerian community.

The contrast with Bellevue could not have been more striking. Faced with an articulate, well-organised community (which knew its rights and had a single, clear, goal), the local authority was quickly forced onto the back-foot. And by the time the authority came round to the view that it needed to work *with* the community towards a compromise, the latter’s goals had been much refined. It no longer wished merely to stay put, but had a very specific set of requirements. The local authority returned to Bassens in 1998; this time with a proposal to replace the existing apartments with new homes, but move residents away from the industrial estate and bring them

closer to an adjacent railway line. The tenants' committee was unconvinced by the plan and therefore asked the City of Marseille to intervene and require further physical protection from the railway. Once this was agreed, the works commenced according to a plan that had been approved by the local community.

What became clear during these second phase negotiations was that the community was technically adept at interpreting plans, weighing up their implications, and responding with clear counter-arguments and requiring specific alterations. There was a capacity in the tenants' association to communicate beyond the area (on the part of the leader of the committee) and to understand the technical arguments and realities presented by the authority. In Bellevue, these resources were entirely absent. In Bassens, they were in ample supply, with the community endowed with a great deal of social capital. One good example of this is what happened after the authority had completed the first phase of the project on-site. Many of the residents of Bassens worked in the building trade and were familiar with 'plans of works' and building quality standards. After the first homes were built, they were inspected by these residents, who drew attention to poor workmanship, problems with sound insulation and instances of kitchen layouts not adhering to the original plans.

Once again the residents mobilized, using a cultural festival organised by a young artist from the neighbourhood as a platform for their concerns. Following a lengthy protest, during which the community was unable to persuade the local authority to respond to the problems, the two parties took their grievance to court. A subsequent ruling in favour of the residents led to the appointment of an independent inspector of works. The inspector instructed the authority to rectify a number of problems with the completed homes. These works commenced in April 2000 and the residents were finally rehoused in 2004.

Outcomes

In contrast to Bellevue, there was no pre-existing tenants' group in Bassens. Rather, a tenants' committee was established in response to the MOUS intervention. Its president, a charismatic personality in whom the residents had great faith, was to play a determining role in the way in which the project was carried out and in realising the final outcomes for tenants. He proved to be a pragmatist and networker, someone able to communicate effectively with public officials. He was very much the 'everyday fixer' described by Van der Pennen and Schreuders (this volume) and the 'boundary-crosser' described by Kilpatrick and colleagues (this volume). With his leadership, there was a proactive mobilisation of residents through a number of associations and staged events. The public authorities were confronted by a vocal group, able to articulate their concerns on their own terms. They could not be merely 'persuaded' of the logic of the intervention and the planned decant through staged participation, as the public authority had wished; rather they sought a compromise with their landlord and what they saw as a better overall deal for the 'community'. Indeed, the manner of their mobilisation (home-grown rather than externally engineered) gave the tenants' committee a strong hand in negotiations; and because of their evident competency and knowledge in all matters technical (Deboulet, 2013), they were eventually able to confront the landlord in court and win a compromise involving the demolishing of their existing homes and the building of the Marseille-Habitat apartments.

Although not perhaps an entirely positive experience for the local authority, the Bassens case says a great deal about the latent potential, in Marseille, for sudden eruptions of highly effective 'community action', in spite of all the contextual challenges noted above. The ingredients were all there: a small neighbourhood with close social bonds based on common ethnicity; a charismatic leader with the skills needed to bring people together; and an external threat to

individual wellbeing, that became ‘up-scaled’ through the mobilisation into a clear ‘community’ issue. None of these ingredients were present in Bellevue. No leader emerged; the community was heavily divided along ethnic lines, and its mobilisation was forced, with poorly-attended meetings becoming merely an opportunity for the local authority to tell residents what was about to happen to them. Hence, the more numerous but less mobilised residents of Bellevue were not able to shape the outcome of the intervention in any way. Indeed, they were subject to a very obvious form of authoritarianism, hidden behind a façade of good intention and made possible by the incapacity of the community to come together across behind any defined goals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the manifestation of ‘community planning’ (a term that is not widely recognized or used in France) in a very specific context: one of large-scale immigration, poverty, and social and ethnic segregation. Besides the struggles documented in this chapter, other forms of community action exist in France. These include the collective group build projects dotted around the country, fuelled by the appetite of middle-class households to take more direct control over their housing situations and, where possible, to lighten their ecological footprint by promoting greener forms of development. The origin of these projects can be traced back to the self-build promoted by trade unionists in the 1950s, which crumpled under the weight of the modernist housing project, but which is now emerging in a new, privatized form.

In the working class neighbourhoods of Marseille, some examples of community action have emerged from the recent renewal and reconsideration of the large social housing projects of the 1960s. From the 1980s onwards, lip-service was paid to the ‘*développement social des quartiers*’ (DSQ – social development of neighbourhoods). This later transformed into a broader ‘*politique de la ville*’ and a wider concern for urban governance, centred on large-scale programmes and projects and given added impetus by early signs of a crisis of electoral involvement during those years. However, major housing interventions continue to be dominated by large public bureaucracies whose primary focus is physical renewal. They concentrate their efforts on persuading the residents of target neighbourhoods of the logic of their interventions and rarely encounter significant resistance. This is because ‘communities’ tend to be diffuse, divided and often disconnected from the immediate neighbourhood. They have other priorities, are blighted by crime, or lack trust in public authority. Residents often struggle to find common focus. Where they do, such as in Bassens, the conditions for effective community action are just right – the neighbourhoods are relatively closed, they share an ethnicity, and they possess the skills, knowledge and leadership needed to confront what might be described as bureaucratic indifference. But these conditions are rare. The Bellevue example is more typical of the interactions between ‘community’ and the ‘state’ in Marseille and in France more generally.

The interventionist tradition, originating in the Welfare State, is a powerful force in French politics. It finds expression in many areas of public policy and also in urban planning. Power is not easily relinquished and even when confronted by what appear to be quite reasonable community concerns (as in the example of Bassens), the state will choose to fight rather than bow to local action. And even in instances where it is funding (from *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* or CDC) local initiatives, associations or foundations, it is clear that it is doing so in order to exert influence rather than to ‘empower’. It is possible that - in the years ahead - a greater proportion of funding for voluntary initiative will start to come from non-state sources (as seems increasingly likely given the level of government debt). This might provide the impetus for a transition away from ‘participative’ forms of urban planning aimed at legitimizing

state action to more ‘communitarian’ forms of planning with communities in control. But such a transition would be dependent on a willingness of the state to accept and support different ‘communities’, whilst those communities would need to develop the capacities needed to lead and deliver projects. The situation in France serves as a reminder, if one is needed, of the very different and sometimes difficult contexts in which community action gestates. Many of the chapters in this book deal with the aspirations and consequent mobilization of middle class communities, which face few, if any, of the challenges encountered in Marseille’s working-class neighbourhoods. Here, the capacity to act is a rare commodity, but one that sometimes shines through adversity to bring vital gains for some of France’s most disadvantaged citizens.

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