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Impacts on the social representations of urban and architectural transformations in renewed districts in France and elsewhere.

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ABSTRACT:

Since the 1950's, the aspect of cities in France and Europe has been characterized by large housing areas. The social representations of these districts in France have evolved from an emblematic representation to a stigmatized representation. It has been conveyed through the urban policy carried out since 2003 and has legitimated the demolitions and rebuildings in district renewal projects.

The object is to search for representations in urban renewal programmes, which have been supported by the local actors of the projects, the town-planners and the inhabitants.

Understanding their contents and their processes can enable to evaluate the impact of urban renewal interventions in large housing areas.

The social representation of urban space is a form of knowledge which makes it possible to analyze social reality.

It is an opportunity to question urban renovation projects that have already been carried out and to evaluate their architectural and urban qualities, but also to measure their capacity to change the perception of the district, since this is exactly what French urban policy aims at doing.

The framework of this study is to know if the physical transformations of these districts could have an impact on their images, if they could take part in the change in their representations and thus "destignatize" them?

KEYWORDS: urban renovation projects, social representations, urban forms, social housing

1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of French urban policy since 2003 has been to visibly transform large housing areas and also their inhabitants living environment.

Studying the architectural and urban forms of renovated large housing districts can lead us to question how relevant the programmes about demolition, new housing and rehabilitation projects have been. It also enables to examine the urban forms of the public and residential areas presented by these programmes. Evaluating the impact of the transformation of renovated districts could help to understand what really makes a change in the way they are perceived, and thus to minimise their negative sides.

This is an opportunity to question urban renovation projects which have already been carried out, to evaluate their architectural and urban qualities as well as to measure their ability to change the perception of the district, since this is what French urban policy is trying to achieve.

Could the physical transformations of these districts affect their images, could they take part in changing their perceptions and thus avoid stigmatisation?

First, we must start from an approach of the context in which the policy of post-war rebuilding was implemented and the production of the urban and architectural forms resulting from the modern movement was developed. It lays the foundations for the various current reports about the large housing areas that have justified urban renewal actions since 2003. This approach tries to understand the drift about districts built between the 1950's and the 1970's, up to this day.

Then, it secondly appears necessary to tackle the question of the link between urban form and its representation; to wonder about the representations of these districts in France, and about what has built these representations since 1945 until today; and finally to understand why those large housing areas, which were massively voted in at the time when they were achieved, are now nationally rejected.

Indeed, the French state has developed a whole body of iconography which supports the actions of the urban policy in large housing areas, showing their decay, the physical degradation of the buildings and the "uneasiness" in the suburbs.

A range of terminology referring to these districts has accompanied and justified the restoration campaign since 2003.

However have these projects truly succeeded in being accompanied by new social representations? Does changing the representations of these places simply involve changing their physical aspects?

The study then thirdly endeavours to question the urban forms resulting from this policy and to evaluate its impact on their representations. This work seeks to underline the causes, the directions and the changes of these representations. It also aims at evaluating the impact of form and of its transformation on the way it has been perceived by the actors in the city, the technicians, the elected officials, the "intramural" or external inhabitants. Through this approach, each site is tackled in its uniqueness.

The study sites in France include the districts of La Monnaie in Romans-sur-Isère, La Duchère in Lyon, the Teisseire estate in Grenoble, and Arcueil Gentilly and Creteil districts in Paris.

These selected study sites cover urban renovations on territories with their own urban strategies, and with quite different built heritages.

The outcome of this research enables to verify the existing links between the architectural and urban forms of modern districts and their representations.

The objectives of the urban policy carried out in France these past decades are closely related to the fast development of stigmatized representations about large housing areas. Can this model of intervention then be applied to other countries?

2 FROM THE EMBLEM OF LARGE HOUSING AREAS TO THEIR STIGMATIZATION

2.1 Producing large housing areas

Producing large housing areas from the 1950's to the 70's has definitively marked the urban and architectural landscape in France. Their populations' social issues, which were associated to their negative images, have only managed to stigmatize these districts for decades, in spite of the successive policies undertaken to improve the inhabitants' living environment or their socio-economic status.

In 2003, the Framework Act for Town Planning and Urban Renewal made it possible to intervene indepth in large housing districts, primarily focusing on their built heritages and on their urban structures. The goal was to reintroduce these districts within the cities, to create social diversity in the housing and to diversify the functions. This urban policy has aimed at changing the image of these districts and at systematically taking the opposite view of a stigmatizing modern architecture.

The "large housing area" is to be considered as a period in French urbanization. It symbolizes a context of housing shortage and emergency, with a significant government presence, and the implementation of an innovative ideology conveyed through the Athens Charter.

This globally endorsed and salutary architecture was meant to bring comfort, welfare, functionality, homes which were often intended for a mixed population.



Figure 1- Housing Unit Marseille, photographer Bernard Lafond

From 1945, the State appealed to the media (with photographs, publications, cinemas...) to promote its policy and to defend it. These images took part in developing a speech on modernity, on the ideal city, and on the visionary state at the origin of this erection (Raphaële BERTHO)¹.

For 20 years 300,000 housings were built every year, whereas at the beginning of the 1950's, only 10,000 housings a year were erected.

A ministerial circular dated 21 March 1973 and signed by Olivier Guichard, the Minister for Infrastructure, Housing and Transport, aimed at "preventing the implementation of urban forms known as "large housing areas" and at fighting against social segregation by housing"². It prohibited any larger construction than 500 housing unit buildings.

The construction of large housing areas was then definitively abandoned.

In France, thirty years after the Guichard circular, the Framework Act for Town Planning and Urban Renewal dated 1 August 2003 was meant to act in an ideological but also physical way on «hard French». ANRU — the National Agency for Urban Renovation - was then created to implement this new urban policy.

In less than sixty years, the urban and architectural form of large housing areas, which presented as low-rise buildings and towers and which "had been enthusiastically approved, has finally been named a problem estate, a derogatory term in popular imagery"³; there has been a massive demolition of such urban forms, which were considered as pathological.

These districts of low-rise buildings and towers have become the urban prototypes of exclusion. And even if they were not always such prototypes, their urban form has not evolved whereas their social representations have: those of their inhabitants or the external representations of "people from the city".

The spectacular demolition of low-rise buildings and towers, which was the principal lever of this policy, thus shows a strong will to get rid of large housing areas, and everything that they have generated.

As if a "clean slate" made it possible to exorcize the evils from the suburbs: ghettoization, poverty, degradations, violence...("le thé au Harem d'Archi Ahmed" by Mehdi Charef).

2.2 Urban renewal in france: strategy, process and opportunities

The Borloo Law dated 1 August 2003 reorientated the urban policy⁴. By leaving the rehabilitation of districts behind, it focused on intensive restructuring operations, based on massive demolitions and various reconstructions, in order "to break the urban ghettos".



Figure 2- demolition of a tower, District in Romans-sur-Isere , ${\mathbb O}$ Karin SCHAEFFER

For this purpose, the law launched a national plan of urban renovation over five years in 751 sensitive urban areas (ZUS). This plan was conveyed by local action programmes. About €30 billion works thus had to be carried out between 2004 and 2008 to arrange public spaces, create or restore public equipment, reorganize the roadway systems, renovate the public and private housing stock.

Urban renewal has aimed at helping these districts to develop into «ordinary» urban areas, characterized by varied functions and housing types, an opening and links with the rest of the city, public space quality, together with an improvement in the inhabitants' living environment.

The urban renewal project should enable to put an end to physical isolation as well as the urban degradation or downgrading of these districts. It should also help to integrate them into the rest of the city, to support varied occupancy status and housing management, to break from mono-functional residential areas, and thus to make the concerned districts attractive again.

Diversifying housing relates to varying housing statuses (private/public, rent/property), to a functional diversity (housings built on the same dwelling, public equipment, commercial equipment, industrial estates...), as well as an architectural diversity. On this last point, important issues in renewal plans

include varied and increasing urban forms (association of buildings with varied heights and volumes), diverse frontages (use of various materials, asymmetrical facades with more or fewer balconies and terraces), and multiple housing sizes (individual, communal or semi-communal).

Moreover, social landlords sometimes choose more sober and cheaper aesthetics, but pay more attention to uses. A lot of architects claim to have more freedom in the design of social housing that in private housing. They very often have more flexibility to present innovative ideas.

The architectural environmental quality of buildings and equipment, and the improvement in the inhabitants' social life conditions through the district restructuring, are henceforth inseparable from the urban project.

Operations with modest forms and a low profile, making it possible to cross the boundaries between the districts and their cities, replace monumentally large housing areas.

These architectural choices obliterate the stigma in these districts and seem to produce effects on their inhabitants, who mostly feel they no longer "live in the estate."

3 AN URBAN POLICY SEEKING A RENEWED IMAGE OF DISTRICTS

3.1 Large housing areas in question

If the urban policy objectives are quite clear and often scrupulously implemented, both the impact of these new architectural and urban forms on districts and the image that they convey can be evaluated. Studying the architectural and urban shapes of these renewed districts brings up questions about the relevance of demolition works, about the quality of rehabilitation and new housing programs, and the varied provided answers.

If the interventions within the urban renewal projects were an opportunity for large housing districts to improve the inhabitants' living environment and to restore the images of the districts, have these interventions truly succeeded in modifying the image of the district?

"The image conveyed by the new operations is indeed a major lever for action in the success of the National Urban Regeneration Programme (PNRU): urban, architectural and landscape quality makes it possible to develop new contacts with the site, the public space, the buildings and housings, serving a sustainable development of the districts. Moreover, improving the living environment is a major factor to make districts attractive and to reposition them within the cities. Lastly, the selected architectural options can contribute to standardise these frequently stigmatized districts and to integrate them better within their urban environment."

3.2 Demolitions and rehabilitations

A common assumption consists in blaming the urban forms for the social problems in large housing areas. But it has been proven that this ideological point of view is not a common vision anymore. Yet it led the state to set up a policy of demolition and reconstruction in the suburban discricts in order to solve their social dysfunction.

However, the first waves of demolitions and the implementation of the urban renovation policy have resulted in questioning the architectural and urban values of these estates but also, at the same time, the capacity of projects to change social practices.

The concept of heritage has then deeply appeared in the debates, as if the intensified renovation of large housing areas was accompanied by a change in the perception of this urban form.

Obvious rehabilitations carried out by Roland Castro and Sophie Denissoff, Paul Chemetov, Christian Portzamparc, Anne Lacaton, Jean-Philippe Vassal or Frédéric Druot, suggest relying on the potential of the built heritage. The argument of patrimonialising is not the only one to consider, the issues of economy and of sustainable development should also be taken into account.

Supporting the rehabilitation of buildings when possible rather than their destruction enables to value the memory of the place and to achieve a distinct change at lower cost (Roland Castro). Redeveloping occasionally exceptional parks, refurbishing frequently large and bright housings, filling spaces and creating new urban forms and functions, all present opportunities as regards architectural and urban innovation and diversity.

If we focus on the soul of large housing areas, we realize that their inhabitants like their districts for their

social life quality, the frequent space quality in housings, the exceptional green landscapes, in spite of the occasionally ordinary architecture of the construction and the anti-social behaviour. Therefore it is also necessary to compromise with the inhabitants of these places, who know about their hidden dimensions. Such a standpoint is not new because Lucien Kroll, a Belgian architect and a precursor of participative architecture, has already tried and offered to occasionally intervene in architecture, after working with the inhabitants and the various partners for a long time: he suggested to improve it in a homeopathic way, for example by adding a balcony, an elevator, a garden at the foot of a building, an expansion on a roof, or to make an artistic intervention on a front (The project in Hellersdorf-Berlin in 1994).

In addition, it is rather easy to transform the urban fabric but it is more difficult to change the practices that have developed and settled there. 6

The change in the people's living environment is not mechanically accompanied by social change.⁷ "This transformation of the city equally reveals how inadequate the classical welfare state is, a state designed in the postwar period". ⁸

4 URBAN RENEWAL: FROM THE URBAN PROJECT TO THE URBAN STRATEGY

4.1 The urban project

"The urban project is not a turnkey architecture project, but the beginning of a process opening the prospect for a major transformation of the long-term district, in order to assert its integration within the whole town," from Philippe Panerai Workshop, 1998.

The urban renewal project should be the opportunity to recognize the existing values in these districts: architectural and urban values, which have been recognized in certain sites, as well as social values. Renovating is an extraordinary means to innovate, invent, improve, reconstruct.

Architects and town planners have been able to carry out innovating projects. Not by the will of the project management alone, but in real connection with a global city project supported by the local political actors and by social landlords who were concerned about taking part in an innovative prospect. Social housing has often been an instigator in innovation. It has been a place of experimentation, as it could be seen from the 1960's to the 1970's, but has continued to be so until today. The social landlords who have been involved in great city projects have tried to renew their architectural and urban approaches.

Intergenerational dwellings (including seniors and students), evolutionary residences, shared spaces and gardens have been social landlords' initiatives ... But an innovative social landlord and identified and well-organized management are not always effective enough to provide exceptional formal answers.

Therefore a detailed study and a diagnosis of the sites to be renovated seem to be key issues in connection to the architectural and urban answers. There is not just one way to make the city, indeed, the complexity of each site requires its own approach. Bernard Paris speaks about a project strategy rather than an urban project: "The strategy is built on a few fundamental objectives (fabric principles, block characteristics...), which will form the backbone of the transformation of the district [...]", from Régénérer les grands ensembles by A. Masboungi.

4.2 Districts in Romans-sur-Isere, Lyon, Grenoble and Paris

La Monnaie district in Romans-sur-Isère has been subject to numerous demolitions. A lot of people have been rehoused outside the district. It has been difficult to attract new private constructions and economic activities on the land then made avalaible.

The urban renewal project in La Duchère district in Lyon is part of a broader scheme. The quality of the new creations, the renovations and the implanted equipment together with the land pressure in Lyon all take part in the social mixing of the district.

The conversion to residential units in the Teisseire estate in Grenoble has made it possible to try out an urban form. It takes part in valuing the feet of the buildings and brings a sense of security to the inhabitants.

Finally the two districts in Paris, namely Arcueil Gentilly and Creteil, are characterized by their exemplary architectural heritage. The large housing area in Arcueil and Gentilly is implanted on both towns. The urban projects were carried out by the respective mayor of each town. The political divergences brought specific positioning about urban interventions. One of the towns chose to demolish and rebuild intermediate-sized buildings and public equipment. The other town opted for a rehabilitation project — a very interesting configuration to measure the impact of each urban project on the local actors' and the inhabitants' perceptions on the same site.

The urban renewal project in Creteil consists in identically regenerating all the buildings, and in restoring coherence in the urban grid, in order to integrate the roads and the equipment (schools, multimedia library...).

The districts of this study are apparently similarly dysfunctional in spite of the distinctive features of each site: they are isolated districts (not necessarily far from the city centres), with urban breaks, a population in difficulty, no limits between public and private sectors, obsolete or outdated dwellings, and they require

social mixing through housing (rented social housing, home ownership, private programs) and through trade and services...

The challenge is to reorganize these districts and to do so in a sustainable way, "to provide on-street addresses again" (Pierre Riboulet, an architect), to enhance and improve the places, thus to improve the inhabitants' living environment, to renovate, regenerate, restructure,... to adopt a sustainable development approach (Grenelle laws).

The answers to the similar dysfunction are just as similar, with the risk of standardizing all these French districts.

Opening up the districts implies demolishing buildings to make the land available, to trace a grid connecting to the rest of the town and to serve the places by bus or tram.

The functions of the district are diversified by the housing, the economic and cultural activity and the installation of school facilities – the goal is to break from the mono-functional residential area, which isolates its inhabitants. The recommended architectural forms are small collective housing units, sometimes individual housing, lined up along the street.

Since Philippe Panerai's residential units were tested in the Teisseire estate in Grenoble, they have been rather systematically applied in urban renewal projects. They make a possible transition between the private and public space and foster the feeling of security. They also enable to create clearly identified residential units, which look like collective ownership housing from the outside. Reshaping or transforming the frame, choosing architectural and urban forms aim at "repairing" the absurdity of the modern movement, by rediscovering the models of an "ordinary" city.

The rejection phase about large housing areas was accompanied by the demolition of the frame in order to rebuild. However, the practice has been evolving towards taking into account the heritage quality in some large housing areas and has affected the interventions, which are now rather based on reshaping, revaluing, or transforming the low-rise buildings and towers. Indeed the new operations tend to increasingly integrate this 20th-century heritage.



Figure 3- Lyon, La Duchère - Arcueil Gentilly — Créteil, Les bleuets — Grenoble, Teisseire — Romans-sur-Isere, La Monnaie.

5 SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LARGE HOUSING AREAS

This systemic approach about districts sends us back to popular representations which were extensively covered by the media and which used a descriptive vocabulary from the medical register (Jean Rivière), underlining the pathogenic characteristics of the places and of its inhabitants.

The construction of a specific image about suburban neighbourhoods has justified the interventions of demolition in large housing areas and the whole policy carried out by the state and the town operators. There was already a monopoly on controlling this image in 1945, in order to promote the policy of the state based on land use planning and urban planning.⁹

The study of these districts shows how unique each site is and also underlines their own assets. Are representations such as that of the "Ghetto" actual for the inhabitants of these districts? According to Kokoreff and Lapeyronnie, "the Ghetto is a new configuration which is imposing itself in such estates".

Is it actual for the political actors of the city?

Or shouldn't one rather speak of a "village", as expressed by some inhabitants? Yet "is the form given a direction or does it give a direction?" (from R. Ledrut's Forme et le sens dans la société 1984)

At the end of the urban renovations, the evaluations from ANRU (Committee for the evaluation and the follow-up of the national agency for urban renovation) show that most inhabitants are satisfied, even if young people remain very critical. A notable change in the inhabitants' living environment is emerging. The inhabitants feel safer, and they also feel that they no longer live in an "estate"... New confidence about their position in the city seems to be emerging. ¹⁰ (from a survey led by Barbara Allen and Hervé Duret in *A quoi sert la rénovation urbaine?* by Donzelot)

But whether these changes are permanent is uncertain, because there has been rising social brittleness among the inhabitants.

For public actors, urban renovation makes it possible to solve the problems of suburbs. It is the opportunity to take care of a stigmatized heritage and to revalue the territory. The mayor becomes the main actor of a territory in which he could not or hardly act.

It is possible for social landlords to refresh the social composition of the residences and also to revalue their heritage.

Architects and town planners break new ground in the use of materials, in the types of housing units, or in the treatment of public areas.

However, the urban approach is sometimes very "formal" (for example when the layouts of the ways and of the urban scheduling are only visible on the ground plans). The projects seem to provide systematically similar architectural responses from one site to another.

However, architects and urban planners, local actors or social landlords have wished to break new ground in this context.

The project of the « Bois le Prêtre » tower (Vassal Lacaton) has been debated as regards how legitimate the demolition was. The MVRDV project in Amsterdam suggests dealing with a diversity programme by combining housing and activities in a 10-storey building.

The "Cité Manifeste" estate in Mulhouse, which was initiated by Jean Nouvelle, and the programme started by DOMOFRANCE¹¹ and the Town planning Design Architecture Plan (PUCA)¹² make it possible to reunite collective and individual housing.

However, the success of urban renewal plans depends on fitting the project within a wider territorial policy, such as in Lyon for example.

Thus the change in the social representations of these districts is the final challenge of their restoration.

The limits to architectural and urban responses often emerge from a lack of dialogue and little identification of the site and of its problems, but also of its challenges. Indeed bias wins over identification.

After assessing the first operations led between 2003 and 2013, the urban renewal policy nows favors diagnoses, historical characteristics (the memory of the district) and involves the inhabitants better. These people are not so much perceived as recipients, whose commitment is sollicited, but as parts of the project.

6 CONCLUSIONS: WHICH REPRESENTATIONS IN THE FUTURE?

"There is only beauty and ugliness in the look that we take at it. [...] Architecture is neutral, what matters is life inside. The architect's responsibility is overestimated depending on people's happiness or misfortune," said Alain BUBLEX, a plastic artist, in a France Culture radio programme dated 12/9/2011.

"If the success of the National Urban Regeneration Programme (PNRU) can thus be presented as undeniable, it is firstly because its achievements are visible and proportionate to how spectacularly the traces of the past have disappeared in a cloud of dust and a smell of powder», from ANRU: MISSION ACCOMPLIE? by Renaud Epstein (in Donzelot, J. (dir.) (2012) A quoi sert la rénovation urbaine?, Paris: PUF)

After being perceived by the population in a positive way, as factors for social progress and for an improvement in domestic comfort, "large housing areas" were quickly rejected after the seventies: they had become synonymous with social crisis, town planning mistakes and insecurity. They lacked service roads, public and cultural equipment, social infrastructures, shops, and cafés related to these districts, the buildings and green spaces were also poorly maintained, and they looked similar because of industrialised construction — all this did not help to create identification and collective life in this environment. Soon these large housing areas really seemed like bedroom communities.

As could be seen in a lot of renovated districts, the interventions had been spectacular and staged to legitimate political action approved by the majority. They have truly changed the inhabitants' "material" living conditions, and have often succeeded in making such districts commonplace. However can the change in the urban form induced by the urban policy be associated to the social representations of these districts? Have these changes truly been accompanied by new representations?

To evaluate the impact on the social representations of renovated districts, it is necessary to define the concept of social representation in itself and to identify what constructs it.¹³

After this first step, all the representations can be collected and analyzed.

The selected methods for on-site investigations are composed of studies of urban forms examined before and after being restored, in connection with the ways of living, and the practices and uses of public spaces. They also include interviews and readings of reports and assessments, therefore they offer a panel of data which can be linked to identified social representations.

The objective study of urban and architectural renewal forms through constructive, aesthetic and sensitive expert assessment gives an overview of the renovated district and helps to identify the object.

Collecting oral speeches by the means of interviews, exchanges in public spaces, discussions with the inhabitants and the actors of the urban renewal, makes representations come out. Together with the collection of speeches, gathered data such as drawings or music can be added, knowing that street culture has developed significantly in these districts.¹⁴

This tool focusses on the principal elements of people's representations.

This data collecting step precedes the whole analysis of representations.

The conclusion of these analyses opens up theidentification of the representations from the inhabitants, the actors of the city, the politicians, depending on how much involved they have been in the district. Approaching these spaces through social representations makes it possible to understand what these districts embody for their inhabitants, for those who observe or handle them. It leads to verifying whether there is a mechanistic relationship between urban forms and social representations.

The action of the urban policy in large housing areas has been aiming at revaluing the representations of these districts. Urban projects constantly mobilize social representations in order to justify town planning actions to change spaces. Trying to identify these representations in renovated districts enables to understand how the perceptions are constructed and how they change. It also helps to evaluate to what extent the urban policy interventions on urban and architectural forms have had an impact on the social representations of these districts.

The urban renewal plan carried out since 2003 has not been meaningless. It has been at the centre of political debates, the subject of numerous sociology, town planning, or architecture works. It is controversial or generates consensus. Social representations are a significant issue as regards the outcome of this policy.



Figure 4: MVRDV, Amsterdam, photographer Batintherain

- 1-Bertho, R. (2013). La Mission photographique de la DATAR, un laboratoire du paysage contemporain.
- 2- Circular March 21th 1973 "relative aux formes d'urbanisation dites grands ensembles et à la lutte contre la ségrégation sociale par l'habitat" -Ministry for the tourism and housing, equipment, regional planning
- 3- Masboungi, A. (2005) Régénérer les grands ensembles P12 Edition de la Villette
- 4-Law n° 2003-710 ,August 1^{str} 2003 "d'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine", said "Loi Borloo"
- 5- CES ANRU, (2011) Qualité architecturale et constructive.
- 6-Viala, L., (2005) «Contre le déterminisme de la forme urbaine, une approche totale de la forme de la ville», Espaces et sociétés (n⁰ 122), p.99-114
- 7-Dris, N., (2005), "Formes urbaines, sens et représentations: l'interférence des modèles", Espaces et sociétés(n⁰ 122), p.87-98
- 8- Donzelot, J. (2013) La France des cités, le chantier de la citoyeneté urbaine. Fayard
- 9- Bertho, R. (2013). La Mission photographique de la DATAR, un laboratoire du paysage contemporain.
- 10- from a survey led by Barbara Allen and Hervé Duret in A quoi sert la rénovation urbaine? by Donzelot (2012)
- 11-DOMOFRANCE is a social company for the habitat
- 12-PUCA is an interdepartmental agency created in 1998
- 13-from Paulette DUARTES's "De la Sociologie urbaine à la sociologie du projet urbain-Représentations et acteurs", published by Pierre Mendès France University in Grenoble.
- 14-Kery James's song "Banlieusards", from a programme named SAGA CITE broadcast on a French channel, emphasizing the assets of young people from French estates through dancing, graffiti...

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