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Session A

"A Dynamic Retrospective Analysis of the Development of Customer Resistance in Customer/Property-Developer Relationships"

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This paper analyzes the conception, mechanisms and development processes of customer resistance during the customer/property developer relationship. A qualitative longitudinal study based on 10 retrospective interviews with unsatisfied customers was carried out. The study focuses on the general development process of customer resistance, four different process models of resistance development, and the change from individual to collective resistance which can occur in the customer/developer relationship.
Keywords: Customer/Property developer relationship, Process models of customer resistance, Complaining behavior, Retrospective interviews.

Introduction

What is resistance and how is it constructed? Although resistance has only recently aroused the interest of practitioners and marketing researchers, work in this field has been varied (Roux, 2007). In the present study, the question is interesting in two respects. Since consumers' complaining behaviors contribute to the formation and development of resistance phenomena toward a brand or retailer, a link between studies in these two areas needs to be established. In other words, what do we understand by the phenomena of resistance and complaining behavior? And what conceptual similarities and differences do they display? These questions have, to our knowledge, been rarely or not at all addressed in previous studies. Moreover, this study concerns the real estate sector (buying a property and the private individual/property developer relationship), which is characterized by a high level of complexity and involvement (i.e. the customer's costs and "psychological involvement" in relation to the purchase of real estate/property development), further justifying our problematic. If one makes a brief comparison of studies on resistance and complaining behavior, it is clear that there is common ground, especially in regard to the definition of these concepts. For example, for both resistance and complaining behavior, researchers have been interested in "the forms of expression or the existence of resistance" (Roux, 2007) and "forms of response" associated with complaining behavior (Crié, 2001), as well as the question of the *processes* involved, without, however, proposing an integrative framework on this topic.

Despite the attention paid to the *processual* and *dynamic* aspects of resistance phenomena, it is clear that thinking about the formation, development and evolution of resistance during a relationship is still underdeveloped. Thus this study raises the following question: How is resistance constructed and how does it evolve during a commercial (private customer/property developer) relationship? This question calls for an examination of the mechanisms and processes by which resistance emerges and develops in the course of this relationship.

To address our problematic, we carried out a qualitative longitudinal study on customers dissatisfied with their property purchase. This was based on retrospective interviews conducted with 10 customers, covering the history of the relationship between the customer and the property developer (from first entering into the relationship until the present). The data collected were then analyzed for thematic content. Individual and comparative analysis of the interviews helped identify and clarify the mechanisms and processes of construction of resistance phenomena during the customer/property developer relationship. The first part of this paper justifies the establishment a link between the literature on resistance and complaining behaviors for studying the mechanisms and processes of the construction of resistance during the customer/property developer relationship. The second part expounds the methodological approach adopted. The third and final part analyzes and discusses the findings, and presents our conclusions as well as limitations and possible future research.

1. Why are complaining behaviors of interest for studying the process of resistance construction in commercial relationships?

The various conceptualizations of resistance and complaining behavior (definitions, antecedents and consequences) give rise to the following questions. In the literature, why is there sometimes a confusion between resistance phenomena and complaining behaviors? Is there one or are there several resistance construction processes, and what might these be? These questions arise from the contributions and limitations of previous studies on resistance as well as from the current business concerns (i.e. managing the customer relationship better in the event of occasional or repeated dissatisfaction and avoiding or limiting customer resistance). To provide a better understanding of the mechanisms and processes of the construction of customer resistance, we propose to establish a link between the literature on *resistance* and the literature on *complaining behavior*. This critical analysis of the literature does not claim to be exhaustive, but it highlights the main similarities and differences in terms of the approach adopted or conceptualization (definitions, antecedents and consequences).

1.1. Resistance phenomena vs. complaining behavior: definitions and forms

Recall that the first studies on complaining behaviors were conducted in the 1970s (Hirschman, 1970) and that studies on resistance are more recent (Penazola and Price, 1993; Herrmann, 1993; Fischer, 2001; Roux, 2007). To define **resistance**, researchers have been mainly interested in (1) the different behaviors associated with resistance, and (2) the distinction between resistance linked to firms' behavior and resistance to the functioning of the market (Roux, 2007). The main studies on the subject have been exploratory and have mostly adopted qualitative approaches. In relation to <u>forms of behavior associated with resistance</u>, Penaloza and Price (1993) were the first to introduce the concept of consumer resistance. Based on the work of Poster (1992), these authors developed four angles for analyzing resistance (Roux, 2007): "collective or individual, reformist or radical, against product offerings or against the meanings conveyed by firms, internal or external to marketing institutions". Resistance is therefore expressed by protests that may be individual (e.g. complaints, negative word-of-mouth, exit or avoidance of products; Friedman, 1985 and 1999) or collective movements (e.g. boycotts; Hirschman, 1970 and Hermann, 1993), and may silent, isolated and sustained (the notion of passive opposition, i.e. not giving up, enduring). This last form of expression is all the more harmful to the firm in that it is unaware of its existence. The above-mentioned studies focus on "ways of resisting" (Certeau, 1990, cited by Roux, 2007). Subsequently, Fournier (1998) revealed the processual and evolving aspect of resistance. He argues that resistance develops in accordance with a *continuum* of oppositional behaviors and activities that may range from avoidance of certain products or brands, through adjustment or consumption reduction behaviors, to more aggressive forms of behavior toward firms such as boycotts or complaints. Ritson and Dobscha (1999) introduced the idea that resistance may go beyond boycotting (to penalize the company) and be expressed in "market exit behaviors through the formation of alternative exchange networks among consumers" (Roux, 2007).

According to Roux (2007), resistance reflects different <u>forms of consumer behavior</u> deemed to be <u>oppositional and reactive</u> (Penazola and Price, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Fischer, 2001; Roux, 2007). Roux (2007) points out that the term "resist" derives from the Latin "re-sistere", signifying "stop and oppose". She makes a distinction between (1) "the propensity to resist" and (2) "situational resistance". The consumer's propensity to resist refers to the individual tendency to oppose, while situational resistance involves the "notion of opposition". In the latter case, the individual acts or reacts in response to perceived pressure, to a force exerted on him or her. Resistance behavior arises once the consumer perceives discordant elements and is or feels himself to be in a situation of conflict with the brand or retailer. In an integrative conceptual paper on resistance Roux (2007) points out that "resistance reflects a state of opposition – from which variable forms of response stem – to an exerted force that is perceived as unacceptable due to the discordant representations and emotions that it induces in the subject". According to Roux (2007), the nature of the construct gives rise variously to: the *propensity to resist* (the consumer's stable individual tendency), the *motivational state of resistance* (an internal state that drives the individual to reduce the perceived tension), *manifestations of resistance* (variable forms of oppositional response to pressure situations or market discourses perceived as discordant), and *accumulated resistance* (the various cognitions and negative emotions registered over time by the consumer in relation to past resistance episodes).

To define **complaining behavior**, researchers have progressively focused on (1) different kinds of response to dissatisfaction and the target for complaints, and (2) the identification of behaviors and typical profiles of dissatisfied consumers. As regards the kinds of response to dissatisfaction, Hirschman (1970) was one of the first researchers to develop a conceptualization of complaining behaviors through the ELV (Exit, Voice, Loyalty) model. The customer may thus decide to break off his relationship with the firm (Exit), (2) to respond verbally to express his dissatisfaction to targets/friends, the company or consumer associations (Voice), or (3) respond passively in the hope of a positive change in the firm's behavior (Loyalty). More precisely, Day and Landon (1977) consider that "complaining behavior is a post-purchase phenomenon". It occurs when the consumption experience is perceived as unsatisfactory and when the consumer can neither psychologically assimilate it nor quickly forget it (Day, Grabicke, Schaetzle and Staubash, 1981). Our analysis of the literature reveals three possible responses: a behavioral response / "an action taken by the individual" (Day *et al.,* 1981), a non-behavioral response / "a negative attitude toward the firm" (Day, 1984; Richins, 1983), or no action taken, due to the "consumer's oversight or loyalty" (Hirschman, 1970; Day and Landon, 1977; Richins 1987; Levesque and McDougall, 1996; Crié, 2001; N'Goala, 2001; Prim-Allaz and Sabadie, 2003). In this last instance, complaining behavior is defined as a *process*, "that is, its final form does not depend directly on the factors basically constituting it but on the consumer's evaluation of this situation and its development over time" (Stephens and Gwinner, 1998; Crié, 2001). We also see that the plurality of responses, which has been extensively studied at a conceptual level, is often linked to (1) the intensity of dissatisfaction and (2) to the kind of products and services the dissatisfaction applies to (Hirschman, 1970). It should not be forgotten that there are few empirical studies (with measurement scales) in regard to the types of response to dissatisfaction.

As regards public targets for complaints (e.g. the seller, the company, the courts) *vs.* private targets (e.g. family and friends), opinion in the literature is sharply divided. Some authors have shown that the greater the degree of involvement, in terms of the cost and complexity of the product or service, the greater the likelihood of public action (Day and Landon 1977, Richins, 1987, Levesque and McDougall 1996). Conversely, other authors consider that the more complex the product or service, the lower the willingness to engage in public action (Day and Ash, 1979). Faced with the many classifications of the forms and response styles of complaining behavior, Singh (1988 and 1990) developed a line of thinking in relation to previous studies. First, he clarified the link between the form of response and the complaint target. He classified non-satisfied consumers' response styles on the basis of a three-dimensional structure: a verbal response (Voice) made to the seller, supplier or retailer[1]; a private response (Private) made to friends, family, etc.; and a response directed at a third party not involved in the transaction (Third Party) such as the media, consumer organizations or the courts. Moreover, he showed that certain variables such as personality (i.e. individual variable), past behavior (or past experience) or the purchase situation significantly influence consumers' types of response to dissatisfaction.
Finally, some authors have focused on identifying typical consumer profiles in relation to the type of response adopted (behavior) and the target (public versus private) in the event of dissatisfaction (Crié, 2001). They reveal specific behaviors in regard to making claims for compensation against the company in such circumstances (e.g. "claimers" or "non-claimers", Day, 1980; Etzel and Siverman, 1891; Bearden and Teel, 1983, Barskdale *et al.,* 1984 / "annoyed" consumers*,* Singh, 1990).

Whether in regard to defining resistance or defining complaining behavior, analysis of the literature shows that the literature on each clearly focuses on "the expression or forms of resistance" (Roux, 2007) or complaining behavior's "forms of response" to dissatisfaction (Crié, 2001). In analyzing these two bodies of work, it is sometimes difficult to make a clear distinction between resistant behavior and complaining behavior. For example, boycotting (Day, 1980 and 1984) and negative word-of-mouth (Richins, 1987 and Singh and Pandya, 1993) are associated both with possible complaining behavior responses (cited by Crié, 2001) and with possible manifestations of resistance (Friedman, 1985 and 1999, cited by Roux, 2007). This observation leads us to consider that complaining behavior may be part of the construction process (creation and development) of resistance over time. Finally, one or more customer complaints that may occur in the course of a service

1 In our study, it is a property developer.

relationship or experience between a customer and service provider can represent the first stage (stage 1) of the resistance construction process or an initial manifestation of resistance.

1.2. What are the antecedents and consequences of resistance and complaining behaviors in the literature?
In a conceptual integrative paper on resistance[2] Roux (2007) criticizes and enriches the different approaches developed in the literature and provides an analytic framework of consumer resistance (with definitions, antecedents and consequences of resistance). She highlights several factors influencing or antecedent to resistance. These comprise individual (e.g. sociodemographic factors such as educational level) and/or psychological factors (e.g. individual propensity to resist, the consumer's skepticism and cynicism (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998) reactance (Friedstad and Wright, 1994), situational determinants, and negative emotions that interact with a cognitive evaluation of a given situation. Thus Roux (2007) considers that situational triggers give rise to a cognitive evaluative process associated with negative emotional reactions, which are the cause of resistance. She adds that the relationship between the cognitive evaluative process and negative emotions is moderated by individual factors.

Roux (2007) identifies various consequences of resistance behavior: changes in the perceived image of the brand, modification of consumers' behavior (e.g. a tendency to doubt firms' claims, a greater propensity to seek information, negative word-of-mouth, permanent exit from/breaking off the commercial relationship).

In a conceptual integrative paper on complaining behavior, Crié (2001) criticizes and enriches the different approaches developed in the literature and provides an interpretative perspective and an integrating framework of the various existing theories (in relation to the types of response to dissatisfaction, the types of behavior and the antecedents and consequences of complaining behavior). The author emphasizes three main types of factor, with different weights, influencing consumers' and customers' complaining behavior (shown in Table 1 below). Psychological factors include individual variables that refer to the propensity to complain. Economic factors are linked to the structuring of exchanges and the costs associated with complaining behavior. Ethical factors reflect the fairness of the transaction.

Table 1: Antecedents of complaining behavior according to Crié (2001)

Psychological factors	Sociocultural factors Frustration/confidence Learning Allocation Attitude/complaint Experiences Educational level
Economic factors	Market structure Purchasing frequency Buyer/seller interactions Cost of complaining Probability of success Expected benefit Income Barriers to entry/exit
Ethical factors	Fairness Loyalty Information

The main consequences of complaining behavior are: negative word-of-mouth, legal action, inaction or exit (Crié, 2001). The variety of the antecedents and consequences of complaining behavior is partly explained by the application context, i.e. industry, services, retail / Business-to-Business versus Business-to-Consumer relationship, and partly by their dynamic nature. While some authors show that legal action is a possible type of response to dissatisfaction, others view it as a consequence of complaining behavior. This discrepancy is partly explained by the fact the complaining behavior has not often been analyzed as a *process*.

In this respect, Crié (2001) emphasizes that "the many variables involved strengthen the idea that complaining behavior is not a momentary phenomenon, but is the result of a process of preliminary assessments, subject to initiating and modulating factors" that come into play before, during and after complaining behavior – hence the need for a longitudinal and predictive approach in order to study it. The same applies to resistance (Roux, 2007). Finally, the *dynamic* and *processual* nature of resistance leads us to believe that it is important to study the possible links between isolated complaints (e.g. a letter of complaint in the event of customer dissatisfaction and compensation by the firm) and genuine resistance on the part of the customer (e.g. boycotting or active opposition to a firm) during a commercial relationship.

2. Research methodology

Having shown why we believe it interesting to study the mechanisms and construction processes of resistance in the course the customer/service provider relationship, we now turn to the methodological choices made in our study. These concern (1) the choice of sector, (2) the pertinence of a qualitative longitudinal approach using a sample of 10 dissatisfied customers unhappy about their property purchase.

2.1. The choice of the real estate sector

First, to meet our research objectives, it was necessary to use a sector offering sufficient complexity and involvement in relation to the purchase (i.e. cost and the customer's "psychological commitment" with regard to the property purchase). We met someone who was very unhappy and dissatisfied with his real estate purchase from a highly reputed property developer (selling upmarket properties). Following this first interview, we found that other customers who had bought their property from this developer were similarly dissatisfied and angry with the developer in question. In fact, these customers had already taken steps, both individually and collectively, to obtain redress from the developer. We thus decided to interview these customers.

2.2. A qualitative longitudinal approach

As regards the choice of methodology, we adopted a qualitative longitudinal approach based on 10 dissatisfied customers unhappy with their property purchase, with retrospective interviews conducted in real time. The interviews were combined with the critical incident method. Generally speaking, retrospective interviews provide a better understanding of dynamic phenomena (Ring and Van de Ven, 1992 and 1994; Yin, 1990). Moreover, the critical incident method allows the history of the customers' relationship with the property developer to be traced (Flanagan, 1954; Keaveney, 1995). Further, identifying the negative incidents that gave rise to the customers' dissatisfaction and annoyance as well as the management of these incidents during the customer/developer relationship, produced a better understanding of the mechanisms and construction processes of resistance (from the time of entering into relations with the developer until the present).
For the collection and analysis of the data, we created as semi-directive interview guide, which included the following elements.
- *1) Introductory stage.* Context of entering into the relationship with the developer; main criteria for choosing the developer; customer's expectations and attitude toward property developers – offering mid-range to upmarket properties – at the start of the relationship.
- *2) Development stage.* The customers recount the history of their relationship with developer "P", mentioning the main positive and negative events; how these events were managed by the actors (customer/developer behavior); the results of the actors' behavior (response to a customer's request: response or non-response to an incident, response or non-response to customer dissatisfaction); the consequences in terms of customers' perceptions of the developer/site foreman and secretarial staff, and the behavior and actions taken by customers to obtain redress (e.g. letter of complaint, petition).
- *3) Reformulation of wording.* The interviews were transcribed in summary form and subsequently validated with the customers.

The retrospective interviews, lasting on average from one to two and a half hours, were conducted with 10 customers (see Appendix 1 for the sample characteristics). The sample was constructed in the course of the data collection and analysis. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed. A thematic and comparative (interviews compared with each other) content analysis was carried out on the data collected. Finally, we found that the retrospective interviews revealed bias in relation to the history. In order to ensure the validity of the retrospective data collected from the interviews, we limited the bias associated with lapses of memory and *a posteriori* rationalization (Glick, Huber, Miller, Doty and Sutcliff, 1990; Forgues and Vandangeon-Demurez, 1999).

3. Analysis of the findings in regard to the mechanisms and construction processes of resistance

Comparative analysis of the interviews revealed two types of finding. The first concerns the identification of an overall construction process of the customers' resistance, giving rise to two forms of resistance (individual and collective) and their possible articulation in the course the customer/developer relationship. The second result was the successful identification of different development stages of the resistance construction process in the customer/developer relationship (stages 1 to 3).

3.1. Identification of an overall construction process of customer resistance to the developer

A general construction process of customer resistance clearly exists, which can arise from a single customer complaint (see Box 1) and can end up in "more intense" resistance behavior over time (see Box 2). Thus the interviews underlined the importance of repetition of customer complaints over time in the formation and development of resistance during the customer/developer relationship. Whatever its form – individual or collective –, resistance only begins after several fruitless complaints and the experience of ill-will, clear lack of ethics, bad faith and lack of consideration on the part of the developer. The main incidents attributable to the developer and leading to complaints were: poor workmanship of all kinds, badly fitting doors and windows, gas leaks, serious insulation problems, plumbing problems, etc.

Box 1: Complaining behavior and complaint process

Critical incident caused by the developer ➔ customer dissatisfaction ➔ **customer complaint (compensation demand)** ➔ developer's response

Box 2: Resistance behavior and resistance process

Repeated critical incidents caused by the developer ➔ repeated customer dissatisfaction ➔ customer compensation demand ➔ developer's negative response ➔ **individual resistance behavior** (e.g. sending repeated letters of complaint, putting up an "angry owner" sign at the development) and/or **collective resistance behavior** (e.g. petitions, collective meetings with a view to setting up an association)

Furthermore, the resistance process takes various forms during its formation and development. As the literature on resistance emphasizes, we found these to be both individual and collective. Through the interviews we encountered individual complaints and protests such as complaints lodged in person, by telephone or registered mail, negative word-of-mouth, putting up an "angry owner" sign, warning potential purchasers, making inquiries, about the poor quality of the property's amenities and services. We also observed collective resistance such as sending a petition to the developer, taking collective steps to create an association, writing to the newspapers and setting up an Internet blog. However, the key fact lies in the evolution and mutual linkage of individual and collective forms of resistance during the customer/developer relationship.

Box 3: Respondent comments illustrating the overall construction process of resistance

Overall process: "after all these complaints we made without getting a response… or with unsatisfactory responses and repairs… my windows were much less important than the insulation problems I had, which they didn't want to fix… so we all decided to have a meeting to confront and threaten the developer… I decided to put up an angry owner sign right in the middle of my garden to discourage and warn new buyers."

Complaint behavior + satisfactory outcome: "well, I didn't have too many problems, they responded right away and changed my bathtub, I called and moaned and they quickly came and fixed it all…I also knew the site foreman from the time the work began…I was an insider."

Individual and collective resistance: "so we all decided [collective resistance] to have a meeting to confront and threaten the developer… I decided [individual resistance] to put up an 'angry owner' sign right in the middle of my garden to discourage and warn new buyers."

3.2. Various stages and construction modes of resistance

Analysis of the interviews allowed us to identify three stages in the development of the overall resistance construction process during the customer/property developer relationship. Identification of these stages (1 to 3) is a function, over time, of the growing intensity of (repeated) complaints, negative emotional reactions becoming increasingly strong (negative attitude towards the developer, anger, disgust) and the hardening of customer/development relations resulting in decisive active resistance by the customer in relation to the developer. To identify these three stages in the development of the construction of resistance, we used several types of variables (from the literature and the interviews), namely:

- individual variables such as the customer's age, gender and expertise (i.e. past experience: first, second or third property purchase), degree of knowledge of the building environment and business, and the customer's personality (i.e. his or her propensity to complain or resist);
- contextual variables constituting the second type allow the different stages to be identified. In this category we find, as suggested by Hirschman (1970), intensity of dissatisfaction, the importance of the products or services causing dissatisfaction, and the probability of a successful outcome to the complaint;
- the number of complaints made by the customer and how exactly these complaints are managed by the developer (quality of the relationship, customer/developer communication, positive and/or negative responses provided by the developer's representative(s), the customers' attitudes, reactions and actions);
- intense and clearly defined resistance behavior (signing a petition, the intention of forming an association against the developer, creating an Internet blog, putting up a large "angry owner" sign in one's garden, etc.). Such behaviors are the consequence of repeated complaints that have not been resolved by the developer leading to a high level of customer dissatisfaction and negative attitudes and emotions.

Stage 1

The first stage corresponds to a single complaint situation. In this case, the customer notices a defect and verbally or in writing asks the developer to make the necessary repairs (complaining behavior). The developer acknowledges the defect and provides solutions to put it right. Both parties are satisfied. The experience ends there. (See Boxes 4 and 5).

Box 4: Stage 1 of the resistance construction process
(Customer complaint, resolution and customer satisfaction)

Critical incident caused by the developer ➔ customer dissatisfaction ➔ **customer complaint (request to correct the defect)** ➔ developer's favorable response ➔ customer/developer relationship deemed satisfactory ➔ customer satisfaction

Box 5: Respondents' comments illustrating stage 1 of the resistance construction process

"I really kept track of the construction work"; "Since I'm in the business, I noticed a lot of defects"; "I dealt directly with the site personnel, but …"; "This often happens with developers…"; "Overall, the project was carried out correctly and they kept their word…"; "They're still beautiful homes… still fine acquisitions"; "Except once or twice I took rather an aggressive stance, I was dissatisfied… they remained calm"; "They're nice people".

Stage 2

Stage 2 corresponds to a more complex situation with repeated complaints, unsatisfactory responses, and increasingly strained relations between the customer and the developer. Despite this situation, customers adopt a forget-it, do-nothing response to their dissatisfaction (Hirschman, 1970; Day and Landon, 1977; Richins 1987; Levesque and McDougall, 1996; Crié, 2001). This attitude is largely explained by these subjects' low propensity to resist. However, depending on the occurrence of contextual variables, two scenarios may develop: one in which the purchasers' dissatisfaction decreases with time, the other in which they remain extremely annoyed, with very negative emotions toward the developer's representatives. The former are ready

to forget and put the issue behind them, whereas the latter, while doing nothing, at the same time develop a very negative attitude toward the developer – another, non-behavioral, kind of response to customer dissatisfaction (Day, 1985; Richins, 1983) (See Boxes 6 and 7).

Box 6: Stage 2 of the resistance construction process
(*Customer complaints, non-resolution of problems, and passive resistance: negative and/or "forget-it" attitude*)
Situation 1: Critical incident caused by the developer ➔ customer dissatisfaction ➔ **several customer complaints (requests to correct the defect)** ➔ developer's responses viewed as largely favorable ➔ scale of remaining defects low ➔ probability of satisfactory resolution of problem viewed as low ➔ quality of the customer/developer relationship *reasonable* ➔ Customer **takes no further action**

Situation 2: Critical incident caused by the developer ➔ customer dissatisfaction ➔ **several customer complaints (requests to correct the defect)** ➔ developer's responses unsatisfactory or non-existent ➔ scale of remaining defects high ➔ probability of satisfactory resolution of problem viewed as low ➔ quality of the customer/developer relationship *poor* ➔ Customer **takes no further action** and develops a **negative attitude** toward the developer.

Box 7: Respondents' comments illustrating stage 2 of the resistance construction process
Situation 1 "We're not people to make a fuss"; "They made an effort"; "When you hear the problems Julien Courbet had, that was worse... We're not going to bother about little details like that, when the main things have been fixed"; "But what can we do? ... We're angry at times, but once it's settled, well, okay... When they say the cracks don't matter! We won't take it any further, there's nothing we can do... What's the point of writing to the newspapers?"

Situation 2 "I don't feel up to doing anything about it and my husband doesn't have the time"; "Unanswered registered letters ... everything we've asked for, it's always been negative... I'm sorry, but it's not possible..."; "We've got cracks in the ceiling... same in the bathroom, it stinks"; "Call Julien Courbet, we didn't do it because I'm timid and my husband thinks it wouldn't do any good!"; "Disgust, anger, the fact he takes us for idiots... it really bugs me, this lack of respect"; "I'm taking up sport again, I wanted to de-stress, I need to get out of the house, I won't say the damned house, but, well..."; "I wouldn't recommend developer P even to my worst enemy!"

Stage 3
In the third stage, the process of complaints evolving into resistance enters its final phase. The subjects' propensity to complain and their propensity to resist are very high. Two scenarios then arise. In the first, the subjects make threats (to seek legal redress, to launch petitions, to contact the media, etc.), but do not put them into action in order to avoid losing "the link" with the developer. But now that the developer has sold all the houses in development, he is inaccessible. The purchasers remain dissatisfied and want to take steps to obtain redress from him. In the second situation, the resistance process gets under way more quickly. The defects are considered to be very serious and, since the complaints made in stage 1 have not quickly been responded to, the customers are furious. They decide to go to court and take legal action to hold up the continuation of the sale program. At this point, the situation is as yet unsettled and the two parties are awaiting the court's decision (Boxes 8 and 9).

Box 8: Stage 3 of the resistance construction process
(Customer complaints, non-resolution and active individual and/or collective resistance,)
Situation 1 Critical incident caused by the developer ➔ customer dissatisfaction ➔ **several customer complaints (requests to correct the defect)** ➔ developer's responses unsatisfactory or non-existent ➔ scale of remaining defects high ➔ probability of satisfactory resolution of problem viewed as high ➔ quality of the customer/developer relationship *poor* ➔ threats ➔ **individual resistance** and **leader in collective resistance**

Situation 2 Critical incident caused by the developer ➔ customer dissatisfaction ➔ **several customer complaints (requests to correct the defect)** ➔ developer's responses unsatisfactory or non-existent ➔ scale of remaining defects high ➔ probability of satisfactory resolution of problem viewed as high ➔ quality of the customer/developer relationship *poor* ➔ threats ➔ **individual resistance**

Box 9: Respondents' comments illustrating stage 3 of the resistance construction process
Situation 1 "At first, I asked them politely to fix things… later, it was getting on my nerves and I was beginning to wonder… then things got worse"; "I'll put up with a lot, but not when I'm being made a fool of… I become angry"; "for the developer, that worried him a lot"; "I contacted a lawyer"; "I'm thinking of staging a sit-it at the company's offices in the Place Vendôme"; "We set up a petition"
Situation 2 "I put up an 'Angry owner' sign in my garden"; "My neighbor went bananas. He contacted a lawyer…there's an ongoing lawsuit…"

Analysis of the various interviews in our sample allowed us to highlight three successive stages in the resistance construction process during the customer/developer relationship in the case of an unsatisfactory property purchase. The different stages show that the resistance process begins with a single complaint (stage 1). Continued dissatisfaction over time and an increase in its intensity lead on to the following stages. People's propensity to resist, combined with other contextual variables, account for dissatisfied customers moving to stages 2 or 3 of the resistance process. The lower the propensity to resist, the more they adopt passive resistance – "forgetting it" and/or a negative attitude toward the developer (stage 2). On the other hand, the greater the propensity to resist, the more the purchasers are inclined to engage in active resistance, up to the point of breaking off relations with the property developer (e.g. awaiting the court's decision).

Conclusion, limitations and future research

Studies on resistance have been mainly concerned with its forms and manifestations. Moreover, the "resistance" literature raises questions as to the place and role of complaining behavior in the construction process of customers' resistance to a provider. It also underlines the dynamic aspect of the concept without, however, systematically addressing the question of the mechanisms and construction process and development of resistance over time. The positioning of resistance within a qualitative longitudinal perspective sheds light on its evolution and processes in the course of the customer/property developer relationship. The retrospective interviews showed that the resistance construction process originates in a single customer complaint and evolves, over time, toward "more intense" resistance behavior (with individual and/or collective resistance). The interviews also reveal the resistance construction process through three development stages (stage 1: complaining; stage 2: passive resistance; stage 3: active resistance). Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. One of these lies in the research context, i.e. the real estate sector. It would thus be interesting to apply our study to another sector (e.g. insurance or banking) and to a B-to-B context. A second limitation concerns the methodology adopted, which reveals bias linked to the historical nature of the study. Even though we used a rigorous approach, ideally we would have observed all the behavior in real time (though this would have been difficult to do over a relatively short time period).

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APPENDIX 1
Characteristics of customers in our sample

Customers	**Age**	**Family situation**	**Professional activity**	**Information level**
1	36	Married, 2 children	Teacher and researcher	2nd property purchase
2	40	Married, 2 children	Company director	2nd property purchase
3	38	Married, 1 child	Office worker	2nd property purchase
4	63	Married	Retired	3rd property purchase
5	67	Married	Retired	
6	56	Single	Plumber	3rd property purchase
7	40	Married, 2 children	Office worker	2nd property purchase
8	43	Married, 2 children	Locksmith	2nd property purchase
9	39	Married, 2 children	Beautician	2nd property purchase
10	32	Married, 3 children	Craft worker	2nd property purchase