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Article

# Architect Collectives and the Coproduction of Places in the “Grey Zones” of Urban Development Planning: The Educational Institution as a Mediation Framework

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**Abstract:** Recent research work carried out in France tends to show that calling on collectives of artists or architects to develop participatory approaches with inhabitants has become a common practice for public or private project owners. However, these interventions are still often limited to communication operations or come up against the inertia of political and professional cultures, which limits their scope. After briefly stating the circumstances that lead urban project owners in France to pay increasing attention to the skills of architectural “collectives”, this article focuses on the presentation of two experiments conducted by two of them. Articulating pedagogical and urban citizenship issues, these experiments were confronted with procedural and normative frameworks, some of which came from the world of urban production, others from the school institution. The aim of this article is to show that the coproduction of spaces that have a strong meaning for their users, but which are unthought of within strategic urban projects, can have a greater impact on the way in which the operational actors envisage their project. After summarizing the main highlights of these two experiments, this contribution discusses the lessons that can be drawn from them in terms of their implementation conditions and the extensions they may have had. From a methodological point of view, the interest of these two experiments lies in the fact that the two associations that were involved in them understood them as experiments from the outset. They thus implemented reflexive mechanisms involving researchers, of which this article is one of the concrete results.

**Keywords:** architect collectives; coproduction of spaces; participatory approaches; educational approaches; professional culture



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## 1. Introduction

The career choices of architects in France have always been largely defined by the pre-existence of a purchase order [1]. Deploring the lack of interest in participation expressed by French architects up until the mid-2000s, a founder of the *Habitat groupé autogéré* (self-managed group housing) movement that emerged after May ‘68, once confided to us that “architects wait for an order and as long as there isn’t one, they won’t budge, it’s not their concern.” This remark largely explains the fact that students are not being trained in architecture schools to accompany residents, users and even professional clients, in the definition of expectations. Instead, they are generally required to respond to “program specifications,” a term that expresses the importance in France of the regulatory framework organizing construction and engineering. The main factor over the last thirty years in the emergence of new attitudes toward citizen participation by architects and public project managers is thus the evolution of this legal-political environment. Yet over the last decade there has been a growing number of architect actions associating conception and construction based on notions of “citizen activation” [2,3] and which are influencing regulations. Project managers are increasingly referring to them to help manage the different steps of project management or to valorize innovation, yet without reconsidering

their practices from a more structural perspective. Therefore, are these experiences merely destined to be instruments of communications strategies [4] or to collide with the inertia of dominant cultural and professional policies [5,6]? The aim of this paper is to illustrate that the coproduction of spaces that are important for users, but which have not been considered in strategic urban projects, can reinforce these very projects. We also look at steps taken by several collectives to transform and formalize the knowledge gained from these experiences.

After briefly reviewing the circumstances in which French urban project managers are paying greater attention to the skills of architect collectives, this paper presents two experiments conducted by two such collectives. Drawing upon the local educational network, these actions are similar to the elaboration of new “project situations” [7,8] at the heart of major development operations. In their articulation of the pedagogical and urban citizenship issues at stake, they have found themselves struggling with procedural and normative frameworks defining the respective spheres of urban production and educational institutions. After outlining the two experiences, this paper suggests lessons that can be drawn regarding notably the implementation conditions and extensions from which these experiments benefitted. We conclude with a reflection generated by these actions about ways of envisaging modalities for the renewal of and knowledge sharing related to architectural and urban project processes.

In terms of methodology (Figure 1), these two operations are interesting case studies of what both associations considered to be experimental actions and the subject of reflective processes [9] that they put in place with researchers, including one of the authors of this paper. The authors of this text consider that “a more participative science itself [10,11] leads to a better understanding of projects and reinforces their scope in terms of knowledge production and the evolution of practices”. This paper was written along such principles: two of its authors are members of the two cited associations; one of them is also a lecturer-researcher but did not participate directly in the experiments under discussion. The third author, also a lecturer-researcher, has no connection with the two associations. Beyond the authors’ experience reports, the writing of this article was also informed by interviews undertaken with other project actors as well as a corpus of documents including preliminary operations studies; written conventions between different participating parties; action proposals and experiment audits drawn up by researchers on different aspects of their interventions; and logbooks and exhibitions about the different actions.

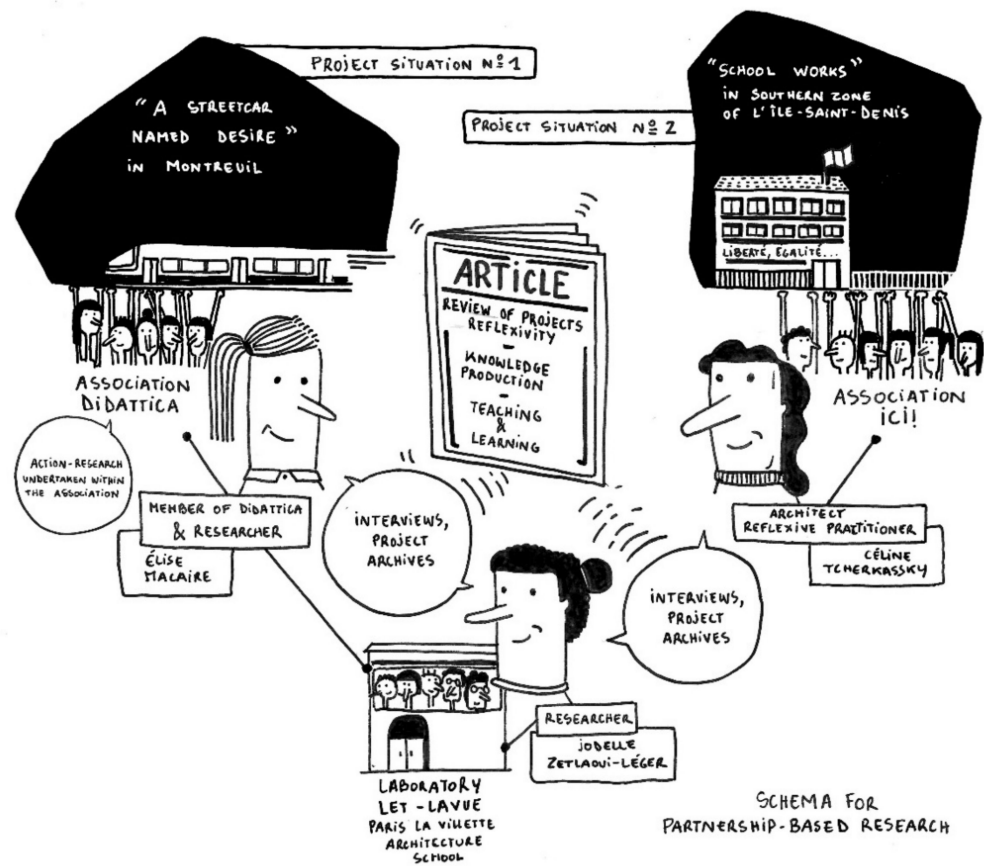


Figure 1. Schema for partnership-based research (design Céline Tcherkassky).

## 2. Urban Project Managers: Greater Consideration for Architect Collectives

Still hotly debated, the term “collective”, as adopted in France from the 1990s by groups of architects engaged in participative processes, underlines the critical nature of their position compared to the “professional stereotype” of the lone creator at the head of an agency creating iconic architectural objects [12]. In contrast, the term “collective” implies a “making together”, with other actors and without hierarchical distinction and with the users of the space in question. It also implies conceiving and building at the same time, thus calling into question the traditional regulatory and symbolic break between these two activities. Similarly to activist artists who perceived public space to be a medium for social critique and new interactions with the general public, early architect collectives launched artistic and cultural actions driven by their desire for a more democratic architecture in terms of the need for greater awareness about architecture and for the sharing of the act of building. Their orientation and involvement were influenced by the environmental and popular movements whose values they shared. Internationally, this movement of architect collectives was galvanized by social, environmental and ethical concerns [13] in line with the tactical urbanism movement [14]; in France, they found support with public policies that granted an important place to culture as a means of engaging with social issues. Public policies aimed at working-class neighborhoods thus became a key source of funding for these architect collectives.

The place occupied by these collectives—and their professionalization in the architectural and urban spheres—was firmly established in the 2000s [15,16] with the acceptance of sustainable development imperatives. It was further reinforced by the passing of key legislation aimed at inciting citizen participation, often around environmental issues. Collectives became a “segment” or sub-category within the architectural profession. Today they are a “polarity” of thinkers and designers open to cross-discipline approaches and who, thanks to their experience with public cooperation, are contributing to the renewal

of traditional architectural practices and the redefinition of the contours of architecture in general [12,17].

The new generation of architect collectives often refers to the leading figure of Patrick Bouchain who started working with these groups in the early 2000s. Bouchain was a well-known architect thanks to the trust placed in him by leading political figures such as former Mayor of the city of Blois and Minister for Culture, then Education, Jack Lang. Patrick Bouchain was able to realize several projects based on an “open programming approach defined with users, whereby temporary occupations were progressively stabilized and contributed to the revalorization of different construction trades” [18]. A fervent defender of the circumvention of procedural and technical standards, in the pivotal years of 2000–2010, Bouchain succeeded in attracting the interest of public and private actors in urban planning and construction. At the time, central administrations, municipalities, developers and promoters were backing “innovative” or “experimental” approaches to try and address new issues such as participation requirements, fallout from the 2008 financial crisis, reduced local public funding, real-estate uncertainties and difficulties in the requalification of unattractive properties, leading to longer project schedules, etc. As a result, projects were commissioned with a focus on construction collectives—architects, designers, landscapers—as well as anthropologists, philosophers and artists. Whilst the operations conducted in the name of innovation were not necessarily driven by participatory motivations, the capacity of collectives to “act socially”, “involve non-professional audiences” and “make” with a minimum of resources, within a framework of a circular economy and generating visibility in the public space, was clearly demonstrated and appreciated [19]. This kind of action had for several decades been a recurring element in the “grammar of participation” [2], even if the collectives were now being consulted regarding the final use of buildings in search of a new vocation.

In France, abandoned and derelict sites, in-between spaces or “third places” that do not meet preformatted solutions have together provided the biggest opportunities for participative programming and design. Collectives have already and spontaneously been interested in these kinds of territories, but they are now formally invited to rethink them. To what extent are the attitudes, habits and even “conventions” of architectural and urban production [20] called into question by these experiences? What relationship do these collectives have with technicians and local administration? How do they rally clients around new practices and broader fields of action? Do collectives’ own practices evolve?

### 3. Experimenting within Normative Cultures

Both operations—a school renovation and an urban tramway development—concerned an entire neighborhood. They illustrate the multiple institutional layers that shape public urban and facilities’ planning and thus contribute to the fragmentation of ways of thinking about space. The two associations in question were created at distinctly different periods. They are representative of the principles and values defended by architect collectives, as well as the concerns more specific to the decade in which each one was created, respectively, in the late 1990s and early 2010s. Their common denominator is the educational sphere (either national or popular) as their preferred space for a renewed mediation [12] between architects and residents, experts and citizens. While the educational framework provides opportunities for recreating ties between institutions and the city, it is a highly normative space. However, the training methods and spatial framework that define it are currently being called into question.

Educational architecture is a typical example of the normalization reflex that has existed in the production of public facilities in France since the 19th century [21]. In the name of various republican principles and of the control of modes of knowledge transmission, the central State has imposed one pedagogical model and construction benchmark [22]. This thinking has historically left little space for innovation despite local authorities being accorded the right to contract their own buildings and organize architectural competitions. Teachers remain on the payroll of the Ministry of Education,

and, via its “academic inspectors”, the State retains a controlling presence on the subjects of pedagogical and spatial organization.

Despite the decentralization laws of the 1980s, building norms remain for local government a guarantee of the good use of public funds whilst meeting the State’s pedagogical requirements. Educational construction projects thus continue to be defined by the dialogue between local politicians, technicians and academic inspectors, without significant consultation of either users or local residents.

In general, the architect is solicited only when the operation has already been largely defined, and his or her contribution is thus limited. The configuration of a primary or secondary school classroom has remained practically unchanged since the 19th century, in terms of both size and design [23]: it perpetuates a certain pedagogical model whereby the teacher is facing rows of motionless students, with not enough space to do otherwise. The furniture is chosen from supplier catalogs authorized by the public authorities and also provides little variation on ways of being “in class”, other than a library-style arrangement. In crowded classrooms, teachers’ key preoccupations are surveillance and fear, with little latitude for practices adapted to pupils’ individual potential. The space remains panoptical in both the classroom and the playground, restricting students’ responsibility as well as possibilities for innovation in programming and spatial conception. Schools, considered “sanctuaries of the Republic”, are often closed off to the neighborhood and indifferent to their immediate surroundings. The very configuration of these spaces accentuates students’ disinterest in their school, as well as making the school an insurmountable fortress for parents in working-class neighborhoods.

### 3.1. “School Works” in the Southern Zone of L’Île-Saint-Denis

The first experiment to be discussed here takes place in a city in the northern suburbs of Paris, L’Île-Saint-Denis, whose borders correspond to those of the island on which it is built. The southern part of the city has been undergoing a vast urban renewal program since the 2000s. In 2014, as part of their final cursus year, a group of students from the Paris La Villette architecture school decided to accompany the neighborhood residents during the period of urban transformation. For the students, it was the occasion to ask questions both about urban production in a territory undergoing deep post-industrial transformation and about architecture as a profession. Brought together by shared values, they created an association baptized ICI (“here” in French). They took on the role of “neighborhood architects” with the ambition of bringing residents to think differently about architecture. Organizing a platform for dialogue in the form of a weekly two-day presence on the ground floor of one of the neighborhood residential blocks, they also established different mechanisms for seeking out and meeting residents: a mobile tea trolley, questionnaires and games designed for sharing information about the neighborhood, an interactive model, festivities, etc. The objective was to identify residents’ concerns and the spaces with particular meaning for them, as well as to meet key figures and understand their capacity to get involved in order to prepare later actions aimed at improving daily life in a neighborhood without shops, associations or public services beyond the local primary school which was de facto the only meeting place on the southern part of the island.

After years of high turnover of teachers unable to motivate students with learning difficulties, the school appointed in 2011 a teaching team oriented around a project of splitting afternoon classes and pairing them with extra teachers from other disciplines. With help from the local mayor, they met an education sciences research laboratory from the University of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium (the Bureau d’ingénierie en éducation et en formation, BIEF) interested in doing research in this urban zone. Confronted by a high level of student drop-out and a general attitude of defiance toward the institution of education, the teachers also sought and obtained backing from a private foundation, AG2R la Mondiale, which was prepared to finance a project proposed by teachers aimed at addressing these problems.

The teachers proposed to bring an extra dimension to the splitting and pairing classroom idea by bringing on board the ICI collective whose work in the neighborhood was much appreciated. At the time the school was slated for a renovation and extension that had been drawn up without consulting its users; thus the collective proposed to pursue two objectives: accompany the pupils in the process of the programming, design and realization of a spatial project that would impact the quality of their daily lives and foster pupils' curiosity and empowerment. The collective's mission was defined by the teachers, and several fundamental principles were fixed: one project would be undertaken per year. It would be developed with children aged 8–11 years old, who would be allowed to involve younger children in their tasks. Each project was organized in three phases: survey, conception, construction. Classes were split every afternoon into two groups, and pupils donned specific roles: investigators, surveyors, architects and builders (Table 1). The knowledge and skills to be developed were both adapted to their educational program and to the project. Four subjects were identified.

**Table 1.** Roles and trades.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Investigators</p> <p>The investigators observe and assess the needs, © ICI!</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Surveyors</p> <p>The surveyors produce the site models, © ICI!</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Architects</p> <p>The architects design transformations based on identified needs, © ICI!</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Builders</p> <p>Builders discover materials and guide the worksite, © ICI!</p>	

In the first year, the focus was on the school courtyard, with the construction of playground bleachers (Figure 2). The building phase was entirely handled by the children, and the idea was to propose a form of active learning through an impressive physical

construction that would restore self-confidence and trust in adults and to give children responsibilities by entrusting them with “grown-up” tools (hand saws, screwdrivers, trowels, etc.). During project hours, the building site was open to the neighborhood in order to create a broad sense of involvement and community around the school (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** Year 1—Schoolyard—© ICI!/The “spectacular bleachers” realized the first season.



**Figure 3.** Parents—Community—© ICI!/Parents and community members are contacted during the development of needs and during the worksite.

Once trust had been restored and the methodology proven satisfactory, the objective in the second year was to establish a phase of investigation and detailed programming for the school library (Figure 4). The ambition here was also to create a democratic organization that allowed to both validate and put in place the different proposals developed. This time, the site development was shared between the children, local tradespeople and municipal technicians.



**Figure 4.** Year 2—Library—© ICI! and ©Cyrus Cornu photograph/The new “volcanic library”.



In the program's third year, it was decided to focus on the garden (Figure 5). The application of raw earth construction techniques to build outdoor furniture allowed students and teachers to be relatively autonomous in the technical realization of the project.

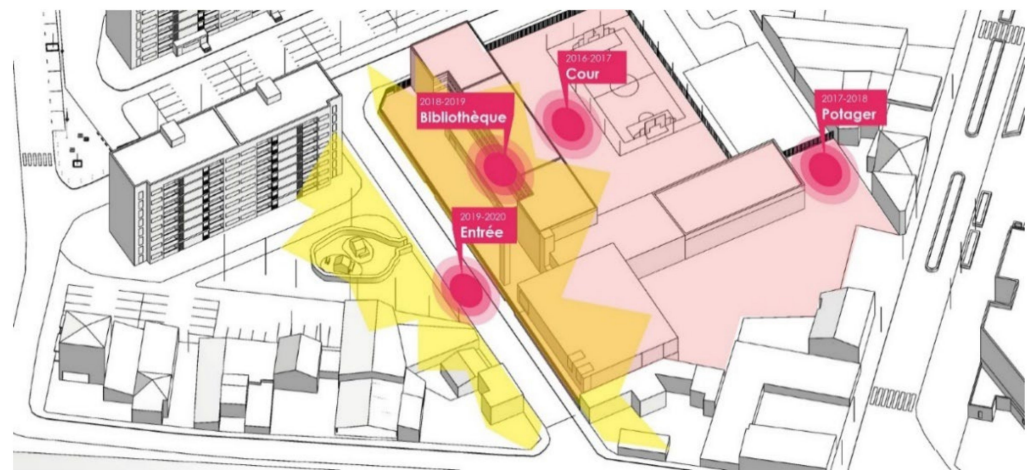


**Figure 5.** Year 3—Kitchen garden—© ICI!/Pupils use raw earth construction techniques to build the furniture of the vegetable garden.

With financial support from the AG2R la Mondiale foundation entering its last phase, the associative and school teams decided to extend the partnership. For this transitional year and in agreement with the local authorities in charge of the urban renovation program, it was decided that the project would go beyond the school's "sacred" walls and work on improving its interface with the neighborhood by redesigning the school entrance (Figures 6 and 7).



**Figure 6.** Year 4—Entrances 01, 02, 03, 04—© ICI!/Place making at the entrance of the school.



**Figure 7.** Axonometric perspective of the neighborhood/Location of spaces transformed over 4 years.

### 3.2. “A Streetcar Named Desire” in Montreuil

The second experiment took place in Montreuil, in the Seine-Saint-Denis commune of east Paris, more specifically, in the neighborhood of Les Ruffins–Le Morillon, which for years already had been awaiting the arrival of a tramway line. Several plots of land had been earmarked for works to this effect, but in the interim, they had become open-sky rubbish dumps that lined the road to the school. It was decided to approach the local city hall, the departmental administration and the public land manager, le Grand Paris, in order to activate the cleaning up of these boarded-up derelict lots.

An architect, member of the local residents’ committee and head of an association called *didattica* (founded in 2001 within the École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Paris La Villette. It “brings together architects, artists, researchers, teachers (primary, secondary and higher education) and students from all disciplines who believe that there can be no democratic practice of architecture without pedagogy”) committed to participative actions around education and cultural projects, proposed a project involving local children—in particular those from the social housing blocks adjoining the low-rise suburban zone—to work on the development of these empty lots. This proposal convinced the public land manager to sign a temporary occupation permit that would last until the beginning of the tramway works. With the residents’ committee and the guidance of the *didattica* association, the land manager drew up a pedagogical project to conduct workshops on “urban creation” in these disused lots, baptized “A streetcar named desire” and involving both the local high school and the municipal recreational center. The objective was to co-construct developments that would lay the ground for the arrival of the tramway and the spaces surrounding it. The local high school principal was consulted and agreed to integrate the school entrance zone into the workshop field of action, as it would also be impacted by the tramway arrival. No survey had been undertaken to date on the typical uses of these spaces. Their vocation before and during the construction had apparently not been considered, and the long-term design that had been proposed was rather run-of-the-mill (benches, lighting, pavement works).

The *didattica* architect organized a pedagogical team comprised of seven people with different skill sets to work for a year with the college and the municipal recreational center. Most of them lived locally and got involved as both professionals and citizens. With a second qualification in political philosophy, the architect also had a long relationship with artistic and cultural spheres. For this project, she worked closely with another architect, who was initially a teaching graduate of the Ministry of Education before becoming an architecture teacher. They were accompanied in the workshops by a young geographer and anthropologist. A history student, who had grown up in the local social housing blocks, occupied the position of “scribe-photographer” and co-author of the workshop reports.

Also contributing to the “cooperative and pedagogical adventure” of the association were a poet, a painter and a musician, as well as a volunteer designer who helped with technical advice and project supervision. The association put in place reflexive learning tools whereby pupils, teachers and two members of the *didattica* team were required to maintain a journal; a regular seminar was organized with the pedagogical team, and a young political science researcher undertook an action research project [24].

The actions with pupils were organized according to the principles of “institutional pedagogy” outlined by Céléstin Freinet and based on the central idea of learning through responsibility [25].

Skills have a central place in this approach (learning through “trades”) as well as the fostering of autonomy and initiative taking within a collective structure (the school classroom), considered as a democratic space. The cross-disciplinary approach to skills and the instruction of citizenship are at the heart of this approach built on “familiarization” with the fields of architecture, urbanism and landscape design and the appropriation of their “tools and techniques.” The workshops proposed that children become “apprentice architects” with their instruction adapted to the program of partner educational establishments (Table 2). The pupils were invited to design all the steps of an architectural and urban project: conduct an urban survey and diagnostic of the different daily spaces in the neighborhood; draw and make models of design proposals; dialogue with residents in order to present and debate programming ideas and first proposals; work on an “open and pedagogical” building site (alongside volunteer adults); and try out new uses permitted by their designs.

**Table 2.** Children’s roles and trades in the urban creation workshops.







Urban Planners	Identifying the perimeter for developments in the tramway surroundings/team “Paths and activities” © Sirandou Soukouna—didattica	 
Investigators	Photographers and sound engineers (interviews)/the note takers © Sirandou Soukouna—didattica	 
Designers	Study of architectural references on the theme of “Colours and embellishments”/Presentation of the flying fox landing pad with the cable spring brake and the safety net © Sirandou Soukouna—didattica	 

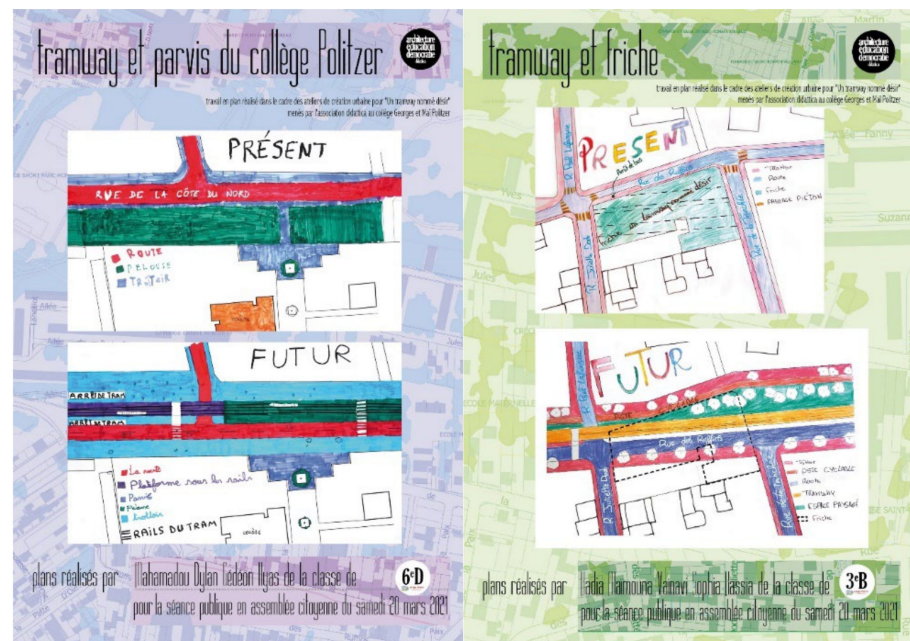
Table 2. Cont.

Builders	Worksite with the recreation center/Worksite and flying fox test © didattica		
Other trades	Scribes and model makers from the recreation center/symbolic moment at the recreation center: stapling the tramway tracks © Sirandou Soukouna—didattica		

At the same time as the student workshops, parents and other residents were invited to citizen assemblies as well as to be volunteers at the worksite. The approach led to the construction of a flying fox on the vacant lots as well as development proposals for the college entry. The association also worked to accompany the management of these spaces (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8. Neighborhood model made by the children featuring the spaces identified for the two urban creation workshop projects © didattica.



**Figure 9.** Posters made by the children: prefiguring the vacant lot redevelopments surrounding the tramway and the school entrance © didattica.

#### 4. Collectively Rethinking the Neglected Spaces of Architectural and Urban Projects

The process undertaken by the *didattica* association in Montreuil was able to garner the support of the tramway operators as it fundamentally raised shared concerns: to avoid vacant lots becoming dumps for the time they are “frozen” pending the arrival of the tramway tracks; to make the tramway project “real” in local residents’ imagination by creating a tangible presence after so many years of uncertainty; to envisage the coming urban transformation as a positive experiment with learnings in terms of democracy and urbanism; and to improve the school entrance. This situation is a good illustration of the reasons that are leading current property owners and cities to support temporary or transitional urbanism [26], but it also reveals their difficulties in defining, for certain spaces, detailed programming that is creative and conceived across different time frames. Delegating this job to collectives constitutes an opportunity that urban project operators are increasingly seizing. Whilst many technicians tend to stay out of the work involving residents or consider it as mere animation of the place before its transformation, others are paying increasing attention and trying to use the chance to learn ways of going about space programming and resident involvement. The participative actions entrusted to associations since the 1990s in France have historically struggled to impact the heart of urban projects, let alone drive them [12]. However, several transitional urbanism operations undertaken in France over the last few years appear to open avenues for closer and more integrated cooperation with the broader ongoing urban project, particularly when they concern strategic spaces within that project. The Montreuil action is one such example, and it led technicians to reconsider their practices:

*“Associative projects with residents do not come naturally with technical services. But once the transitory urbanism projects are established, the technical teams get to work with the associative actors. The two worlds start talking, get to understand one another. Bridges are built between the technical and the associative cultures.”* (Departmental tramway operations manager)

Beyond the construction of transport infrastructure with clearly defined objectives of the opening up and development of certain areas, the actions undertaken with the high school pupils and day care center children brought to the forefront other issues that touch on daily life in the neighborhood. Accompanied by the cross-disciplinary team from the

association, these residents and educational facility users came to an understanding of the project situation and were able to express spatial expectations about the tramway both beyond the technical needs and in relation to other useful urban functions. Barely identified by the tramway operators until that point, these spaces began to attract attention while revealing issues of coordination between actors.

*“Concerning the pupils’ work that was presented, it shows that yes, there is a tramway but there are also the tramway surroundings. These surroundings are partly developed by the Department but the surroundings of the surroundings, that are beyond our perimeter and beyond that of the small business owners, of facilities, etc, this is a grey zone that no-one touches, each considering it to be ‘not his’.”* (Departmental tramway operations manager)

In general, the detailed design of public spaces at the border of several infrastructures of buildings is one of the last steps in a project. Territories are approached in a top-down and sequential way, going from big-scale to small, except of course for the verification of the characteristics of the land in question (topography, soil pollution, etc.). The use of space on a pedestrian and residential scale and the ways in which daily life is already organized in a block or a neighborhood are not considered a priority when launching a vast urban transformation operation (Figure 10).



**Figure 10.** Simulation of pedestrians trying out the crossing planned in the tramway project © didattica.

At L’île-Saint-Denis, the school renovation, like that of the neighborhood, was not subject to a prior use diagnosis on the operators’ behalf. This was, however, organized by the ICI collective. The teachers said that they had been consulted throughout the conception phase but felt that their concerns were not taken into account. The perspective of developing a greater number of square feet gave the impression that practical aspects of the school’s daily life were not important. The teachers felt that the project management was only really interested in increasing the number of classrooms. This very real estate-oriented vision of the school’s transformation was reinforced by the fact that the project was essentially driven by the local administrator in charge of heritage, without any real collaboration with the educational administrator. Urban studies on neighborhood renovation were disconnected from the school project. The involvement of the ICI collective thus allowed for the integration of spaces previously not taken into account by both operations but particularly important for users: the playground, library, garden and school surroundings.

The prior survey conducted by the pupils themselves was essential in identifying questions that they considered a priority for improving their life at the school (as we will also see in the tramway case). Their questions raised an inclusive dimension in terms of both the school and the neighborhood, such as the spaces used by girls in the courtyard or the way parents were received in front of the school; these questions were revealed to be essential, yet they had been completely ignored by the professionals in charge of the

operation, whose only analysis of the situation was technical, quantitative and stopped at the school's outer walls.

The experience of the tramway surroundings' design in Montreuil also confirms the pervasiveness of a functionalist approach to the city practiced by the major urban operators, as revealed in the disconnect between the ways of thinking about a facility and the urban spaces around it, for the ensemble was not treated as a part of the city in which different uses are already layered and intertwined. Instead, project managers viewed their role through the prism of specific fields of competence, despite the existence of a pilot committee and the designation of an urban contractor to design a global plan for the neighborhood. The prevalence of a fragmented approach to space is an ongoing echo of modernist rationalism [27] that pays little attention to transitory spaces. This effect is reinforced by the absence of consideration, in overall and specific design approaches, for existing practices in the daily lives of users (pedestrians in particular). Local politicians and technicians who followed the actions of the *didattica* association were surprised by everything they learned on this subject during the project presentation by the college students:

*"The students have a precise idea of what they would like to see there, in relation to their needs, their desires, etc. Beyond their very different proposals, what is very clear is that they have a broad range of needs that are not met, and that we, the Department, have not responded to in the development of public spaces. It is such a shame that the two types of knowledge don't communicate more: technical knowledge presented by the departmental project manager, or the public transport operator RATP . . . and user knowledge of residents who live in and use the neighbourhood daily." (Departmental tramway operations manager)*

The same operations manager also recounts pupils' capacity to define their proposals thanks to prior research (history, topography and geography, sociology, etc.) and field studies accompanied by the association, compared to traditional consultation/concertation approaches that tend to draw up and exchange around a list of needs defined by professionals. The necessary definition of specific uses of the tramway surroundings was recognized as one of the essential expressions of the future urban characteristics of the neighborhood: it set the stage for forms of social encounters, the place of different generations in a public place as well as that of shops, what kind of shops, etc.

The field studies undertaken by the college pupils consisted of a series of interviews (with residents, association managers, local politicians and technicians) and a questionnaire completed by their family or neighbors, providing the students with a broad view of the different parties concerned by the tramway project and their own place within a complex system of actors (Figure 11). Their proposals and those of the residents' collective thus arose from a global perspective built on the residents' point of view and including the project's technical-administrative dimensions. These were analyzed in detail by the technicians and local administrators, then fleshed out in workshops. The suggestions presented in the initial development project—plants, benches, etc.—were also discussed in a two-way dynamic and pedagogical exchange.

The departmental tramway operations manager emphasized that he did not feel that his expertise was undermined by the participative process. Perhaps to reassure himself of this, he added that he felt that the children's work was complementary to his own but in a rupture with the engineering protocols practiced until then; he also felt that this work should have taken place earlier in the project elaboration.



**Figure 11.** Working on “Neighbourhood actors” © Sirandou Soukouna—didattica.

The question of the college entrance design perfectly illustrates the way in which this new approach transgressed the functionalist and sequential tradition of space transformation that had until then accorded little interest to existing uses, for this space is vital: it facilitates the getting together of pupils before and after school, and it is a meeting spot for residents and, most of all, for parents. Its neglected appearance contributed to devaluing a college whose academic results were also particularly degraded and had not been the subject of any particular reflection. Consultation with the school had flagged the school entrance as a priority but with little real expectations. Yet, for the school principal, the transformation of the school surroundings was a key issue in symbolic, urban and educational terms and a reminder of the necessity for all users to be considered in their specificity (Figure 12).



**Figure 12.** Redevelopments in front of the college © didattica.

*“There was nothing; henceforth there will be something. We hadn’t thought about it, now we have, and we have made the school threshold visible, made the school visible. The school entrance has been identified as a learning space between inside and outside. This outcome is important.”* (School principal).

Today, environmental issues are facilitating reconciliation between very different actors around support for participative processes: a revegetation project conveys issues of urban requalification and the fight against climate change, values that are shared by the transport operator and the college. The school principal thus perceived an educational aspect in resonance with the way the *didattica* association envisaged the pedagogical framework of the student project.



## 5. “Pedagogical Architects” a Challenge to Institutions?

The actions by the two collectives are remarkable initiatives that fundamentally challenge institutional norms concerning the way in which public services are rendered. Numerous research projects over the last few years have shown that during participative processes, architects often shoulder different roles that go beyond conception and construction site supervision [28]. Without divesting themselves of their essential skill sets, these architects develop an extended practice. If this simply means that architects can train or raise the awareness of ordinary citizens about architecture, the acceptance of this role depends on the context and conditions of their actions. Collaborating with actors from the national educational institution is not a given in France, a fact that the architects from both associations were able to fully measure.

### 5.1. Questions of Legitimacy

In France, a country known for its particularly centralized and normalized education system, teachers are representatives of the State and are thus considered solely in charge and responsible for both educational content and its dissemination. It is globally very difficult for the educational institution to agree to share these prerogatives, particularly during school hours. This position was adopted in the mid-19th century in the context of the nation-state building of the French Republic; the Minister for Public Instruction’s decision led to the adoption of a unique teaching model said to be “simultaneous” versus the “mutualist” model. Ever since, so-called “new pedagogies” based on experimentation and cooperation between pupils of different age groups have struggled to cross the threshold of French public schools. Such practices, increasingly sought out by middle- and upper-class parents, remain in general confined to private schools, partially explaining, for example, the growing success of Montessori schools.

This context also explains why interaction with persons outside the educational institution is in general only allowed for several hours of class time per year. It also explains the reaction of the Seine-Saint-Denis school inspection authority (*Inspection Académique*), which addressed a letter to the school principal vehemently denouncing interventions by architects during school time, judged irresponsible, and requesting the resignation of the teachers concerned. The letter accused the teachers of delegating pedagogical instruction to architects outside the educational system due to their own supposed incompetence.

In Montreuil, the college teachers sometimes felt in competition with or undermined by actors positioned as “pedagogical architects.” The *didattica* teams had developed a process in which teachers struggled to find their place, sometimes even feeling ousted despite the association coordinators’ proposals to associate them from the outset. In the case of the municipal recreation center, the collaboration unfolded differently as the moderator was firmly established within the teaching team and often worked with children without other actors present. Once the flying fox was built, a partnership was immediately envisaged with this mediator so that the children would continue to be associated with the project outcomes, in particular its communication.

### 5.2. Co-Constructing the Pedagogical Project

Architects and teachers collaborated closely on the L’Île-Saint-Denis project which was commonly defined by both parties from the outset. The collective’s involvement in neighborhood daily life before the participation experiment had provided the occasion to meet the school team. During a “light party” organized by the collective, they had asked local school children to make paper lamps that were placed around the local streets. A relationship of trust was created between residents, teachers and the architects. Most of all, the cooperation was clinched by the teachers’ pedagogical project around the need to organize school time differently.

Before the collective became involved, the teachers’ main concern was to try and vary the teaching structure between mornings and afternoons by splitting classes into two groups and bringing in different mediators proposed by the municipality—notably

sport, music and dance instructors. With the architects and during school time, the children performed activities that were even more different than usual: conducting research with their classmates, using tools and building materials, etc., with practical implications and a big impact on their daily environment both inside and outside the school.

In this way, a form of pedagogical coproduction evolved whereby the objectives established by the teachers driving the experiment fully intersected the knowledge and skill sets developed in the architects' workshops. This contribution by architects to an educational project fundamentally supported by teachers led to the genuine sharing of the whole process. Throughout the ICI experiment, architecture was collectively treated as a global means to learn new things with concrete results. This interest might have been difficult to harness if the workshop and meeting proposals had been presented as being about raising awareness about architecture itself.

Researchers and teachers noted that the experience had a clear impact on children's relationship to school and learning [29,30]. Students developed a new attitude in the classroom—"we could simply start teaching" commented a teacher. Once at school, the kids who had participated in the workshops with the architects started improving their grades in subjects tested in the workshops, such as life and earth science, maths, geometry, technology.

### 5.3. Taking on Responsibility within an Unclear Framework

The actions by these two collectives follow a logic of experience and learning that allows for error, a philosophy that goes in the opposite direction to that of the French educational [31], architectural and design spheres, for the culture of project-as-process inherently leads to successive adjustments and is defined by uncertainty [32], an element also common to participative processes which can generate unexpected and unformatted responses, eliciting anxiety with politicians and technicians [33] who thwart them.

The quality and the future management of spaces designed and made with users often creates fear with actors in charge of the spaces in question. In the case of the Montreuil and L'Île-Saint-Denis experiences, this obstacle was one more in a project already considered barely credible, due to its association with children and residents. Apparently works made by children or residents, even when accompanied by professionals, are of doubtful quality. In L'Île-Saint-Denis, the ICI collective had assigned an important part of the budget to the project's materialization with funds obtained from the municipality, the agglomeration and private foundations. The collective organized dialogue mechanisms around the pupils' proposals, with professionals present to guide discussions on sensitive points and list recommendations. These were critical steps in tipping the project from a children's hypothesis to a buildable reality (Figure 13).



**Figure 13.** Jury bringing together all stakeholders: teachers, elected officials, city services, parents, guest architects and pupils' representatives ©ICI!.

Despite these precautions, the trustworthiness of works that have not been ordered from the public service catalogs or gone through the procedural channels established by

the national education department or the city hall raises suspicion. Their thriftiness in financial and environmental terms is overlooked. The investment, including the symbolic and emotional investment of teaching teams and pupils in the fabrication of these works, is not taken seriously or is overlooked. Local elected officials and technical services eventually delegate responsibility for these projects to a “control bureau” that is considered as a stamp proving the safety and seriousness of the project. This was regrettable, according to an elected official in L’Île-Saint-Denis, who today supports the actions brought by the ICI collective after an initial period of mistrust, which she herself acknowledges:

*“The first completed project (school playground bleachers) is currently rotting in a corner because it ‘doesn’t respect standards’ according to the municipality. When I asked questions, the control bureau replied ‘It just needs a little wire to be changed.’ A minor detail but nothing gets done to fix these little experiments that the technical services have probably discredited with the Mayor.”*

This kind of situation gives project stakeholders the impression that local politicians and technical administrators would prefer that nothing happened in their territory, rather than embrace projects that they do not completely control.

## 6. Forging Alliances

The setting up, development and sharing of such initiatives requires allies. These can be found with elected officials as well as technical and administrative staff, operators and users of public facilities. What counts is their capacity to positively influence the montage, deployment and/or ulterior developments of the project. Architects are not necessarily such allies. The ICI association tried to involve the leading architect from the urban renovation team in the process involving neighborhood children. The reply was to suggest “awareness-raising techniques about building foundations”, a typical top-down expert reaction to a participative proposal.

In the scientific literature, the allies of participative projects are often considered to be “boundary spanners” [34,35] with atypical backgrounds across varying disciplines or professions. The interest expressed by the departmental tramway operations manager in the *didattica* association and the children’s contributions and his capacity to call his own practices into question were not a coincidence, and interviews revealed that he already had a certain experience with associative structures and actions in popular neighborhoods, during a previous professional experience. The local deputy in charge of Education and Citizenship who tried to persuade the city hall of the pertinence of ICI’s actions and the interest of pursuing them on other sites was not a technician but had worked for several years with a contractor on rehabilitation operations for social housing. She pointed out that this experience was for her the chance to work with architects but also to bring greater attention to “that which is pre-existing.”

In Montreuil, the school principal and the head of the recreation center both facilitated the actions carried out by *didattica*, whose pedagogical project was more or less accepted unconditionally. Their commitment meant that numerous institutional obstacles were overcome, in particular concerning logistical aspects of the workshops. The school principal had closely followed democratic experiments in public space in France during the 2010s, a commitment that brought a strategic dimension to the operations in his school. Before meeting *didattica*, he already had a project to develop the gardens. Aware of the school entrance issue and the question of the school’s place within the urban fabric, he immediately fitted in with the association’s pedagogical project. He seized it as an opportunity to resolve several different problems that the school had been facing for nearly 50 years. He accepted the uncertain outcome of the participatory process in the name of its sincerity and the raised awareness that it would create with the pupils in terms of the practice of citizenship (Figure 14). He was ready to take the risks that it implied:



**Figure 14.** Presentation of the class posters to the gathered assembly/an apprentice architect presents the school entrance project © Sirandou Soukouona—didattica.

*“My participation required a leap of faith. It wasn’t about doing, or pretending. Or saying ‘let’s get together, draw something up, make a proposal and see if we can do something about it.’ It was about commitment. I committed to respecting the outcome of these discussions and reflections. To be honest, when I saw the results, some points made me sweat—a table, a shelter, how on earth can that be built? What are the security standards that apply, the upkeep? . . . Rules are there for these points but actually let’s see what the kids do with them, if it’s dangerous etc. My personal responsibility would be much less called upon if we kept a sort of non-space in front of the school. So yes, there is an element of risk in the process.”*

Allies can also be discovered along the way, as the process unfolds. The ICI collective’s actions fitted in with a pre-existing project of class splitting and pairing that the Ecole Lurçat school principal had been able to try out elsewhere before taking up this position. He wanted to be able to call upon professionals who were competent in other fields that the teaching team was not qualified to handle. He obtained direct support from a task force within the Ministry of Education dedicated to innovation, thus allowing him to circumvent the obstacles raised by the local academic inspector. The support provided by this Ministerial task force named “Bâti scolaire” also gave the project a certain status on a national scale.

These indispensable alliances do not always exist at the outset of a project. For both examples cited here, they are the fruit of patience and building. They remain fragile as they depend upon administrative and technical public servants who often change jobs or local officials whose tenure is called into question with every election. The key issue is thus to structurally modify the relationship of different decision-making parties, not only to experimentation but to the very notion of the project, in its contextual and collective dimensions.

## 7. Process Effects and Follow-Up

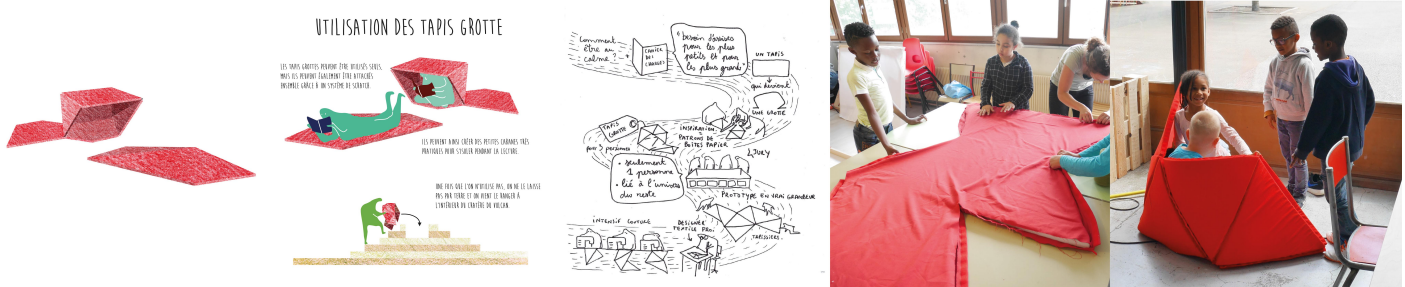
### 7.1. A New Appreciation of Architecture and Architects

The actions in both L’Île-Saint-Denis and Montreuil were organized according to a series of workshops at each step of project elaboration, from diagnosis to operation. They were also developed afterward, within a broader vision of the project that included its reception [36] and the ongoing development of daily life in these places. Both collectives fulfilled their role of “spatial agents”, facilitators and use co-producers, assuming social and professional responsibilities that go beyond that of the delivery of a commissioned object [7]. The processes they proposed led to exchanges that are still an exception in France, between children, residents, architects and urbanists, researchers and politicians. Their objective was not only to raise awareness about architecture but to coproduce objects of great use and symbolic value. They also led to a rethinking of practices.

In L'Île-Saint-Denis, for the redesign of the school library, a discussion panel was created with an architect, a designer, a woodworker and representatives from the local administration. Students' attention was drawn to the important principle of coherence in the design of the space:

*"There are some very beautiful things in your project. It's as if one morning, we got up and decided to put on our prettiest woollen stockings with a sparkly bathing suit, comfortable thongs and a puffer jacket. Separately, each item is beautiful but they don't go well together."*

The workshop research was concentrated on the idea of coherence and ways in which future students could appropriate the spaces. Designs were sought that were less literal and more metaphoric, such as the bleachers which were transformed into a volcano that fixed the concept for the rest—thus the hideaway grottos became lava-carpet storage caves inside the volcano crater (Figure 15).



**Figure 15.** All steps for the design and making of the “lava-carpet” ©ICI!.

Through this experience, the school teaching team discovered how pupils can benefit from more active involvement with learning in a country where practical activities using all the senses disappear quickly from the school currus after preschool. Teachers found this path to be an effective solution for children with learning difficulties, a remedial process that renewed the connection between children, families and the educational institution. In L'Île-Saint-Denis and Montreuil, there was an overall progression in children's capacity for self-expression and respect for other points of view. The teachers viewed this as a citizenship education process.

These long-term approaches involving dialogue with different experts and actors of the architectural project and requiring students to adopt different roles throughout the project also lead to a better global understanding of the practice of architecture (Figure 16):

*"I was impressed when I saw that the children had assimilated the different roles taken on throughout the process: architect, interviewer, builder, surveyor. Seeing their investment and the way the children progressed, how they integrated everything, seeing them handling wood, tools, thinking, creating research journals, distributing questionnaires, recuperating them and analyzing their data, asking themselves 'can it be made or not', working on to-scale drawings and many models, it really was an incredibly rich experience."* (Principal of the J Lurçat College)

ENQUÊTEURS

équipe ICI : Céline, Hélène, Sarah  
 classe : CE2  
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# 10 PROGRAMMATION SPATIALE

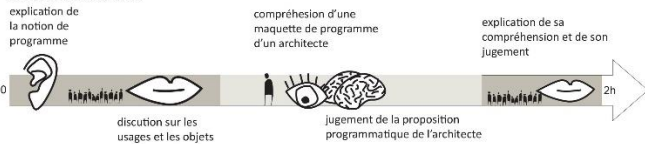
FICHE PÉDAGOGIQUE  
 du 13 / 01 / 2017

les objectifs

les outils préparés

- comprendre la notion de programme dans l'espace
  - distinguer usages et objets
  - comprendre l'intérêt de parler en usage et non pas en objet pour penser un projet (retour sur la séance sur catalogue et sur mesure)
  - comprendre une maquette « abstraite »
  - juger le travail des architectes
- > maquettes programmatiques des architectes
  - > toile de jugement
  - > étiquettes de qualification d'espace

déroulé de la séance



les objectifs atteints et perspectives pour la suite  
 le positif / le négatif / difficultés rencontrées / remarques

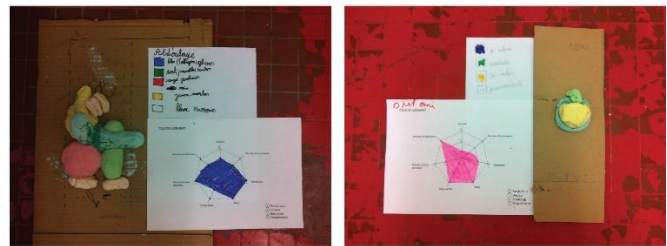
Approfondissement de la notion de sur mesure et sur catalogue : assimilation de l'intérêt de parler en terme d'usage et non en objet (effet liste du père Noël).

Bonne compréhension des maquettes abstraites. Découverte de l'intérêt de faire des légendes.

Quelques difficultés à trouver des référentiels pour juger les programmes : besoin à l'avenir d'aller voir des exemples pour en discuter ensemble.



Découverte de la notion de programme et des maquettes abstraites



Un enquêteur juge une maquette d'architecte

**Figure 16.** Extract from the logbook—investigators—educational sheet—S10/Extract from the workshop logbook 2017—©ICI!

According to the Lurçat College teachers, the involvement of architects during school time also contributed to a breaking down of social distances, in the sense of the “class barriers” [37] that the world of architecture had until then signified for these children of modest backgrounds. The teachers also had a new appraisal of the architectural profession, as extended to and practiced by the children.

*“In France, the figure of the architect in society is organized around either a notion of architectural prestige, or else he who asks for building permits. ICI showed how architecture is more than just building; it is about organizing social activity in an inclusive way. They created something living, in their own neighbourhood.” (Teacher, J. Lurçat school)*

*“I used to think that architects drew plans and made models for buildings and other constructions. I would never have thought that primary children could be architects... I wasn't familiar with all the other professions—surveyors, researchers, builders, I didn't know that there were so many other trades and that they would be perfect for primary school children.” (Principal, J. Lurçat school)*

The ICI collective reports that its own practices evolved throughout the experiments, in terms of its vision of architecture. Despite having already spent several years directly involved with construction sites, the L'Île-Saint-Denis neighborhood project required them to also get involved in the early steps of project identification, definition and expectations, as well as in research and funding and in helping the project management structure the commission. These programming activities are traditionally considered to be the project management's responsibility and are not taught at architecture school. They are even considered as being external to the project. Yet they are essential for defining the meaning

and objectives of the project and are a constant influence on a project's conception. Research undertaken over the last years in France shows that project participation is even more efficient and seen as sincere by residents when its primary objective is programming [38]. The local representative in charge of education and citizenship and who supported the ICI collective's approach was fully aware of this. In light of the J. Lurçat school experiment, she sought to recruit a qualified person who would help her draw up the contractual requirements for choosing qualified use programming structures. She was persuaded that participation is meaningful only when "residents are really made to work" and with precise and organized feedback. The message fell on deaf ears with the municipal technical services; therefore she also tried to raise awareness on the subject with the mayor and other representatives.

### 7.2. Sharing Process Philosophy and Learnings

The proximity that architects build with future users throughout participative projects, in particular transitional urbanism projects, can provoke a feeling of abandon when the project is over. It is necessary to go beyond the "event" aspect that characterizes these collective actions and the expectations that they raise for the project managers.

The Montreuil initiative obtained funding from a private foundation, several territorial administrations, the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (the investment arm of the French state that carries out missions of public interest) and the Agence Nationale de la Rénovation Urbaine (National Agency for Urban Renovation). These partners considered that this "project within the project" could not only prefigure future public spaces in this part of the city but could be deployed in other spaces expecting a tramway line. The Greater Paris project in particular includes major infrastructural development works with a big impact on residents' daily lives. The perspective of requalifying certain urban spaces, within the framework of a transport project, as strategic for users allows other, innovative partnerships to be forged, for example:

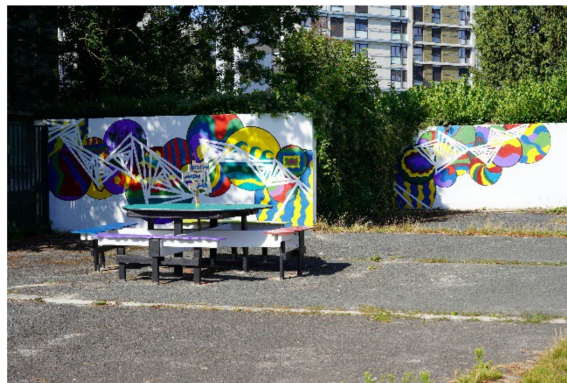
- With educational institutions, including recreational and cultural structures (college, municipal recreation center, library), technical services (gardens and urban cleanliness) and local democracy actors at different levels, whether municipal or departmental;
- With civil society and its associations (resident collectives, workers' gardens, neighborhood committees, horticultural and artistic associations), as well as local shops and businesses who contribute by offering or lending material and tools.

In autumn 2021, as the two sites came to a close (construction of a flying fox on the vacant lot and redevelopment of the college entrance, with street furniture), the association was mounting other collaborations with neighborhood professionals involved with social action and popular education, aimed at studying future uses allowed by the redevelopment.

The *didattica* association signed several agreements with institutional and financial partners who will accompany them in defining temporary occupations. A partnership has also been announced with the residents' collective for the management of the vacant lot development to help them accompany the use of the lot with the flying fox. The association will act as a mediator between the city and the college in the management, upkeep and supervision of the college entrance development (maintenance of plants, furniture, a wall frieze and general cleanliness). Association members are thus taking on responsibilities that go beyond those of a traditional architect. They are committed to long-term viability, not simply of an edifice but of the new life habits that could evolve there. Through conscious and committed processes, they are able to learn from the first new uses of the space [39] all the while exploring collaborative work methods with new partners.

The association is also determined to ensure the long-term sustainability of the developments and their upkeep and integration in the urban landscape. The school college entrance was designed in close collaboration with the municipality's technical services so that it could be easily repaired, disassembled and reassembled, such as in the case of changed ground conditions (Figure 17). The Montreuil local administration put the association in touch with a consultancy in charge of "concertation" on urban vacant lots and

the contracting of landscape redevelopments so that they could share key elements of the project; they also prepared a nomadic exhibition that raised awareness with partners on the importance of taking into account the work done with children and residents. The mayoral deputies in charge of urbanism and participative democracy, who directly witnessed the children's production and the dialogue with residents, committed to consulting them again at a future date on the neighborhood's economic development services requirements, as well as for the development of other spaces in relation to the streetcar.



**Figure 17.** Street furniture in front of the college © didattica.

The extension of the ICI collective's actions on L'Île-Saint-Denis was more complicated to envisage. The city hall that initially had difficulty accepting its lack of control over the use of private foundation funding discovered the real breadth of the experience. It accepted the extension of the ICI collective's mission to the redevelopment of an adventure playground near the school. Other associations have since set up operations in this part of the city to develop resident initiatives.

Observation shows that the story of the ICI collective's actions in the neighborhood and at the school is just as important as the physical imprint left by the objects built there [40]. The process left a lasting impression on the children and residents. After the end of the construction site, the storytelling continued and was repeated and appropriated beyond the initial participating group. It was the starting point of a new communal culture in the neighborhood with the school's reputation at its center. This can be measured through two noteworthy observations: the project gave the school a new identity as a dynamic feature of the neighborhood where children could thrive, thus making it more desirable. It cut short the high teacher turnover rates and slowed the family exodus from the neighborhood. In 2021, four years after the library was built, the pupils of the Jean Lurçat school came to visit an exhibition featuring the school. These children had not taken part in the workshops but used the spaces produced there. They could see how "they", the pupils, had built the volcano and "of course" they continue to store lava-mats in the volcano crater. This visual narrative expresses the way in which a relation is woven between knowledge transmission, form and use choices. One of the notable differences between participative processes in an educational context versus other contexts is that it is organized with a captive public. Their availability allows for the long-term, progressive emergence of a shared culture. In other contexts, mostly with adults, the co-construction time is often extracted with difficulty from busy everyday lives. One of the major issues is thus reinventing communal moments. Working with educational institutions offers key leverage for participative processes that can be developed within and beyond the school, with new hybrid pedagogical methods and expertise.

If local institutional actors struggle to admit the pertinence of this process, it has nonetheless been endorsed at the highest level by the Education Ministry, during the "Bâti scolaire" task force research into the future of educational architecture in France. The meetings and exchanges between ICI collective architects and this task force led to the ap-



preciation of the experience in an exhibition entitled “School works, when experimentation and participation transform the school.”

As co-organizer with a designer of this exhibition on the ground floor of the Ministry of Education, the association was thus able to directly render its work visible with the Ministry as well as with other actors involved with schools and their everyday operations (Figure 18). The exhibition was itinerant and accompanied by a publication [41] (Figure 19) as well as a series of live broadcasts and podcasts that were organized by the ICI collective on school architecture and which involved considerable effort and investment by this group of architects whose objectives went beyond the simple promotion of their work, for it meant that their experiences were not only shared but compared and discussed with other actors.



**Figure 18.** Inauguration of the “Travaux d’école” (School works) Exhibition at the Ministry of National Education in the presence of Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer ©ICI!.



**Figure 19.** Exhibition catalog “Travaux d’école” (School works, when experimentation and participation transform the school) ©ICI!.

These discussions are contributing to the current development on a national level of a building tool kit. The marginal and exceptional character of this kind of process is perhaps a thing of the past, as it enters into the elaboration of a new shared action framework knitting together pedagogical and spatial experimentation, education and construction spheres more tightly than ever before in the last 40 years in France.

### 7.3. Dilemmas to Overcome, a Project Culture to Renew

The two experiences discussed here were able to take place thanks to the prior strong local ties of the two associations that resembled a form of “architectural permanency”, experimented by pioneers of participatory architecture and urban planning in the 1960s (Paul Davidoff, Ralph Erskine) and updated in recent years in France [42]. They were

each very involved in local daily life and its inhabitants (Figure 20). The *didattica* architect lives in Montreuil, and the association has conducted operations there for over fifteen years. The ICI collective is composed of former architecture students who started working in the southern part of L'Île-Saint-Denis during preparations for their final-year diploma. Being grounded in the local community is an added value for these processes, but the "architectural permanency" notion can create problems due to the multiple roles of the architect-resident. His or her own personal vision of the city (political or idealized) is not necessarily the same as that of other residents. In the "Streetcar named desire" project, the neighboring low-rise suburban residents felt left out of the flying fox project voted by the majority of the neighborhood residents. Tensions emerged around the roles of each association: one, professional, in charge of the conception and realization of the new facility; the other in charge of its management and future uses. The subject of security requirements, nonetheless, focused the debates.



**Figure 20.** Inauguration, vacant lot "A streetcar named desire" © *didattica*.

These experiences have brought architects to approach the production of the city via a large spectrum of fields that link the question of building with the question of providing service. To obtain the necessary funding and override the traditional framework of public action, they must convince many actors across these different domains. They must have everything shored up beforehand, which can act as a brake on the capacity to invent as the process evolves with residents, users and children. Paradoxically, this can weaken the dual character of this kind of process, i.e., participative and contextualized. How can the engineering and objectives of these projects be drawn up with participants when the financial and other partners want reassurances of a precisely defined method?

*"The didattica project was minutely orchestrated, in what is an inherent contradiction: how to reconcile such precision with a participatory philosophy and contributions open to all? How to reconcile the fact of each step being planned, with the necessity of each person finding the right place within the project, with some leeway to take a direction that was not anticipated? . . . This paradox is not one of conception but is due to the fact that, to obtain funding with the Caisse des Dépôts, the Fondation de France, the financial directors have to be reassured."* (School Principal)

This double difficulty emerged during the project development with the college and leads us to question the creation and definition of missions within the highly normative techno-administrative spheres.

## 8. Conclusions

The knowledge and expertise concerning spatial coproduction have become more precise and professionalized over the last fifteen years, but their practical expression remains an exception. The issue is one of integrating participative processes into everyday urbanism and architecture. Teaching and research institutions can contribute by encouraging

qualified participation professionals who implement such processes to give presentations to students, lecturers and researchers. Inversely, academic milieux are increasingly perceived as possible resource hubs able to stimulate and accompany such practices. These ties are already beginning in some circles, the writing of this article being the fruit of one such collaboration between collective members and a research lab. The recent development in France of architectural PhDs requiring a project component of their own instigation also creates spaces for cross-disciplinary reflections in order to collectively work toward a renewed approach to project culture.

Providing instruction to politicians, as project commissioners, is a subject that warrants the same attention as professional instruction. In France, elected officials discover the nature of project management essentially on the ground. The training they are proposed rarely broaches this question, unless on a regulatory level. As for architects, ongoing education is a rare phenomenon, given the small size of most architectural practices that makes it difficult for employees to take absences in order to refresh and update their skills. The status of architectural schools does not contribute either to the development of a pedagogical offer on the subject. This general situation creates strong inertia in professional practice. The growing number of citizen initiatives and the mobilization of young people around environmental issues are factors for change. Just as local politicians must answer to their constituents, architecture teachers and researchers are being called out by a growing number of students motivated by less egocentric, more collaborative and inclusive practices that have meaning for everyday life. Their expectations are vectors for new ways of practicing architecture that must be supported and accompanied.

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