

# The citizen experience of Saillans (2014-2020)

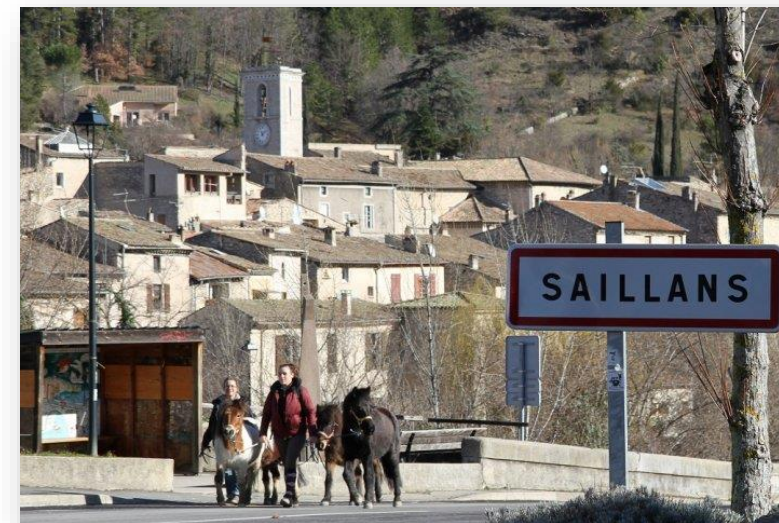


A real and concrete utopia of  
participatory democracy facing  
the challenge of ecological transition

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*Re-scaling the Rural - Thy/Aarhus 20 - 23 May 2022*



# ➤ Introduction

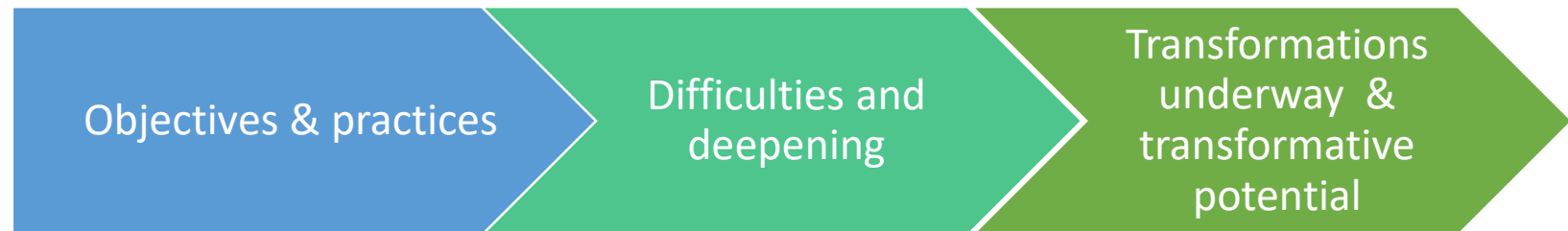
Who am I ?



Questions I address :

- The citizen's experience of governance of the municipality of Saillans : a concrete utopia ?
- Innovative way to face the challenges of the socio-ecological crisis ?

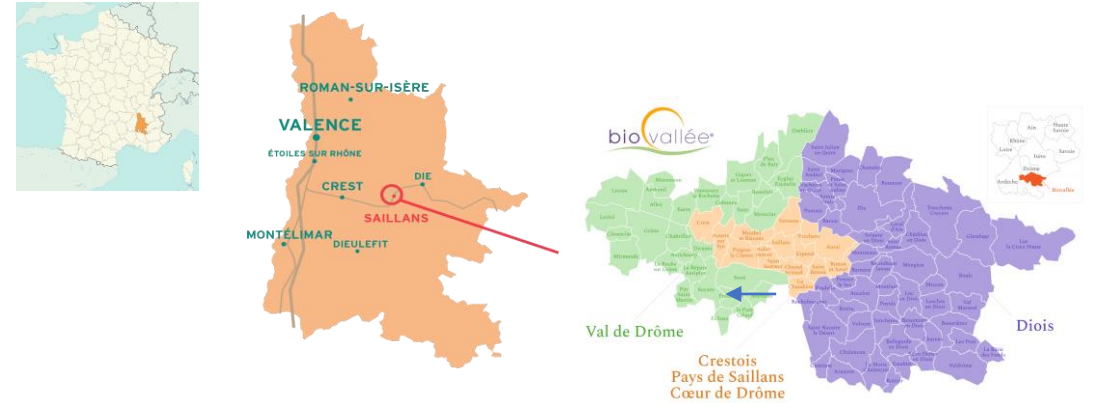
A story of this experience :



## ➤ Case study : the citizen experiment of the municipality of Saillans

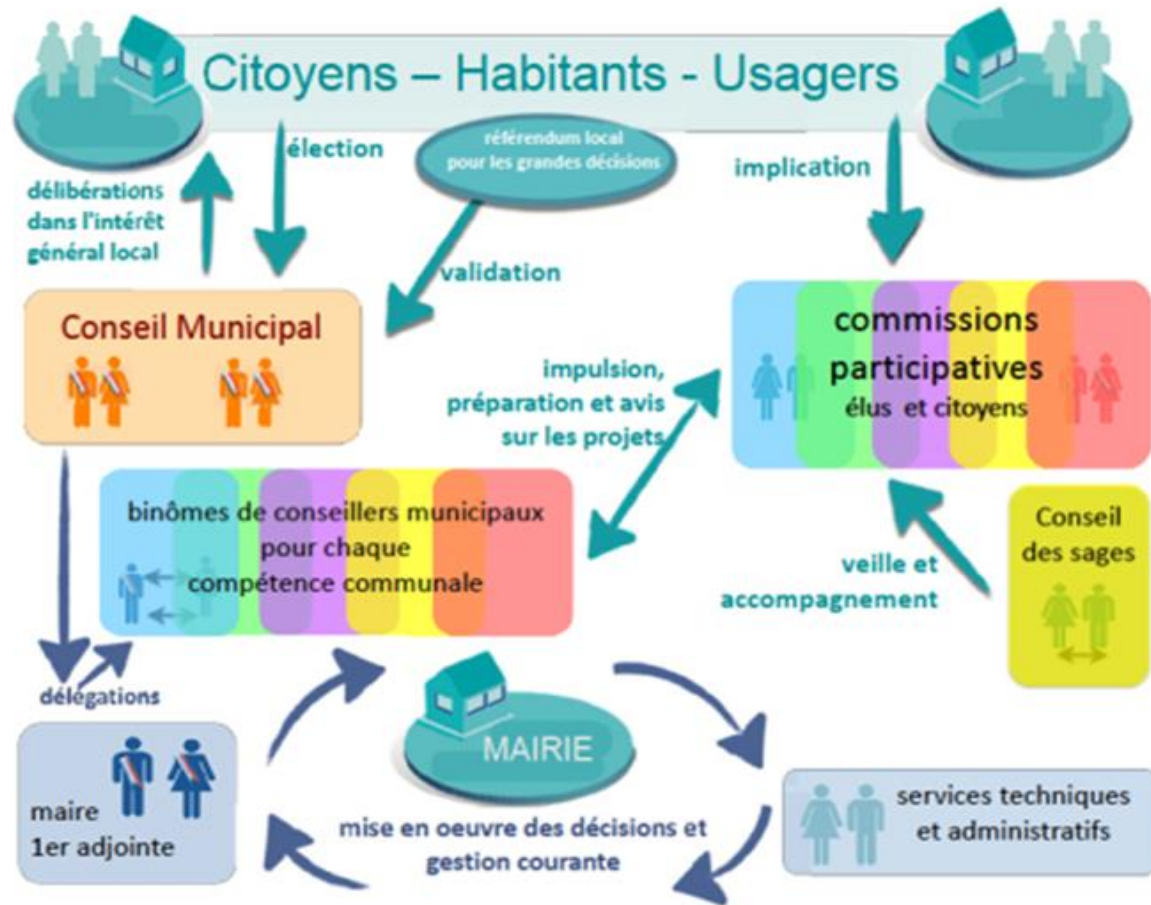
The municipality of Saillans

- 1300 inhabitants (2017)  
growing by 2% per year over the last 2 decades
- The environment is a factor of migration
- Central political issue =  
the transformation of lifestyles  
less carbon-intensive mobility, more grouped and  
less energy-consuming housing, more local and  
organic food, ...
- Different aspirations, between  
autochthons and new arrivals.



# ➤ Objectives & practices

## Organizational chart 2014-2020



Collegiality : elected representatives work in pairs or trio for each delegation

Participation : Participatory events; Popular education methods

Transparency : all meetings are public ; broad communication; monitoring board

# ➤ Objectives & practices

## The municipal project 2014-2020

The project is different from participatory democracy as it is institutionalized in France

- **Massive participation :**
  - 1 event each 3 or 4 days with an average of 20 participants (640 events in 6 years)
  - 1 inhabitant on 2 participate once (670 participants in the 6 years)
- Horizontal relationship
- Empowerment and not control

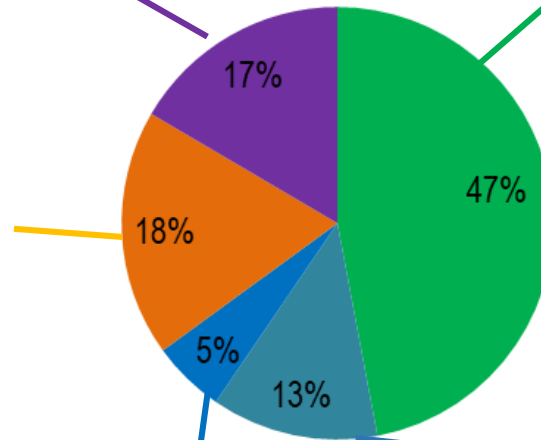
>> a citizen's experience of governing the municipality as a common good.



106 events for the Urban Plan Revision

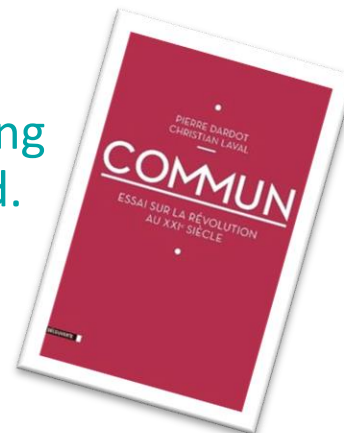
281 Action-Project-Group & 20 Participatory Commissions

118 Pilot Comity



80 other participatory events (vote, poll, ...)

35 Public meetings



## ➤ Objectives & practices

Hybridisation of “do-cracy” and deliberative democracy

- The ecological transition as a set in motion towards an undetermined objective, to be built collectively along the way
- A more improvised mode of action, combining democratic practices based on the ethics of 'doing' and 'discussion'



## ➤ Objectives & practices

Hybridisation of “do-cracy” and deliberative democracy

- Ethics of “doing”
- Inhabitants take direct and autonomous responsibility for problems in the village



# ➤ Objectives & practices

Hybridisation of “do-cracy” and deliberative democracy

- Ethics of discussion
- Practice of multiple discussion forums



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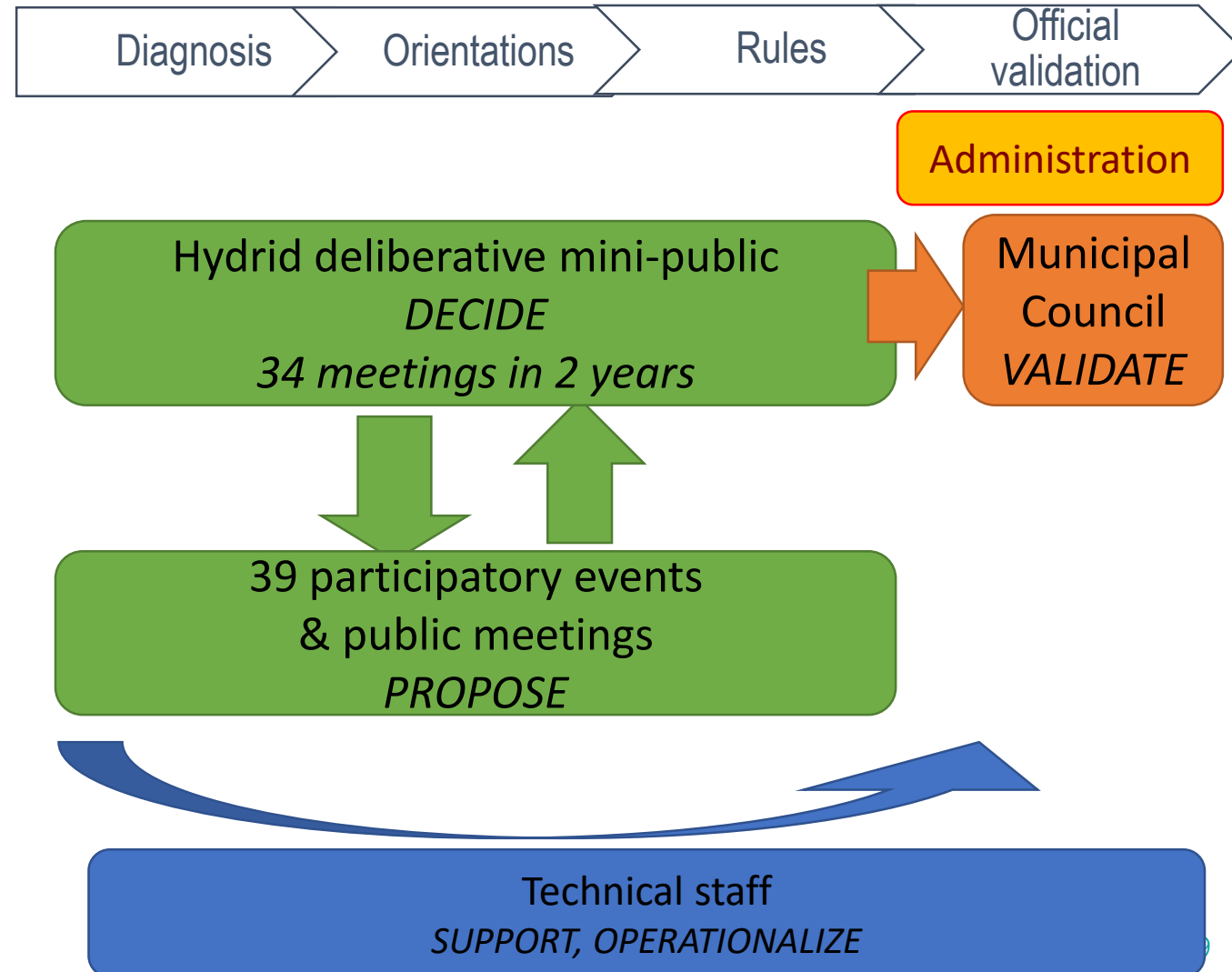


## ➤ Implementation, difficulties and deepening

The example of the revision of the **Local Urban Plan (2017-2019)**

- **Participatory method :**

- **Deliberative mini-public :**  
4 elected representatives  
& 12 inhabitants drawn by lot
  - **Consultative large public workshop :**  
392 different inhabitants took part of 39 events
- **2 challenges:**
    - 'greening' lifestyles while 'democratizing' decision-making
    - maintaining its radicalism



## ➤ Implementation, difficulties and deepening

The difference of thinking and framing transition between the Municipality and the State

- The state procedure for revising the Local urban Plan is strongly marked by a bureaucratic and technical logic.
- Serious obstacles to the deployment of deliberative democracy and do-cracry

>> depoliticization of the debates within the deliberative mini-public.

>> local misunderstandings and frustrations for both elected officials and inhabitants.



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## ➤ Implementation, difficulties and deepening

The persistence of representations and the difficulty to change the dominant system

Two main controversies :

- Limiting urbanization
- Legitimacy of citizens drawn by lot to take decisions

The revision of the local urban plan was a strong factor of politicization at the village level.

Economic growth, a little more "green", as well as representative democracy, a little more open to consultation with citizens, seem to remain "unsurpassable horizons".



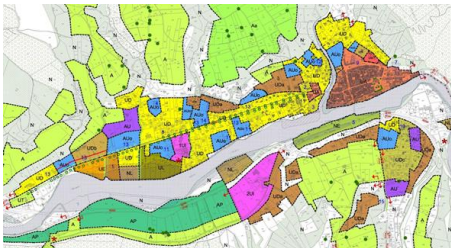
## ➤ Transformations & prefiguration

Toward a more cooperative and 'presential' economy

- The new local urban plan amplifies the ecologization of practices.



**2008**  
29 ha of building land  
950 m<sup>2</sup>/house.



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**2020**  
7 ha of building land  
450 m<sup>2</sup>/house



- It also promotes a "presential" and cooperative economy



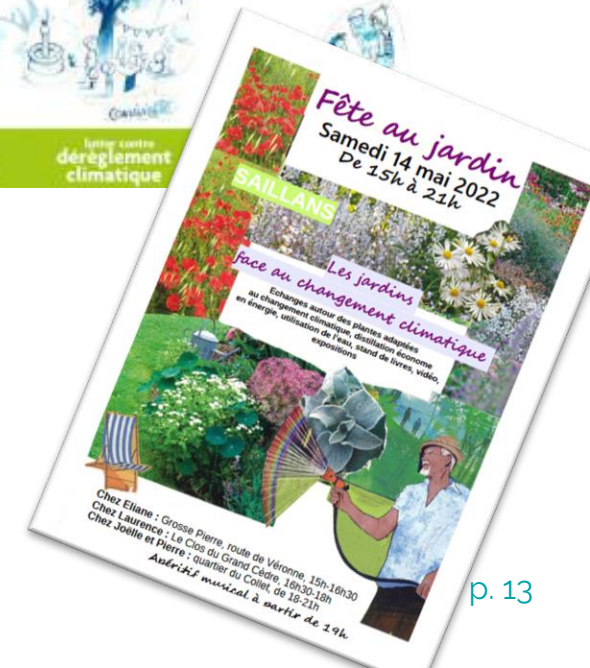
# ➤ Transformations & prefiguration

Toward a political culture of citizen action

- The citizens do not consider themselves, as co-owners defending their properties, but more as inhabitants of a territory, enjoying the concrete experience that it provides and responsible for its future, considering it as a common good.
- Civil society is reinvesting the social learning that has been produced in NGOs or non-formal groups



La **Coopérative Citoyenne Saillansonne**



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## ➤ Transformations & prefiguration

### Opening the imagination

- Saillans as a "territorial ideal" to reconcile, through spatial proximity, 3 aspirations :
  - (re)finding reassuring and convivial social links,
  - getting directly involved in local decisions
  - (re)connecting with nature
  - > prefigure an "alter-rurality"?
- Ecological challenges lead to tensions between social groups in the village. But at the same time, they also invite to renew and amplify the forms of sociability
- Reconsidering social relations seems to open the way to a more global rethinking the relations to nature >> possible counter-Anthropocene ?



## ➤ Conclusion



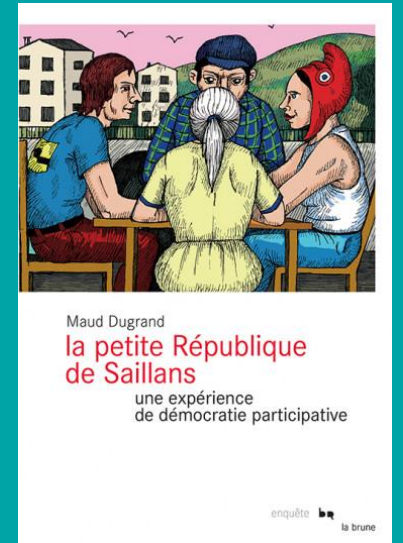


<https://www.mairiedesailans2014-2020.fr/>

➤ thank you



Commune commune, S. Jacquet et D. Brun, 2022



<https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/grand-reportage/municipales-limportant-cest-de-participer>

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