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Democracy of Doing: Socio-Spatial Entanglements and Possibilities for Emancipation in the Rural Municipality of Saillans, France

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Abstract: The "democracy of doing" encompasses a range of initiatives where citizens proactively address issues themselves, fostering a more democratic society based on the principle that power resides with those actively involved in shaping society. This article investigates the emancipatory potential and transformative impact of the territorial dimensions of the "democracy of doing" by examining the communal governance experience of Saillans (Drôme, France) from 2014 to 2020. It analyzes the conditions and territorial factors that influenced this experience, as well as the socio-spatial transformations and the renewal of socio-political orders that it engendered. The study identifies two forms of emancipation: individual emancipation through the 'intentional' work of the inhabitants (Muller, 2018), and collective emancipation through the critique of the 'territorial project' as a mode of local public governance.

INTRODUCTION

The "democracy of doing" is a recent concept that aims to specify the common character of a various social experiences, such as Fab-labs, community gardens or Transition Towns. All rely on the direct and material initiative of citizens to manufacture, produce, develop or offer services, by self-organizing and self-managing, thus contributing to a transformation of ways of inhabiting, living, and collectively making society with their environment. Inspired by the makers movement (Lallement, 2015), sociologist Severin Muller and I have proposed defining the democracy of doing as "the practical implementation of democratic principles, based on self-organisation, horizontality, freedom and autonomy, and working towards the development of commons". We emphasize that "the legitimacy of citizens stems from the initiative and commitment of individuals and collectives". This approach manifests "the will to act of citizens who nurture a project for the democratisation of society, without waiting or depending on others" according to the principle that power lies with those who make or are in the process of making society (Girard and Muller, 2023).

The initiatives that fall under the "democracy of doing" umbrella share common territorial character: they have a strong territorial anchoring and favour the territorial scale for action, where global solutions seem to fail, especially in the face of climate and ecological change and their combined consequences of increasing social inequalities and the crisis of representative democracy. How do the territorial dimensions of this democracy of doing condition its potential and its transformative scope, i.e. how do they modify contemporary socio-political orders and propose new imaginaries and practices? To help answer this question, I will draw on an empirical and emblematic case study that has served to define this notion of democracy of doing: the experience of municipal governance in the village of Saillans (Drôme, France) between 2014 and 2020, in which I was involved. The elected citizens' list entrusted the power

of decision and action over communal affairs to the inhabitants, enabling them bring about concrete social and ecological change on their own scale.

Following a concise exposition of the empirical case and the methodology employed in this study, I will analyse the conditions and territorial dynamics that shaped the Saillans experiment and explore the socio-spatial changes and the emergence of new socio-political orders it instigated. Subsequently, I will highlight the territorial foundations of two forms of emancipation within the democracy of doing. One is individual, stemming from the intentional efforts of inhabitants (Muller, 2018), akin to a 'territorial art' of collective life and action. The other is collective, centred on improvisation as a mode of public action (Soubeyran, 2015) and consists of making "territorial works", rather than producing projects, resources and project territories.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

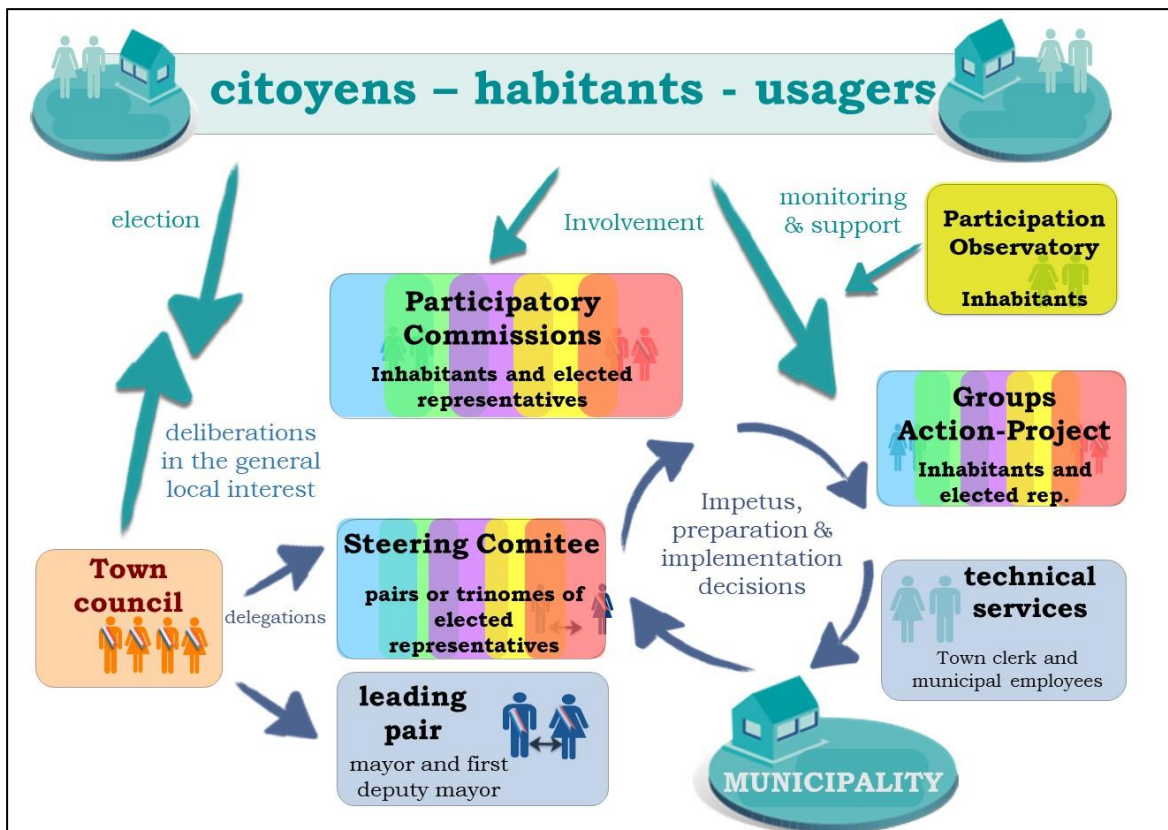
The Democratic Experiment of the Village of Saillans 2014-2020

The village of Saillans is located in France, in the Drôme valley. Organized around a well-endowed town center with services and shops, it has a strong associative dynamism, its historically agricultural and industrial economy has shifted in recent decades towards tourism and services. Over the past thirty years, it has experienced a strong demographic increase reaching 1.231 inhabitants in 2014 (+34% in 30 years). Household incomes are generally low, but education levels are higher than the French rural average.



Figure 1- location and views of Saillans (source: author, Municipality of Saillans)

In 2014, a group of inhabitants, organized on a citizen list won the municipal elections and implemented a six-years-municipal governance that entrust the power of decision and action on municipal affairs to the inhabitants. This governance is based on four principles (collegiality, participation, transparency, and experimentation), organizes new bodies, redistributing the roles and tasks of producing public action between elected officials, technicians, and citizens. Its initiators, including myself, describe it as “collegial and participative governance”. However, with theoretical hindsight, and in comparison with other democratic experiences, the model developed in Saillans differs from participatory democracy as institutionalized in France. It hybridizes two democratic forms, one deliberative and the other that I have termed "doing" (Girard, 2022a). While the deliberative aspect has been extensively documented in existing literature, the concept of "doing democracy" presents a more innovative perspective. In Saillans, this concept materializes notably through the "Group Action-Project" (GAP) device.



4 principles

- **Collegiality** : The reference elected officials work in pairs based on their competencies; the function allowances are distributed among all municipal councilors; the Steering Committee, which meets every two weeks and is open to the public, constitutes the main working and decision-making body; coordination is ensured by the leading pair, consisting of the Mayor and the 1st Deputy Mayor.
- **Participation** : Thematic participatory commissions, which bring together reference elected officials and interested inhabitants, serve as forums for project initiation and prioritization; "Action-Project Groups" prepare and study these projects, then implement them directly following validation by the Steering Committee.
- **Transparency** : Public information and transparency in public decision-making processes are prerequisites for participation: meetings open to the public, systematic publication of minutes, extensive communication (website, mailing list, municipal notice boards, monthly agenda, municipal newsletters); a Participation Observatory made up of residents ensures oversight of the participatory process and supports the Municipality in its implementation
- **Experimentation** The approach of the inhabitants and elected officials of Saillans is pragmatic and concrete, characterized by daily learning and experimentation. It allows for trial and error, for starting anew, all while maintaining transparency and trust between elected officials and residents. The organization of municipal governance remains in constant evolution.

1 charter

It establishes common commitments, encompassing both shared values and the method envisioned to uphold them.



Figure 2 – The model of local democracy of Saillans Municipality 2014-2020 (source: Municipality of Saillans)

The GAP device fosters “the direct and material initiative of citizens: producing, manufacturing, developing, occupying, offering services, redistributing, rather than voting, claiming, or participating in institutionalized devices.” (Girard and Muller, 2023). Voluntary inhabitants gather to develop a concrete action. They directly and autonomously take charge of problems, and self-organize to solve them. The topics covered are very diverse: maintenance of public spaces, modalities of extinguishing public lighting at night, setting up self-managed collective composting, creating and operating of a free shop, establishing a mutual aid system for inhabitants in need, animation and networking of local economic activities, etc.

The activities generally take the form of inquiries, in the pragmatic sense of J. Dewey (Dewey, 2010; 2010). Residents explore a given problem situation, come up with solutions, take action, observe the consequences and reconsider the problem situation in the light of this, deciding whether or not to explore it again. These explorations take many forms: observation, exchanges between peers, recourse to expert knowledge, practical tests. For example, the inhabitants of the compost’ GAP visited sites, participated in training with master composters, surveyed residents on their uses and needs, and set up trials with different types of dry matter. The GAPs combine activities involving knowing, training, practical or social experimentation, collective discussion and decision-making, and taking a step back.

The municipal team supports voluntary inhabitants by providing means - such as rooms, equipment, financing and technical support, information media, or training - and by organizing and guaranteeing spaces and times for discussion, decision-making, monitoring and reflexivity on the method and its effects. It also plays a crucial role in recognizing and legitimizing projects carried out by inhabitants. For each GAP, an elected official is designated as the contact person, but he do not necessarily participate in GAP meetings and activities, if they do, it is not in a position of authority. One or more residents are responsible for organizing the GAP functioning. Each GAP organizes itself as it wishes decision-making and regularly discusses the distribution of roles and tasks. Most of them develop weak leadership, horizontal decision-making processes, and consensus-based practices.



Figure 3 – Examples of Groups Action-Projet (source : author, Municipality of Saillans)

This device allows for a strong amplification of public action. Over the course of the six-year municipal term, 49 different GAPs were held, with the participation of 449 different inhabitants, representing more than a third of the population, of all ages. They each brought together between 6 and 27 people. They resulted in 279 meetings (2792 unitary participations) and many other weekly activities not quantified (such as taking care of composting). The GAPs lasted on average 20 months (10 months median), with great variability: six were punctual (1 meeting), the majority lasted a few months, and eight lasted the entire term. Some activities of these GAPs continue after the change of municipal team, while others have been taken over by local NGOs.

A Situated Analysis by an Involved Geographer

The purpose of this article is situated. As a municipal councilor in Saillans between 2014 and 2020, in charge of governance and environmental issues, I am using my scientific skills to take a geographical look at the town during and after my term of office. The experienced democracy, in all layers of my professional and personal life, constitutes the very object of my research. The approach I have developed therefore has certain distinctive features. I share the normative objectives and a theory of change with the social groups studied, and I played an active part in developing them (Girard, 2022b). I proceed by auto-ethnography, since I can consider myself, a social subject, as the very object of analysis. I am interested in micro-politics, taking advantage of unprecedented access to multiple diffuse and informal sources of information. Finally, I am developing a reflection on my posture and its ethical, methodological and epistemic implications (Girard, 2022a).

I am using an approach based on social and cultural geography to explore the various territorial dimensions of the Saillans experience, in all its historical and socio-spatial dimensions. Territory is a dynamic and conflictual social construct, interwoven with biophysical space, shaped by human activities, invested with representations and imaginaries, and the object of political struggles for its appropriation and the exercise of authority (Berque, 2000, Di Meo and Buléon, 2005, Debarbieux, 2007). My aim is to document the territorial conditions and factors that determine the emergence and trajectory of the experience, the socio-spatial transformations and productions generated and (3) the 'territorial springs' (Girard, 2014) mobilised by certain actors to influence socio-political orders.

I contribute to the question of the transformative scope of the democracy of doing, by focusing more particularly on the emancipatory aims and processes attached to it. Emancipation is defined generically as the action of freeing oneself from a state of dependence. I'm interested in the ability of those involved in a democracy of doing to extricate themselves from institutional forces that they see as alienating, such as the neo-liberalisation of life and society or the 'CAME mythology (Competitiveness, Attractiveness, Metropolisation, Excellence)' (Bouba-Olga, 2019) that fuels many public policies - insofar as they reinforce extractivist and domination logics.

The corpus relies on the participatory objectivation (Bourdieu, 2003) of my six-year experience as a municipal councillor, forty semi-structured interviews with inhabitants, elected officials, technicians, as well as the study of public and internal municipal documents. In the rest of the text, the term "we" refers to the most actively involved elected officials and inhabitants who conceived and led this democratic experience. To describe the empirical experience in Saillans, the term inhabitants is preferred over citizen, which is used in reference to theoretical works.

THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE DEMOCRACY OF 'DOING'

The Lived Experience of Territory: an Object and Mobilizing Factor

This democratic experiment emerged in the specific context of the Drôme valley, typical of "innovative rural margins" (Landel and Koop, 2018). Its geographical isolation, economic marginalization, and low political-media attention have long fostered initiatives and empowerment, leading to the development of alternatives in agriculture, environment (Girard

and Landel, 2019), education, and social economy. The local history blends rootedness and openness (Dugrand, 2020). Demographics are marked by an increase in migration, driven primarily by environmental factors (Cognard, 2010) and poly-topical forms of housing (Stock, 2006). For natives, Saillans represents a homeport they will one day return to or never leave, while for newcomers, it serves as a temporary refuge or a new anchorage point (Sencebe, 2004). The lived experiences of inhabitants, their relationships with the communal territory, the diversity of attachment to places, and the sociability they develop are central to their motivation and forms of engagement in the village's collective life and particularly in the municipal project (Girard, 2022c).

The emergence of the citizen list is marked by a territorial claim: the fight against the establishment of a supermarket on the village outskirts. This conflict highlights the oppression of economic liberalization and autocratic political decision-making processes while revealing the collective capacity to oppose them. It also facilitates the formation of a territorially-based community of interests, delineating the boundaries and horizon of the common good to defend and, by extension, what should be excluded. Throughout the municipal term, GAPs (groups of actions and projects) emerge from the identification by residents of territorialized needs or aspirations. Participating in the compost GAP, for example, is a way to meet other residents, improve daily life, or align political convictions with lifestyle. While motivations vary across spatial and temporal levels, the scale of action and time remains uniform: to do things here and now, using available resources. Inhabitants mobilize their knowledge, skills, and networks to access local resources that help solve their problems.

Territory, a Place of (Re)creation of Common(s)

A Territorial Approach to the Democratic Ideal

Within the GAPs, "common interests are identified by trial and error, and shaped by working together" (Girard and Muller, 2023). direct and manual contact with materials and interactions with others foster an acute awareness of the interrelationships between oneself, others, and the environment, emphasizing the practical consequences of actions. The democracy of doing suggests that common interest—rather than being general—is formed through everyday experience, differing from the representation of opinions (representative principle) or the exchange of arguments transcending private interests (deliberative principle). The activities of the GAPs redefine democracy not merely as a mode of government but as a way of life, a political experience intimately woven into individual lives (Dewey, 2010). This common interest becomes "territorialized" (Le Bourhis & Lascoumes, 1998), deeply intertwined with the context and moment, emerging from a reconfiguration of each individual's stance without obscuring or undermining the identities of active agents.

Territorial Commons and Collective Action

GAPs help identify goods, places, or know-how as "territorial commons" (Defalvard, 2017; Kebir & Wallet, 2021), giving them material and symbolic consistency and expressing the values cherished by participating residents. Through these commons, inhabitants reactivate or reinterpret heritages or create new imaginaries and uses, forging new territorial attachments and transforming their territoriality (Aldhuy, 2008). They develop feelings of belonging to a community of interest, practices, or destiny and forms of (re)appropriation and identification with a space, group, or milieu—or all of these together.

Inhabitants organize themselves to ensure the use, (re)production, and (re)distribution of these territorial commons. They establish new norms—moral, social, political—more or less explicitly, defining rules, rights, duties, and control modalities for their use, sharing, and preservation. This common action binds them more than mere territorial belonging. The practice and shared responsibility of "doing" things in common matter more than the appropriation of things. Thus, the democracy of doing is recognized in "the political principle from which we must build commons and relate to them to preserve, extend, and make them live" (Dardot and Laval, 2014). The extension of the commons is then inherent in the amplification of democracy (Nicolas-Lestrat, 2016).

"Power to Those Who Do" Shakes Up the Pre-existing Territorial Order

Involvement and Expanded Role of Inhabitants

The Democracy of doing fundamentally differs from participatory democracy as instituted in France, challenging the predominant role of elected representatives and experts in public decision-making. Participatory democracy confines citizen activities to certain subjects and audiences, promoting specific skills such as user expertise (Gourgues, 2018, Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2018, Nez, 2013). The Democracy of doing does not select the people, social activities, or living spaces concerned. It extends the role of all citizens to define the "motives for public action" (Zack, 2011). Those involved in a democracy of doing define both the problems and the solutions, including the nature and rules of their contribution. No contract predefines the distribution of roles; participants are free and autonomous in their intentions and retain authority over them. Their recognition and legitimacy are based on their concrete commitment to action, the knowledge and skills they mobilize, and their ability "to carry their own project, autonomously, and with concern for others and their environment" (Sillard, 2020).

Material and Symbolic Re-appropriations

The village is rapidly changing under the influence of the GAPs' multiple activities, transforming the uses and functions of goods and places. Compost bins occupy part of the public garden, streetlights are switched off at night, parking spaces are closed off to create a space for conviviality, vast pots of orange flowers contain edible plants on the main street, and a disused service station has been transformed into a space for donating clothes, books, and toys. These (re)appropriations are contested: the smell of compost is disturbing, parking is problematic, and discussing politics by the river becomes unavoidable. These social tensions are delicate, especially when these transformations are perceived as challenging lifestyles and relationships with the village, affecting the social identities of individuals and groups (Ripoll & Veschambre, 2006). Moreover, 'doing' is becoming a new form of belonging, replacing or complementing pre-existing ones based on birth, property, or work. It is a new way of claiming or legitimizing one's place in the social game. Lastly, GAPs open new social opportunities. While some see them as sources of integration into the village, others perceive them as a new form of exclusivity. Unlike other public places of sociability, the GAP becomes a politicized and non-neutral space. The democracy of doing imposes its spatial footprint and tempo everywhere and all the time in the village, to the detriment of those who do not engage in it. Initially, oppositions are expressed within the GAPs themselves, but over time, refusing to participate becomes a means of expressing disagreement with the policies pursued.

Ultimately, tensions between unity and diversity inherent in any territorial construction (Barbier & Hamman, 2021) are reflected in the redefinition of territorial identities, debates on ways of living together, and practices of exclusion/inclusion of groups and places of action.

EMPOWERMENT IN THE DEMOCRACY OF DOING, A TERRITORIAL ART

Intentional Work & Territoriality

Volunteering in Saillans is extensive and enduring, but what exactly does this work entail, what kind of emancipation does it foster, and what role do territorial relationships play?

The Emancipating forces of the Democratic Experience of Doing

Engagement in GAPs offers individuals learnings on various subjects, the local community and its members, public policy formation and collective action. This experience is rich with significance: it enhances the capacity to connect with and understand the world around them, enables residents to find purpose beyond themselves, and provides a trajectory. It provides concrete steps to navigate the upheavals of the world (Chateauraynaud, 2021). Furthermore, within GAPs, individuals of diverse backgrounds and skills collaborate without prerequisites. Through self-governance and hands-on experience, there is a temporary and partial dissolution of social and political hierarchies, and of the subordinate relationships characteristic of professional environments. GAPs provide everyone with the opportunity to break free from predefined social roles and to receive recognition not contingent on these roles. The democracy of doing values integration through practical engagement, rather than status or rhetorical prowess. It values local knowledge and simple, easily accessible and cost-effective techniques. It empowers residents to achieve independence by liberating them from dependencies (financial, technical expertise, or political). Ultimately, they directly and often immediately contribute to enhancing their quality of life, whether in terms of housing, transportation, or food. They also contribute to enhancing the conditions for their emancipation and empowerment by establishing and promoting new rights: the right to information, education, experimentation, material support, and to influence local public decisions that affect them.

Volunteer work is not viewed through an economic lens. In my opinion, the activities undertaken in a "democracy of doing" are better characterized by the term "experience" in both senses: as a lived reality (Ion, 2012) and as a source of learning (Dewey, 2006). GAPs embody a vision of democracy as a "political experience, lived on the scale of individual and collective lives" (Girard & Muller, 2023). This aligns with J. Dewey's call for a "creative" democracy, the purpose of which is "forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute." (Dewey 1995).

Work Liberates when it Contributes to Doing and Living together

These activities within GAPs, which blur the lines between life and politics, can be described as "intentional work": "work filled with a priori meaning, whose intentions are made clear before and during its execution, so that it goes beyond its own execution" (Muller, 2018). In the democracy of doing, the purpose of work is not externally imposed. Inhabitants are free to modify or reconsider these aims at any point. The action itself is inherently meaningful and

fulfilling. This intrinsic motivation serves as a means to break away from dependencies. Its liberating essence lies not only in the ability to act according to one's goals, but primarily in the refusal to relinquish autonomy over those goals. This intentional effort represents resistance against oppressive and precarious labor practices, competitive and consumerist ideologies, the dehumanization of work, the devaluation of manual labor, and production methods harmful to the environment. For example, the initiation of collective composting represents a rejection of waste disposal outsourcing and seeks to mitigate human impact on the environment by repurposing waste as a resource. Additionally, it views organic matter as a shared resource requiring sustainable reproduction and distribution.

This intentional work also embodies in practice an ideal of 'living and doing together' within the human community, extended to the living beings around it of which it is a part. Drawing inspiration from J. Dewey (1990), this work, like play, resembles art: both "free and self-motivated." While enjoyment - without neglecting seriousness - and deriving pleasure from action are driving forces behind GAPs, they are also behaviors valued and advocated by participants. This art could be described as 'territorial art,' not because it aims to create a closed and authoritative territory and community, but because it recognizes the intricate interdependencies often separated by dialectical thought: between culture and nature, humans and non-humans, material and ideal, local and global, means and ends, life and politics. This art involves highlighting commonalities based on the existential dimensions of every being: being situated in a place, at a time, whether chosen or imposed, being acknowledged for it, without impeding freedom of movement or the richness of identity. This territorial art also involves defining "what we cherish" (Hache, 2011) and what our shared horizon (Lelay, 2024) entails, and being more in resonance to our living environment (Rosa, 2018).

Limits and Conditions of Emancipation through 'Doing'

However, the norm of "doing" introduces a new source of hierarchy and exclusion for those unwilling or unable to participate, or for those who oppose it. Additionally, despite efforts to transform social interaction practices within GAPs (active listening, horizontal structures, consensus-building, etc.), certain forms of domination persist, and subordinate relationships are perpetuated, between men and women, elected officials and residents, long-time and recent village residents, employers and employees. Moreover, the extensive involvement required in the numerous activities offered by the municipal council tends to infiltrate all aspects of life, leading to fatigue among residents and elected officials, with the risk that "self-sacrifice will be compounded by self-neglect, with similar consequences (Muller, forthcoming)."

In conclusion, the emancipatory potential of the democracy of doing is based on citizen empowerment and the ability to critically assess the activities undertaken and their repercussions. Autonomy and reflexivity are also features of neoliberal management aimed at regulating individual behavior. However, Experiments in the "democracy of doing" can maintain a subversive and liberating potential with these same principles under two conditions: residents must be and remain free and autonomous in their intentions, and the responsibility for taking on a topic should not fall on individuals but on collectives.

Self-government without a 'Territorial Project'

The concept that 'power belongs to those who do' is driving a significant shift in the structures and practices of local government. The communal practices, as exemplified in Saillans' democracy of doing, challenges prevailing norms in territorial public administration,

particularly in spatial planning and economic development. This approach diverges from the conventional logic of territorial development projects. I suggest examining how this democratic experiment serves as an active critique of the prevailing modern planning ideology.

The Success of the Territorial Project and its Academic Critics

Over the last thirty years, the project has become a hegemonic mode of action in territorial policies, whether in terms of planning, economic development or environmental management. It is replacing the functionalist logic of planning. The territorial project entrusts local stakeholders with the development and implementation of a strategy for their territory, promising the political capacity to govern it while shaping it, according to a principle of efficiency-performance characteristic of modernity (Barbier & Hamman, 2021). This promise is also democratic: it gives more power to local elected representatives and citizens at the expense of other levels of public action and intermediary bodies, on the principle that proximity provides legitimacy (Faure, 2013). More in line with neoliberal rationality, the territorial project proves to be perfectly compatible with ecological modernization.

The territorial project is not only analysed but also supported by scientist, which partly explains its success. According to Grenoble academics, the territorial project is an effective economic development tool. For a group, it consists in revealing specific assets linked to its local context, developing them and ensuring their reproducibility by avoiding their trivialisation; these territorial resources, built by the project, can then guarantee attractiveness in a globalised and competitive market (Colletis & Pecqueur, 2018). The resulting territorial engineering deploys various instruments, such as the project life cycle (diagnosis - objectives - action programme - execution - evaluation), foresight to build a forward-looking vision, storytelling to consolidate the project and the territory, and reflexivity mechanisms to encourage adaptability.

Scientists are also developing a critical approach to the territorial project. They point out limitations related to its management according to New Public Management principles: risk of depoliticisation through the sectoralisation, standardisation and technicalisation of activities (Pinson, 2019, Mathieu & Guermond, 2011); development of territorial marketing or electoral instrumentalisation of the territorial fact replacing the construction of a collective perspective (Barbier & Hamman, 2021); disinterestedness in the final results in favour of the administrative production of instrumental means (Barone, Mayaux & Guerrin, 2018); or reinforcement of territorial inequalities by encouraging competitiveness (Bouba-Olga & Grossetti, 2018). Reflexivity devices associated with the territorial project are also criticized, regarding the form of governmentality (Foucault, 2008) they often take in use: the reflexive injunction places individuals and territorial actors under permanent pressure from norm changes, control, and behavior adaptation, and its institutionalization prevents them from stepping back outside of planned devices (Ximenez, 2023).

More fundamentally, the reference framework of the project is questioned regarding its temporal regime. In planning thought, a project is justified by "the construction of grips on the future (through the definition of goals) and the control of the temporal process" (Levy, 2018). The project mode relies on an anticipatory vision of the future, sequenced (diagnosis, objectives, programming, execution, evaluation) and goal-oriented. Controlling the time taken for action involves procedural and deliberative rationalisation, which consists of reducing differences of opinion and ambiguities, and seeking support and consensus. Criticisms levelled at the territorial project in this respect relate to the limitation of the collective capacity to act through the ex-ante definition of objectives, and the reduction of pluralism in the effort to

control the timeframe. Other ways of steering public action are possible, however, by focusing on the future as it is happening. In the field of urban planning, some propose other models of action, such as that of improvisation, which considers the potential of action in the present and makes uncertainty a resource for action. 'Letting go' is supposed to unleash creativity, but at the price of mastering improvisation techniques like in jazz music (Soubeyran, 2015, Gwiazdzinski & Soubeyran, 2017).

The Active Resistance of the Saillans Experience to the Project Logic

In Saillans, the incentives to act according to the logic of the territorial project were numerous: the prevailing politico-administrative culture; my presence, as a geographer trained in territorial sciences; our elected aspirations to democratize local life and valorize our resources. Yet, over six years our practice diverged significantly from the canons of the territorial project, despite what the very name of the 'GAP' device suggests. Some inhabitants reproached us for the absence of a 'political project.' Neighboring elected officials and external observers mocked our weak 'political sense' and lack of 'strategic vision,' which, according to them, probably caused us to lose the elections. The experience as it unfolded through the GAPs was indeed an active critique of the principles and methods of project-based territorial development, suggesting alternatives regarding its temporality, political imagination, methods and tools for action. This raises new management issues, particularly regarding to citizen participation, the construction of a shared sense of purpose, the coherence of activities, and maintaining the model over the long term.

First, the governance's temporal framework in the Saillans experience stands apart from that of the territorial project by embracing an open-ended future, where present actions unveil possibilities, thus reversing the conventional hierarchy of ends and means. In practice, the GAPs deviated from their intended purpose as predetermined objectives, established through committee deliberation, and instead emerged organically from inhabitants identifying and addressing local issues. The purpose of the GAPs evolves according to the problem situation, leading to new actions and goals. Moreover, GAPs are not time-limited and there is no need to control their timing. Unlike traditional approaches with predefined timelines and linear action sequences, GAPs operate within a governance framework characterized by improvisation, embracing an open-ended finality without predetermined plans (Levy, 2018), favouring an ongoing dialogue between intentional actions and the gradual shaping of a shared vision. This process unfolds incrementally, akin to a musical composition, with meaning becoming apparent only in hindsight (Jankélévitch 1983). Consequently, participants may struggle to grasp the full extent of their involvement in the larger endeavour.

Furthermore, in France, where participatory mechanisms have become institutionalized, a recurring challenge lies in the limited involvement of residents and the lack of social diversity, impacting the effectiveness of public action. The challenge of mobilization in a democracy of action is distinct: to foster commitment to action without imposing participation; ensuring inclusivity by not excluding those unwilling or unable to participate, and preventing the monopolization of collective resources by active participants. To address this, the municipal team has diversified democratic forms, combining democracy of doing with deliberative and direct forms such as consultation and referendums. Additionally, we have established oversight mechanisms to monitor method effectiveness, alerting to issues of downplayed interests or unintended consequences. Unlike deliberative spaces, which emphasize registers of commitment based on planning and justification (Thevenot, 2006), planned and justified commitments, the democracy of doing favours a more familiar register, as well as a new type

of register that could be described as "creative" (Girard, 2022c). Mobilization drivers include interpersonal relationships of solidarity and conviviality, addressing everyday challenges, and experimenting with new practices or ideas. Managers play a crucial role in fostering these commitments by creating trust, security frameworks, and encouraging risk-taking through information transparency, monitoring and mediation.

The third issue concerns political will. The absence of a predetermined goal does not mean the absence of an intention. While the GAPs lack a predefined precise objective (in the sense of a projection into the future with measurable targets as in project mode), they embody a set of values encompassing moral, social, and political aspects. Public authorities play a role in facilitating the expression of these shared values and raising public awareness of them, so that everyone has the opportunity, if they so wish, to find their way around it. Nor does the absence of a predetermined purpose mean an absence of political will. The municipal team has not imposed a specific political agenda but has allowed a common vision to emerge organically, highlighting the unique nature of this political process. Defining this shared vision relies on inhabitants' lived experiences and territorial attachments, which are complex and deeply rooted. Public authorities aim not to negotiate conflicting interests but to foster dialogue among diverse perspectives, encouraging mutual understanding and recognition. Inclusion, in this context, involves combating the marginalization of certain worldviews rather than simply balancing power dynamics.

Moreover, maintaining "unity in diversity" addresses the need for coherence among various GAP activities. Gwiazdzinski & Soubeyran (2017) argue the mode of improvised action by spinning the metaphor of jazz musical discourse produced by an orchestra. The Saillans experience resembles another artistic discourse: Argentinian community theatre, where neighbors express a shared collective intention in their own unique ways, fostering interdependence and unity amid diversity (Elgoyhen, 2016). The movement persists even as individuals join or depart, emphasizing alignment of direction rather than uniformity of expression. Despite its varied nature, the resulting image reflects the underlying intention and values.

Finally, the Saillans experience highlights a distinct approach to narrative tools. The traditional exercise of envisioning a predetermined future scenario and selecting actions accordingly is replaced by an iterative investigative process focused on understanding the present situation's complexities, effecting tangible transformations, and gradually articulating a normative horizon. The iterative process of verbal articulation, through its deliberate and prolonged repetition across various contexts, fosters the emergence of a shared worldview and future outlook. While indeterminate, this ongoing effort plays a crucial role in mobilizing collective action over time. Unlike narratives associated with territorial projects, the primary goal here is the clarification and consolidation of meaning. The narrative serves to retrospectively interpret actions and provide coherence amidst their diversity, without the need for constant narrative reconstruction to manage unintended consequences. It can thus remain incremental, diverse, and multifaceted.

The Institutional Fabric of the Democracy of Doing

The activities carried out in the Saillans experiment also involve "institutional work" (Nicolas-Le Strat, 2016) in the sense of the gradual transformation of the mechanisms, tools - including language - and rules of municipal public action.

Renewing Political Imaginaries and Territorial Work

The collective practices developed in the democracy of doing in Saillans alter the established imaginary of territorial development as well as that of ecological modernization and representative democracy. This semantic change is reflected in transformation rather than development, improvisation rather than project, commons rather than resources, and inhabitants rather than participants. The emerging framework tends to embed the economy within ecological and democratic concerns, promoting sobriety, interdependence, and tinkering as desirable. This experience aligns with other attempts to depart from dominant developmental and neoliberal logics and capitalist influence on lives such as the Town in transition (Hopkins, 2010), bioregionalism (Faburel & Giard, 2020) or alter-rurality (Jousseau, 2020). Acting here and now demonstrates a political reinvestment in daily life, (Pruvost, 2021), an infra-politics of inhabiting (Faburel & Girault, 2020), and an ordinary environmentalism (Blanc & Paddeu, 2018), where relationships with places and others play a driving role. It is a form of radical utopianism (Wright, 2010), which aims to produce another world from the present one, without delay or projection, without waiting or planning.

Autonomy and self-management signify the desire to 'take back control of oneself' (Faburel & Girault, 2020) by cherishing certain interdependencies, whether territorial, economic, political, social, or ecological. The GAPs express a power to act, a capacity to transform the world in which we live and not just to endure it. They enable the creation of what Hannah Arendt calls 'works' rather than consumable products, in that they endure outside and after individuals (Arendt, 1983). Thus, the socio-spatial processes and productions associated with the democracy of doing could be better described as 'territorial works' rather than projects and territories. They are open (Sennett, 2019), shaped and reshaped by an intensive future (Jankelevitch, 1983) and do not delineate fixed and clear boundaries in space, time, and community. This territorial art constantly reinterprets and perpetuates heritages, giving humans a craft rather than a laborious function and contributing to their liberation from the oppressive instrumental rationalization of lives and society. It also invites inhabitants to value their relational rather than functional dimensions, situating them among what makes up the world.

Institutionalising the Democracy of Doing?

While new institutions have been created in practice, the modalities of governance specific to the democracy of doing have been little formalized administratively and legally. Over the course of the experience, procedural frameworks have been minimized by gradually abandoning some initially set rules and loosening practices, especially group facilitation. Several reasons account for this approach, including the desire to avoid exclusion through procedural sophistication or unfamiliar animation techniques and to allow governance modalities to evolve. The maintenance of openness and indeterminacy inherent in this democracy of doing relies on the ability to transgress and divert frameworks. Furthermore, the possible disappearance of the Saillans model due to the 2020 elections was not considered a fundamental impediment, as its momentum primarily relies on resident engagement rather than public authorities. Like others, the Saillans experience demonstrates that alternatives are credible and achievable. Therefore, it seemed more essential to disseminate this idea to enable others elsewhere to do the same and form networks of allies. While the model may not be inherently replicable, political imaginaries and developed tools can readily circulate. The future of the democracy of doing lies in its scaling up, but it risks recuperation or trivialization in a neoliberal or managerial perspective. Maintaining its subversive character requires the constant

assertion of its disruptive normative horizon, its imaginary, and its political values when spreading tools.

Re-appropriating the Institutional Fabric

The maker movement relies on techniques as tools of resistance and emancipation (Hatch, 2013). Similarly, the Saillans experience suggests the importance of inhabitants reclaiming norms, procedures, and public action mechanisms and developing a shared culture in this regard, following the commons imaginary. For institutional techniques to be emancipatory, inhabitants should remain masters of their purposes, able to discuss the validity of their objectives and methods, negotiate, and contribute to their implementation. They should also have the capacity to take control of existing tools and procedures and create new ones as needed. In practice, as seen in Saillans, this entails ensuring that the motivations and rationales behind legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as the procedures of public decision-making, are accessible and comprehensible to a broad audience. The work conducted by the GAPs includes gaining knowledge about the institutional context and identifying local areas for maneuver. This re-appropriation of the institutional fabric also involves creating its own tools, mechanisms and rules. Finally, reclaiming reflexive processes - such as monitoring, evaluation, and oversight - empowers residents, counteracting the potential disabling effects of external structures and maintaining significance. In Saillans, through the GAPs, residents engage in discussions regarding the legitimacy of regulatory injunctions, the efficacy of implemented methods, and the underlying knowledge. They consider how to document the multiple effects of the actions implemented and debate whether they contribute to desired visions and futures. Subsequently, they propose adjustments to methods as needed. Equipping residents in this way enables them to form a continuous and constructive counterweight to institutions at various levels, including the municipality itself.

CONCLUSION

Following Berrebi-Hoffmann et al. (2017) and reflecting on the social experiment in Saillans, I aimed to elucidate "the way in which society is tinkering with itself today" on a territorial scale, particularly in ecological and democratic realms. This exploration underscored the importance of territorial dimensions in the democracy of doing and their impact on managing territorial public initiatives. The Saillans experience highlights how strong territorial bonds drive commitment to action and how the village scale serves as a crucial locus for (re)creating the common and implementing the political principle of the common. These acts serve both as resistance and as alternative proposals to the neoliberalization of life and society.

I outlined what a political imagination and tools freed from the conventional logic of the territorial project would look like. If the conventional territorial project represents a modern interpretation, a more 'capitaloscenic' approach would consider the ecological upheavals of the earth and the associated social, political, and democratic issues. This empirical investigation sketched the possibility of investing territorial approaches differently, analyzing work as a territorial art of doing and living together, and local public action as a process of crafting territorial artworks. This repositions humans as artisans and situates them among what makes up the world.

By focusing on the everyday and the ordinary, this approach seeks to redefine how democracy and politics are practiced and understood, advocating for a socio-ecological transformation that prioritizes the quality of relationships including non-humans (e.g. Berque, 2000, Marage &

Jégou, 2022) and ways of living, being and acting in the world (e.g. Faburel & Girault, 2020, Hoyaux, 2003).

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