Building the Third Millenium City

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This essay examines *la politique de la ville* (the urban policy of the city), enacted in France during the last fifty years to deal specifically with the question of social diversity in housing, as well as social diversity within the larger society. The essay provides an overview of immigration and public housing policies in France in the context of the large increase in immigration that occurred starting in 1956, and shows how the traditional French republican ideal has dominated these policy responses to the challenges of the new multicultural society.

The Birth of the *Grands Ensembles*

New neighborhoods of public housing, commonly referred to as *grands ensembles*, first appeared in France in the 1950s. Social psychologist René Kaës defined a *grand ensemble* as "an entirely new collective habitat responding to a new and particular economic, technical and demographic situation" (Kaës 1963: 39-40). Although it appeared to Kaës as "artifical" in the sense that it had not yet "matured historically," the *grand ensemble* had both objective considerations (as a response to a completely new situation) and normative considerations (as an ideal of collective stability for both the family and the individual, itself defined by the socio-cultural imperatives of society).

The origin of the *grand ensemble* can only be understood in the context of the unstable economic and social conditions of the post-war period. With the ending of wartime shortages and under the decisive impetus of the Marshall Plan, France was to enter a significant period of expansion in the early 1950s. Appreciable yields were recorded in the national agricultural sector while the industrial sector was also showing an important increase in productivity. This new economic prosperity translated into an overall improvement in the living standards of the French population, and stimulated unprecedented demographic growth. The total population of France rose from 40 million in 1946 to 53 million in 1975. Over that period, the rural character of France was inexorably replaced by predominantly urban conditions. While some 26.1 percent of the work force was employed in the primary sectors (agriculture and mining) in 1954, this percentage dropped to 11.3 percent in 1975.

As an accompaniment to this unprecedented transformation, public collective housing became a national priority. The *grand ensemble* appeared then as the best response to the new housing crisis. From 1950 onwards, Eugène Claudius-Petit, then Minister of Reconstruction and Urbanism, was to encourage the implementation of public policy for collective housing through industrial rationalization of the building sector and the provision of fiscal and financial aid. In 1953, the Courant Plan inaugurated the beginning of mass housing in France, with a goal to ensure the construction of several hundred thousand housing units. The so-called "construction framework law" of 7 August 1957 initiated a long-term financial scheme based on the concept of priority development zones to maximize public investment by concentrating on housing projects with a minimum size of 500 units.

Immigration Policy in France

The revival and profound transformation of the economy were also accompanied by radical changes in immigration policy. While the period from 1946 to 1956 was characterized by a low rate of immigration, between 1956 and 1965 there was a marked increase in the immigration of workers from Spain, Morocco and Portugal. With the end of the Algerian war in 1962, the repatriation of French nationals also contributed to the exceptional increase in the French population. From 1962 to 1965, immigration figures for the working population amounted to a net 718,000, of which 324,000 were repatriated nationals and 394,000 were "foreigners" (including 111,000 Algerians). During the decade ending in 1965,

France's foreign-born population increased by approximately one million people. Immigration continued at a similar rate after 1966 until it was completely suspended in July 1974. Despite the complete closing of immigration, France's foreign-born population continued to increase. In the early 1970s, the number of foreign-born residents of France had reached 2.3 million.

Today four million foreign-born people are settled permanently in France. Since 1975, government has increasingly lifted the immigration interdiction for purposes of family reunification (as instituted by the Law of 3 July 1974). This informal policy was formalized under the terms of the decree of 4 December 1984: any foreign national lawfully established for a period of one year was given the right to send for a spouse and any children under 18 years of age, providing he/she had sufficient economic means for the support of the family.

The Making of a Dual City

Having long been a policy focused solely on importing adult male labor, the policy of immigration has had little consideration for the larger process of social integration. Other than the housing for individual workers provided in industrial regions (particularly in coal and steel industries), immigrants of the 1950s were housed primarily in collective quarters. Due to the scarcity or lack of rental housing, immigrants lived, at best, in cheap furnished accommodation in the towns, or at worst in shantytowns outside in the suburbs. The first of these shantytowns to go up was located in the Parisian suburb of Gennevilliers

as early as 1952. Eugene Claudius-Petit, then Minister of Reconstruction, created the National Construction Company for Algerian Workers as an attempt to resolve the immigrant situation. Transit towns were built with public funding and were gradually replaced by permanent developments of affordable housing. In spite of their anti-segregationist aims, these housing projects led to a high level of spatial segregation. In practice, segregation patterns developed all the more easily because there was no real coexistence between immigrants of European origins and Maghrebine or African immigrants. These segregation effects of housing projects were not to disappear in spite of the general improvement in French living conditions throughout the 1960s.

Later, this relatively unsuccessful attempt to reduce social and spatial segregation through the *grands ensembles* was further deflated by the reorientation of housing policy introduced by Albin Chalandon, Minister of Housing and Public Works. In 1970, Chalandon's scheme of grants and advantageous loans enabled wage earners to consider buying their own homes; and 1973, Chalandon's successor Olivier Guichard opposed the continuation of municipal quotas for public housing construction. Both of these policy changes encouraged the better-off residents of the *grands ensembles* to leave and become private homeowners, while the least fortunate households remained, with their numbers continually swelling.

The problems of the *grands ensembles* today are in many ways the result of the segregation that intensified during the 1950s under existing public policies

and increasing poverty and unemployment. Cities are split into separate spatial entities, differentiated by their respective economic, social and cultural characteristics. Suburban *grands ensembles* constitute second-class environments, societies of outcasts where unemployment, school drop-out rates, and crime remain above the national average. The widely experienced feeling of rejection by the host society causes these communities to withdraw into themselves, engendering greater similarity to the ethnic enclave than to their conceptual origin, the village society.

Factors Specific to France: Integration and Rejection of Communitarianism

Facing this divide between the haves and the have-nots, what type of policy should be adopted between urban cores and their peripheries? First of all, the recognition of problematic social conditions emerging from a divided society is nothing new. Under the government of Valery Giscard-d'Estaing (1976-1980) the *VIIième Plan* was instituted, aiming at the rehabilitation of public housing in "immigrant" neighborhoods. In 1977, a financial program known as *Habitat et Vie Sociale* (Habitat and Social Life) was launched. These two public programs sought to group together investments designed to improve the quality of construction and the comfort of accommodation in public housing projects with the creation of more open spaces and new public amenities.

However, the lack of participation by residents, the insufficient mobilization of various officials, and the heavy administrative bureaucracy led the newly elected Socialist government of François Mitterand to redefine new forms of action in 1981. The timeliness of such reform became all the more apparent when the malaise of the *grands ensembles* exploded for the first time into violence and anti-social incidents in Vénissieux and Les Minguettes, two suburbs of Lyon. According to President Mitterand, the real challenge for equality and fraternity was to ensure that cities in France were no longer divided into poor and rich, and that no one felt his/her own neighborhood or his/her own city to be a place of exclusion.

At a time when an effort towards the decentralization of regional, country and district administration was taking effect (enacted by the Law of 2 March 1982), the government wished to create a mechanism whereby, in the words of Hubert Dubedout, socialist mayor of Grenoble and one person responsible for a governmental mission on the *grands ensembles*, "France would avoid the example of the United States and Britain, with their neglected neighborhoods and their zones of uncontrolled social explosion" (Dubedout 1983: 5). The *politique de la ville* (urban policy of the city) was to take shape through the creation of several interdepartmental initiatives, such as the *Développement social des quartiers* (Neighborhood Social Development), the integration of young people, the prevention of delinquency and the "Suburbs 1989" scheme. In July 1988 an interdepartmental delegation for cities and for public urban development had been set up to bring together these different initiatives. At the "Suburbs 1989" meeting in Bron, François Mitterand underlined the need to "appoint either a member of government, a senior

minister or a minister to the Prime Minister, solely to implement urban policy." In December 1990, Michel Delebarre, Mayor of Dunkerque, was officially appointed to this post. His assignment was "to promote the growth of social, economic and cultural life in cities, improve urban living conditions and eliminate exclusion."

Rather than elaborate here on the background of the public policies and the institutional measures taken to resolve this crisis in the suburbs, it seems more useful to recall the spirit in which they were, and still are, devised. This context rests on the originality of the French approach, particularly when compared with the orientations and solutions arrived in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The French approach is unequivocal: the republic is declared one and indivisible. The republican ideal forged in the eighteenth century in the spirit of the Enlightenment—and, above all, by the political philosophy of Rousseau and Condorcet—postulates a double political and social contract for every citizen. An individual's adherence to the republic cannot be proclaimed without a statement of faith in and adhesion to the republican ideal of social advancement based on merit, and the total acceptance and adoption of certain cultural traditions and ways of life. Membership in the French society involves the leveling of all cultural differences and particularities, the intrinsic meaning of which is thus purely and simply incorporation of each individual into the republican mold. It cannot allow the juxtaposition of separate national and cultural identities.[1]

Over the years, the status of immigrants in French society has improved. A law of 17 July 1984 granted a ten-year residency permit, automatically renewable, to long-stay residents, as well as to relatives of any French national, irrespective of their employment situation. Therefore, as Catherine Withol de Wenden, a researcher at the National Center for Scientific Research, points out, "an immigrant's legal status no longer depends on his/her status as a worker, but on the length of his/her presence in France" (Withol de Wenden 1995: 65). Furthermore, by putting an end to the statutory law of 1939 requiring foreign associations to receive preliminary authorization from the Ministry of the Interior, the Law of 9 October 1981 has encouraged the public expression of ethnic and religious identity. It is against this background that Islam has become in the last few years the second-largest religious community in France.

In spite of this communitarian evolution, urban policies still speak in terms of integration, and reject an ethnic division of urban space. Social cohesion represents a public challenge in which urban policies remain a national public concern and a state responsibility. The creation of a Ministry for Urban Affairs has served to underline the inherent limitations of decentralization and financial crisis of the welfare state. Thus social cohesion remains, in the same way as national defense or even social security, within the undisputed domain of state authority. This is another reason why urban policy is primarily centralized and public, favoring community solidarity rather than competition between groups. The Law of 32 May 1990 (the Besson Law) giving the right to housing stipulates that "any person suffering from lack of resources or poor living conditions has the right to

public aid in order to maintain her/himself in decent housing." The Law of 13 July 1991 set down the guidelines for the right to affordable housing and for an equitable development of urban housing. In order to guarantee every city dweller housing conditions and an environment favorable to social cohesion, while eradicating the phenomena of segregation, various tax measures have been devised to encourage financial solidarity between poorer and richer neighborhoods. For any housing program that does not take into account the diversity of supply in such a way as to ensure every citizen freedom of choice in the types of housing, the local authority must pay a financial contribution to one or several state-designated agencies responsible for the construction of public housing. Such a program allows the state to maintain a fiscal means of supporting public housing projects throughout the country, while important measures have also been taken to preserve existing public housing.

Specific Politics of Integration

After twenty years of existence, the *politique de la ville* has not prevented the phenomenon of exclusion. The urban question still remains linked to this equation: *grand ensemble* of public housing equals exclusion. In reality, there is always a relationship between the collective social housing of the *grands ensembles* located in the periphery of the city, and unemployment rates, the failures of the education system for children and youth, and the spread of delinquency. Social mobility is problematic, because there is no residential mobility that allows for a social escape from the *grands ensembles*.

After twenty years, the time for evaluation has come. An assessment of the gains of the policy justifies the reconsideration of more audacious public actions by public authority; the rhetoric supporting a Marshall plan for the suburbs has become more adamant. Arguments for changing these neighborhoods have shifted towards the idea of a physical and social disenclaving: an opening towards the outside, the development of a de-fiscalization system (such as duty-free zones), and other incentives designed to encourage private and public operators to set up new services and improve existing ones. However, although important, these attempts have been more effective in revealing the precariousness of the conditions of existence in peripheral residential zones than in changing the conditions of these neighborhoods.

The paradox of the *politique de la ville* rests on the sum of unexamined contradictions within the political agenda. The most obvious contradiction arises when we consider the necessity to better target the homogenous population, a coherent urban ensemble to develop more efficient policies and political actions, and consequently to better control the risks of marginalization produced by a public process that forces residents to the margins of society. But any urban public policy produces a counter-effect of stigmatization and therefore victimization. To be stigmatized by the rest of the city residents makes difficult the individual process of social and professional reassertion. It is for this reason that urban policies have successively attempted to broaden the field of intervention by replacing the management of specific areas in crisis with a larger encompassing

and integrating perspective. In his 1983 report, Hubert Dudebout condemned the program *Habitat et Vie Sociale* for being too "focused on improving the internal comfort of housing units to the detriment of the larger environment of housing and infrastructure." It is to bridge this "artificial separation" between housing and the rest of socio-economic life that the *Développement social des quartiers* (Social Development of Neighborhoods) program was developed. The intention of this program to better articulate the social welfare policies of physical and morphological improvement of the *grands ensembles* neighborhoods as an attempt to connect the rehabilitation of buildings and the improvement of public spaces. Moreover, the goal was also to redefine the "image" of the suburbs. But the redefinition of the image has been very limited. Beyond the superficiality of intervention, the DSQ activities have themselves contributed to the stigmatization of populations because of the restricted parameters of intervention. The DSQ has therefore been replaced by a new program of *Développement Social Urbain* (Urban Social Development) primarily defined at the scale of the entire city.

This question of the appropriate scale of intervention for urban policy is back in the public discourse. In the debate over scale, new ways of thinking about and renewing urban space are part of the terminology. Jean-Pierre Sueur, mayor of Orléans, was asked in 1998 by the Prime Minister to lead a consultation on the future of cities. In *Demain la ville* (Tomorrow the City), Sueur argued for the renewal of the *politique de la ville* based on a new urban model ac-

counting for the juxtaposition of spaces but creating more links, interpenetration, fluidity, and mix of different spaces. Sueur's fifty recommendations for the future of cities included considerations for the reshaping of spaces—how to construct urbanity given the fact that many problems are not physical—but also the affirmation of the right to mobility for each citizen, since the right of movement is a crucial element of urban cohesion. Because urban problems cannot be solved at the scale of the village, Jean-Pierre Sueur suggested the creation of a new political institution at a more appropriate geographic scale— an elected metropolitan-regional assembly.

Although the government did not endorse Sueur's proposed constitutional reform (which would have been unprecedented in the French republican system) it has nevertheless accepted the metropolitan region as the pertinent scale of urban policies. The inter-ministerial committee of 30 June 1998 articulated the following four objectives: support of the republican ideology, reinforcement of social cohesion, mobilization of citizens around a collective project, and finally, construction of a new democratic space for citizens. These objectives consolidate the full endorsement of the republican discourse, therefore rejecting the communitarian and multiculturalist hypotheses.[2]

Conclusion
Beyond continuity in the development of urban policies, new public measures seem to reinforce an ideology favoring cultural integration and the rejection of communitarism and multiculturalism. Social cohesion in the city of the third millennium rests on

the ideal of the French model of acculturation and republican integration of various cultural groups into the dominant society.

For these reasons, it is without a doubt that the *politique de la ville* brings attention to the (re)constitution of a public space in the projects of housing rehabilitation and urban renewal, since public space is thought to be the necessary focus of republican acculturation. The will to maintain this principle against all odds attests to a certain backlash in society and speaks of the permanence of the republican postulate of equality for all in the same unit of time and place. In this sense, the privatization of public space (Davis 1997) and the formation of "edge cities" (Garreau 1991) are experienced as a major increase in fragmentation of the national collective (Lopez 1996). For public space to become a place of exchange and citizen-dialogue, the *politique de la ville* attempts to institute exemplary conditions of resident participation in the definition of living space.

Facing the omnipresence of private space, this redefinition of public space must be accompanied by a deep reflection on the social and spatial mobility that are among the conditions of citizenship today. In a society marked by temporal fragmentation and rapid flows of information, the mobility of a person in space signifies social-economic adaptability and integration. This new debate of mobility, speed of movement, also implies a rethinking of time more globally—whether one is speaking of the time of a project, its successful conditions, its sustainability, or its urban-ness. By denying the existence of individualities, urbanism has divorced past and present to an-

chor itself in a future of mastering social relations. The time of personal experience has been denied. Jean Chesneaux described this paradox when he observed that the modern city has signified the degeneration of the axis past-present-future (Chesneaux 1996).

How to rethink time? First, as Paul Ricoeur (1985) contests, by renouncing Hegel and his presumptions of time as a linear construct represented as a singular collective located outside all dialectic and diachrony. Hegelianism has been increasingly questioned by twentieth century history and has naturally lost ground in disciplines that attempt to understand the city and its transformations, but it is far from being completely eradicated. The attempt by functionalist architects to suspend time can be supplanted by a vision that reintegrates time as a project value. In works on the morphological history of cities by Jean Castex, such as Philippe Panerai and Antoine Grumbach's concept of the palimpsest city, the central hypothesis is that urban space is never decreed but is the product of time and history. When real estate investment is viewed as a race against the clock because time is synonymous with uncertainty and financial risk, the logic of production must be modified to reincorporate historical time, a time slower than the street temporality of the construction process of a building or neighborhood. One must then go beyond the rhetoric of interface, operationalizing performance, and immediate functionality in order to reintroduce the principle of responsibility as promoted by the philosopher Hans Jonas in his response to Karl Jaspers (Jaspers 1963). Between experiences of the past, priorities of the present, and the exigencies of the future, it is vital

to build a theory of mutual responsibility, of one towards the other, or the present towards future generations (Jonas 1995).

Endnotes

[1]The republican model of the nation-state endorses a universalist ideology in which equality and social protection by the state constitution is based on the *individual* rights of all residents, therefore denying *groups* as legal categories recognized by the state. With its focus on the individual, the state offers necessary corrective programs to overcome individual discrimination (in unemployment, education, housing, legal system, public services and so forth) but does not recognize group-based discrimination, and no consideration is given to cultural rights. Thus, despite the cultural pluralism of its population, the state aims at integrating disparate groups into a single national culture. The result is the marginalization of existing minorities and newcomers by the dominant population on the very basis of cultural difference. Hence, the universal recognition of individual social rights of equality and justice does not necessarily translate into social equality and justice. The lack of political and cultural recognition by the nation-state prevents mobilization on an (ethno)cultural basis.

[2]The multiculturalist model of the nation-state rests on the recognition of the cultural diversity and collective rights of differentiated groups. Institutional recognition of cultural pluralism involves public measures (language rights, regional autonomy, land claims, guaranteed representation, veto rights) aimed at protecting and promoting ethnic and national identities.

The multicultural state financially supports and legally protects cultural rights, and encourages the participation of newcomers in social and political life. Resting on the concept of recognition of systemic discrimination, the multicultural state, contrary to the particularist state, seeks to engage in a socialization process geared towards the transformation of behaviors of the state and civil society (Helly 1996).

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