

In Search of the User: The Experiment of Modern Urbanism in Postwar France, 1955-1975

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Dissertation Abstract

If there is one master narrative about the postwar European city, it is most likely that of the high hopes and ultimate failures of modern urbanism. This evolution has come to be understood as a logical consequence of its authoritarian denial of user needs. Caught up in rhetoric and critique, the history of this “banal modernism” has meanwhile remained remarkably overlooked. Focusing on French mass housing estates and new towns, this dissertation examines the development of modern urbanism and its mounting criticisms through the lens of what turns out to be a shared concern: the user.

Under the influence of an expanding welfare state and a rising consumer culture during France’s postwar decades of unprecedented economic and urban growth, the user became an increasingly central question in the organization of everyday life. The study reveals how modern urbanism was shaped by and actively shaped this development, in which the user shifted from a standard, passive beneficiary of public services to an active participant and demanding consumer.

The dissertation argues that French urbanism evolved as an experimental process in which the realms of production and consumption were in continual interaction. Amongst the cultures of urban expertise, the domain of sociology became a central mediator in this process. Providing architects and planners with a unique entryway into the world of the user, it informed the design of new housing typologies and urban centers meant to entice users in novel ways.

Prevailing accounts tend to cast the postwar French city either as shaped by a degenerated version of interwar modernism or driven by the exigencies of a centralized state. This study develops an alternative focus: rather than architectural doctrine or government policy, it is the changing category of the user - fueled by the entanglement of social welfare and consumer culture - that underlies the politics of urban change in postwar France. By showing how expertise of the user traverses what have previously been understood as fundamentally opposing approaches to the city – modernist technocratic planning versus user participation – the study dismantles the notions of “top-down” and “bottom-up” that continue to shape urban debates today.

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List of Acronyms

CEDER: Centre d'études des équipements résidentiels (Study Center for Residential Facilities)

CERFI: Centre d'études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles (Center for Institutional Studies, Research and Formation)

CGP: Commission générale du Plan (General Planning Commission)

CIAM: Congrès international d'architecture moderne (International Congress of Modern Architecture)

CSTB: Centre scientifique et technique du bâtiment (Scientific and Technical Center for Construction)

CSU: Centre de sociologie urbaine (Center of Urban Sociology)

DATAR: Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale (Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action)

DGRST: Délégation générale de la recherche scientifique et technique (General Delegation for Scientific and Technical Research)

ENA: Ecole nationale d'administration (National School of Administration)

ENPC: Ecole nationale des Ponts et chaussées (National School of Bridges and Roads)

ENSBA: Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts)

GCVN: Groupe centrale des villes nouvelles (Central Group of New Towns)

INED: Institut national d'études démographiques (National Institute for Demographic Studies)

INSEE: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

IUP: Institut d'urbanisme de l'Université de Paris (Institute for Urbanism of the University of Paris)

HBM: Habitations à bon marché (inexpensive housing)

HLM: Habitations à loyer modéré (moderate rent housing)

MJC: Maison des jeunes et de la culture (youth and cultural center)

MRU: Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme (Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism)

SCIC: Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse des dépôts (Central Real Estate Company of the Caisse des dépôts)

SDAURP: Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région de Paris (Regional Urban Plan for Paris)

UIOF: Union internationale des organismes familiaux (International Union of Familial Organizations)

UNAF: Union nationale des associations familiales (National Union of Family Associations)

ZUP: Zone à urbaniser par/en priorité (zone for immediate urbanization)

ZAC: Zone d'aménagement concerté (zone for concerted planning)

Introduction

Rethinking Postwar Modernism

If there is one master narrative about the postwar European city, it is most likely that of the high hopes and acute failures of modern urbanism. The countless urban renewal projects, sprawling housing estates and ambitious new towns built during the postwar decades of unprecedented economic expansion now appear as remnants of long-lost convictions: the belief in modern architecture and urban planning as vehicles of social and economic modernization and in the superiority of the collective in providing for individual users and families.

Whether by the name of Pruitt-Igoe, Sarcelles, Bijlmermeer or Aylesbury, less than three decades later such places came to represent an urban crisis that cut deep into the public consciousness of many Western societies. Residential mobility left many modern housing projects and new neighborhoods to those with little choice to live elsewhere. Meanwhile, their stigmatization as sites of urban crisis since the end of the 1970s has tended to associate social ills with the wrongdoings of modernism: its rationalistic hubris, its inflexible and inhumane treatment of urban space, and its outright denial of users' freedom, needs, and aspirations. Modernist architecture and urban planning - with Le Corbusier as the default personification - was generally condemned for its authoritarian attitude. If it ever did take into account its users, it was to dictate their behavior through the environment provided for them.¹

Up until today, contemporary observers remain remarkably categorical in their denunciation of modern urbanism, based on exactly these grounds. Tony Judt, in his otherwise authoritative history of postwar Europe, only confirms the dominant view when he mentions in passing: "Just why post-war European politicians and planners should have made so very many mistakes remains unclear, even if we allow that in the wake of two world wars and an extended economic depression there was a craving for anything fresh, new and unlinked to the past. It is not as though contemporaries were unaware of the ugliness of their new environment: the occupants of the giant housing complexes, tower blocks and new towns never liked them, and they said so clearly enough to anyone who cared to inquire. Architects and sociologists may not have understood that their projects would, within one generation, breed social outcasts and violent gangs, but that prospect was clear enough to the residents."² To others, architects in particular, this "bureaucratized middling modernism"³ was a degenerated, knee-jerk version of interwar

¹ For a critique of modernist architecture and urban planning in this vein, see: James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Contrasting sharply with this view is Katherine Bristol's analysis of what she calls "the myth of Pruitt-Igoe." Her study emphasizes the limited agency of architects and planners in postwar modern housing, see: Katharine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 (1991): 163-71.

² Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 388.

³ Term coined by: Jane M. Jacobs, "Building Event" (paper presented at Buildings: Technologies or Interactions? Exploring the Intersections between Architectural Theory and the Social Sciences, Conference at Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung, Universität Bielefeld, June 17-19 2009).

modernism - its richer, more diverse substrate that could still be salvaged.⁴ Meanwhile, the “banal modernisms” of the postwar have continued to elude proper historical analysis.⁵ Their story remains caught in contemporary critique that takes rhetoric rather than reality as reference.

France exemplifies the dominant narrative. Two images, whose opposition reinforces their symbolic weight, dominate our contemporary view of urban France: on the one hand, the monumental splendor and richness of Paris’ historic city center, on the other hand the poverty and hopelessness of its suburban landscapes of tower blocks and slabs. And yet over the past century, these suburbs - more than Haussmann’s boulevards - have been home to the majority of Parisians. By the early 1980s less than 16 percent lived inside the city walls, which remain up until today the administrative boundaries of the city of Paris.⁶ The others - often the “othered,” the immigrants and the poor - inhabit the sprawling suburbs, which are dominated by the *grands ensembles*, modern collective housing estates built between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s. The country’s other metropolitan areas conform to this trend.

More than any other European country, France is marked by the exceptionally strong impact of both modernism and the state on postwar urbanization. During the *trente glorieuses*, the three decades of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity after WWII, modern urbanism was a preeminent tool of national modernization under the aegis of a centralized state.⁷ The modern comfort of a standard four-room apartment, born with mass production and typified in France as the “F4,” was its cornerstone. Urbanism in France was fundamentally shaped by the state-led imperative of mass housing.⁸ Despite the increasing engagement of private capital and the

⁴ This view remains dominant in architectural culture and is based on popular readers like: Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

⁵ Despite their overwhelming presence in our urban landscapes and collective consciousness, historians have paid relatively little attention to the actually built modernism of the postwar city. More conspicuous even is the neglect by architectural historians: focusing mainly on utopian and paper projects, the discourse of CIAM and Team X, and the isolated works of individual architects, they tend to neglect the mass production of housing estates and new towns that actually shaped the postwar city. On postwar utopianism, see: Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007); Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007). On CIAM and Team X see: Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); Bruno Fayolle Lussac and Rémi Papillault, *Le Team X et le logement collectif à grande échelle en Europe: Un retour critique des pratiques vers la théorie. Actes du séminaire européen, Toulouse 27-28 mai 2004* (Pessac: Maison des sciences de l’homme d’Aquitaine, 2008). In general, anthologies of postwar architecture have favored discourse above production, see for instance: Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Columbia University GSAPP / Rizzoli, 1993); K. Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998). The scholarship on postwar Britain is exceptional, and does address the complex role of architecture in postwar urban change. See: Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art / Yale University Press, 1994); John Robert Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future City, 1928-1953*, 1st ed. (London / New York: E & FN Spon, 1997); John Robert Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (London / New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁶ Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 75.

⁷ The term *trente glorieuses* was first coined by Jean Fourastié, see: Jean Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (Paris: Fayard, 1979). On French modernization and its relation to national identity, see: Herrick Chapman, “Modernity and National Identity in Postwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 291-314; Gabrielle Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998); Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸ French urbanism at this time was oriented towards what in French was called “habitat.” Exceeding the strict realm of housing provision, it also included an attention to urban amenities and neighborhood life.

gradual liberalization of planning procedures, the centralized state remained the country's sole urbanist, de jure and de facto, until the 1980s.⁹ Understanding modern urbanism in postwar France is therefore impossible without an account of the workings of the state apparatus and its relation to market forces.

Existing studies have shown how French postwar urbanism - with an authoritarianism and a penchant for technocracy inherited from its wartime government - was powered by a centralized state aristocracy, designed by an old-school architectural elite, and built by large developers and corporate construction firms. Some have demonstrated the longstanding processes of abstraction and representation that were at the basis of the territorial modernization of postwar France. Others have referred to the entire period as "the era of the technocrats," who, after Reconstruction, did nothing less than steam-roll France with towers and slabs of standardized housing units, disjointed from anything existing, and thus, just waiting to be rejected by their users. Their architectural style was coined "le hard French" because of its stark and essentially "statistical" aesthetics.¹⁰

Recent historical research on postwar French urbanism has nevertheless begun to complicate such sweeping accounts. By revealing the precarious nature of the ideologies supporting urbanism, the complex local politics of construction, the government's public information campaigns, and planners' continuing efforts to improve the *grands ensembles* and turn them into successful neighborhoods, historians have revealed the instructive role of modern architecture and urbanism in national modernization. Some have characterized the *grands ensembles*, which were initially built for white middle-class nuclear French families, as instrumental to the democratization of postwar French society. Others have emphasized that concerns with the user and with everyday life in mass housing areas preceded the social critiques of late 1960s: in other words, they accompanied rather than succeeded modern urbanism. Still others have argued that, contrary to what is commonly held, participation in the realm of architecture and urban planning in France did not just emerge in the revolts of the governed during the 1970s, but in the workings of the centralized state more than a decade earlier.¹¹ Whether such initiatives were part of a governmental propaganda apparatus or veritably intended to give people "a voice in the city,"

⁹ Viviane Claude speaks about "l'Etat urbaniste" between the 1940s and the 1980s, see: Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville: Les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2006). In this study, I treat the French state not as a monolithic or coherent entity, but as a complex site in which diverse and often-competing actors and institutions. For a historical account of intra-state competition and the complexity of state policy with regards to architecture, see: Eric Lengereau, *L'Etat et l'architecture, 1958-1981: Une politique publique?* (Paris: Picard / Comité d'histoire du Ministère de la Culture, 2001).

¹⁰ For an extended review of the existing literature, see Bibliographic Note. Key studies include: Danièle Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997); Bruno-Henri Vayssière, *Reconstruction, déconstruction: Le hard French, ou l'architecture française des trente glorieuses* (Paris: Picard, 1988); Marc Desportes and Antoine Picon, *De l'espace au territoire: L'aménagement en France XVIe - XXe siècles* (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole nationale des Ponts et chaussées, 1997); Jean-Claude Thoenig, *L'ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987).

¹¹ For an extended review of the existing literature, see Bibliographic Note. Recent key studies include: Brian William Newsome, "The Struggle for a Voice in the City: The Development of Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in France, 1940-1968" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2002); Nicole Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2005); Thibault Tellier, *Le temps des HLM 1945-1975: La saga urbaine des Trente Glorieuses* (Paris: Autrement, 2007); Gwenaëlle Legouillon, "La genèse de la politique des grands ensembles, 1945-1962" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Sorbonne, 2010).

their presence alone prompts a serious revision of the accepted narrative. And that is what this dissertation set out to do.

Its premise is to chart the historical evolution of French urbanism through the changing lens of the user. In what way did it reinforce or challenge dominant ideas about inhabitants, their needs, and their wants? How did architects and planners take into account the use and users of what they built? And how, if so, did the reactions of those for whom they were built eventually inform the conception of subsequent projects? What was in fact most fascinating to me when I set out this research project, was how the leftist, populist or anti-modernist critiques since the late 1960s and the revised architectural production that followed in their wake, shared this central concern with the very object of their criticism: the user. Rather than a break, I noticed a slow evolution in built form and strong continuities in both discourse and production from the 1950s until the mid-1970s. Did the prevalence of technocratic expertise and functionalist doctrine not exclude “humanist” concerns with the user and the diversity of inhabitants’ needs?

Technocracy Meets Consumer Culture

Against the background of rapid urbanization, economic development, and the process of decolonization, modern urbanism in postwar France negotiated both state-led modernization and a rising mass culture. It did so by changing what it meant to be a user, a citizen, and a consumer. While prevailing accounts tend to cast postwar urbanization in France either as shaped by a degenerated version of interwar modernism, or driven by the exigencies of a centralized state, this study develops an alternative focus: rather than architectural doctrine or government policy, it is the changing *category of the user* - fueled by the entanglement of welfare and consumer culture - that underlies much of the politics of change in the postwar city. The study examines the various ways in which this category shaped the production of the built environment between the take-off of urban growth and mass housing in the 1950s and the economic restructuring of the 1970s. Concretely, it looks at the emergence of the user in the urbanism of France’s mass housing estates or *grands ensembles*, and its role in the gradual transformation of urban models which culminated in the *villes nouvelles*, France’s official program of new towns officially launched in 1965.

French urbanism - both before and after 1968 - was less about the inhabitants, than about those who spoke, and built, in their name.¹² During this period participation remained a promise more than a practice. In the same way, the user was there as a concern more than as a direct agent in the making of the built environment.¹³ The user mattered in so far as it was an increasingly problematic category of design in a production regime that remained in place despite the

¹² My findings are in line with the general argument of Capdevielle and Mouriaux, who cast May 1968 as an intermediary event bringing existing forces to the surface and informing politics and culture during the 1970s, without fundamentally changing the economic and social structures themselves. See: Jacques Capdevielle and René Mouriaux, *Mai 1968, l'entre-deux de la modernité: Histoire de trente ans* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1988).

¹³ See the contributions by Annie Fourcaut, Loïc Vadelorge, Hélène Hatzfeld and Thibault Tellier at the conference: *La participation des habitants dans la ville XIXe-XXe siècles*, (Paris: Conference at Panthéon-Sorbonne Université Paris I, organized by CHS (Centre d’Histoire Sociale du XXe siècle), CHCSC (Centre d’histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines), Université de Versailles, 11 June 2008).

enormous social transformations of the period. In a decolonizing France, this figure was peculiarly cleaned of race and ethnicity - despite an advanced social classification.¹⁴ Whether as an abstract universalized notion, statistical entity identified with the nuclear family, normative figure subject to modernization, active participant in local neighborhood life, free consumer or protesting militant, the user functioned as a category for evaluating what was built and for determining what should be built. The user did not only emerge “in action,” through the concrete protests of individuals and groups to large-scale urban intervention, but was also constructed as a register of understanding.

The *Petit Robert* dictionary defines the user - “*usager*” - as a “person who uses (a public service, the public domain)” and situates the emergence of the term in the 1930s.¹⁵ Not incidentally, this moment coincided with the development of welfare and modern state planning. As the historian Jean-Pierre Daviet has described, the figure of the user embodies the responsibility of the state to furnish goods and services in expanding domains of social and personal life.¹⁶ Naturally, it became a central point of reference during the “golden age” of the welfare state in postwar Europe, when many governments became actively involved with their citizens’ well-being and personal development. By this time, it had become clear to policy-makers and citizens alike that the function of the state was no longer to rule, but to serve.¹⁷

The figure of the user typified this new role of the state. Neither a consumer - an independent actor in the private realm of the market - nor a citizen - a subject of the state and thus in direct political relation to it through rights and obligations - the user was relatively autonomous from the state, yet at the same time linked to it as beneficiary of a “public service.” This kind of state provision was based on citizen rights, and thus on the basis of calculated need rather than individual want. At the same time, as this study demonstrates, it was increasingly understood as a consumer relationship, measured through individual satisfaction. The user was thus located both in the realm of political citizenship and private consumption. Or rather, the predominance of the

¹⁴ Kristen Ross has shown how modernization and decolonization are intimately linked in French postwar culture, see: Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁵ The dictionary took up the word in 1933, see: *Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la langue française*, (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1967).

¹⁶ Jean-Pierre Daviet placed the first origins of the notion well into the 19th century and showed that it was not only a matter of administrative law but was also shaped by socialist ideas. See: Jean-Pierre Daviet, “Le service public et l’usager, entre le droit administratif et la philosophie politique (1873-1945),” in *Consommateur, usager, citoyen: Quel modèle de socialisation?*, ed. Chantal Horellou-Lafarge (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

¹⁷ Historians have described the development of the welfare state since the end of 19th century, by going back to Germany’s pension, accident and medical insurance system of the 1880s. Other systems of social provision aimed at specific social problems were developed during the interwar in many European states, but it was the experience of WWII that laid the basis for the development of the comprehensive interventionism of postwar welfare in Europe. This went hand in hand with a general faith in the “social”, plannerly state, which was seen as the only agent able to offer long-term welfare and security. Rather than socialist, or “post-ideological” as Tony Judt has argued, the period was one of “managed capitalism” in the words of Richard Kuisel, dominated by a consensus of social democratic thought. See: Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, 362; Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Stephen Padgett and William Paterson, *A History of Social Democracy in Postwar Europe* (London / New York: Longman, 1991), 141. For France in particular, see: François Ewald, *L’Etat providence* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1986).

user as a social category in postwar France exemplified the fundamental ambivalence between citizen and consumer.¹⁸

These identities were indeed often conflated in a country marked by the welding of state-led modernization with a mass consumer culture grafted upon the American model.¹⁹ Rather than a Consumers' Republic, as Liz Cohen has labeled a postwar U.S. in which economic recovery depended on mass consumption and hence "the consumer satisfying personal material wants actually served the national interest,"²⁰ postwar France was perhaps more on its way to becoming a "Users' Republic," in which mass consumption was guided by an elaborate system of state planning and welfare provision. French consumer culture was shaped by the conflict between the European emphasis on consumption as a social right and the American notion of the sovereign consumer whose satisfaction was virtuously guaranteed by the free market.²¹ The authority of the French state in consumption led critics to speak of a "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption."²² National economic planning, with its roots in the 1930s, its testing phase during WWII, and its maturation under Jean Monnet and the Marshall Plan made France a "plannerly state" in which the government had a pervasive presence in everyday life. The ambiguity of the user - partly citizen, partly consumer - was constituent of this intertwining of state, market and society that marks the postwar decades in France.

The built environment was not only shaped by this paradigm; it also helped shape it.²³ In the first postwar years, state planning prioritized infrastructure and heavy industries, but when rapid urban and demographic growth exacerbated the housing shortage, the state assumed unprecedented responsibilities in housing production. Far exceeding its role in interwar social housing and postwar reconstruction, by the mid-1950s the state had begun to promote the mass production of standardized dwelling units in large collective housing estates. The yearly production would only increase until the official rejection of this kind of urbanism in the early 1970s. To contemporaneous sociologists like René Kaës, these estates were the "ecological

¹⁸ The domain of goods and services directly or indirectly provided by the state was often referred to in Marxist terms as "collective consumption," revealing its ambivalent nature of being at once "public" and thus outside the market, and having a close affinity with market consumption. See: Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*, xviii. This book was largely based on the collective research published as: Manuel Castells, *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne* (Paris: Mouton, 1978).

¹⁹ ...yet which was in constant resistance to American influence. See: Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 2003), 8.

²¹ See for instance Chapter 7, "The Consumer-Citizen" in: De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe*.

²² Henri Lefebvre uses the term "*la société bureaucratique de consommation dirigée*" in: Henri Lefebvre, *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

²³ The theoretical framework I adopt here is that of a reciprocal and recursive relationship between structure and agency, between buildings and human action. In this sense, built form is the result of human action as much as it informs these actions. Regardless of the Latourian terminology of a building as a "non-human" actor or "actant," the theoretical groundwork has been supplied by Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu. For a critical review of these theories in relation to architecture, see: Thomas Gieryn, "What buildings do," *Theory and Society* 31, no. 1 (2002): 35-74.

support of mass culture, it is the birth of another society.”²⁴ With their proliferation, the user became a question - not only for state planners and policy-makers, but also for the architects who were now faced with a new but anonymous determinant in their design briefs. As the same time, the advent of state-led mass housing informed its very reception. When users - organized in local inhabitant associations and national civil society organizations - formulated demands for participation, they did so in the name of all-encompassing user, more than as only tenants, citizens or consumers.²⁵

The democratization of access to rights, goods, and services that was one of the primary goals of French social welfare generated a continuum of practices in between the public realm and the private realms of market and household. The urbanism of mass housing was no less a factor in the thoroughgoing reorganization of public and private at this time. Housing was of course more than a straightforward service like postal delivery, gas, or electricity. It was claimed as a citizen right, increasingly built as a modern consumer product, and meanwhile, remained a complex feature of personal identity, collective belonging, and social life. As this study shows, the French state did not refrain from getting involved in these various aspects. The urbanism of “collective facilities” - urban amenities from shops to churches that were to be included in mass housing developments - became a key element of the state-led project to improve life in what it built. In a system in which production and consumption were separate yet dependent realms, the question of how one could inform the other soon became crucial - and not only to those on the receiving side. From the mid-1960s onwards, the French new town program would become the pinnacle of these attempts to create a lively urbanity and to satisfy users in unprecedented ways.

Sociology and the Experiment of Urbanism

We know who the major actors were that built postwar urban France: political elites and government administrators, large semi-public and private developers and construction companies, and modern yet mainly Beaux-Arts-trained architects and engineering firms. Like in Germany, Britain and elsewhere around the world, French postwar urbanization resulted from a productive marriage of capitalist development and welfare state intervention.²⁶ This tells us very little however about *why* and *how* French urbanism - and in particular its built form - evolved during this period.

²⁴ “Le grand ensemble est le support écologique de la culture de masse, c’est la genèse d’une autre société.” See: René Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles* (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1963), 308.

²⁵ In everyday language, *citoyen*, *usager*, *consommateur*, and *client* were often used interchangeably, gaining specific meanings only when employed in particular contexts or harnessed for a particular political aim. As categories of classification, these terms were not only ambiguous, but also contested. In the realm of housing and urbanism, most often used was the term *usager* for user. The notion of *utilisateu*r was not often used in the 1950s, but would become more prominent from the 1970s onwards, without ever eclipsing the use of the term *usager*. *Utilisateu*r was a more neutral term (referring to the use of a device or machine) and did not directly imply the existence of a public or state realm.

²⁶ Schöller has proposed that political elites, planners and large construction companies were behind the emerging hegemony of standardized mass collective housing in Germany. Glendinning and Muthesius argue similarly for Britain. See: Oliver Schöller, *Die Blockstruktur: Eine qualitative Untersuchung zur politischen Ökonomie des westdeutschen Großsiedlungsbaus* (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2005); Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland*.

In his 1970 book “*La révolution urbaine*,” Henri Lefebvre asserted that “[T]here are multiple urbanisms, that of the humanists, that of the developers, and that of the State and the technocrats. The first propose abstract utopias; the second sell urbanism, that is to say, happiness, ‘lifestyle,’ and ‘luxury;’ and as for the latter, their activity disassociates, like that of the State, into will and representation, into institutions and ideologies.”²⁷ This study argues that the historical development of French postwar urbanism was precipitated by intensifying exchanges between these different actor groups under the influence of a rising consumer culture and the politics of an expanding welfare state. Furthermore, it contends that French urbanism evolved as an experimental process in which the realms of production and consumption were in continual interaction with each other. The domain of sociology, so this study demonstrates, supplied the quintessential “user knowledge” assuring this interaction. During the postwar decades, this type of expertise began to percolate into the state apparatus and architecture culture. Paradoxically, sociologists like Henri Lefebvre thus became principal mediators in the processes they described.

Initially however, for French state planners during the 1930s and 1940s the realm of consumption was practically irrelevant. Their primary focus was on the scientific management of production. High-level civil servants, graduated from France’s elite *grandes écoles* and hardened by war-time experience, made up a class of planning experts who cultivated technology as a means to achieve national modernization and thus reinstate French grandeur.²⁸ In France’s politically unstable climate of the immediate postwar decade, this elite of non-elected administrators was convinced that technology and applied science would render politics irrelevant, an idea as old as Saint-Simonianism.²⁹ Their conviction set off an intellectual debate about technocracy, a term used pejoratively by its opponents who considered it disregarding of human values.³⁰

Such opposition however disguised the formation of a shared culture of expertise. As the mindset of national planning infiltrated the diverse realms of the French state apparatus, the state became a knowledge-producing institution as much as an interventionist one. By the end of the 1950s, state planning included a range of social and cultural domains, and administrators acknowledged the social sciences as key auxiliaries to political action and decision-making.³¹ This expert

²⁷ “Il y a plusieurs urbanismes, celui des humanistes, celui des promoteurs, celui de l’Etat et des technocrates. Les premiers proposent des utopies abstraites; les seconds vendent de l’urbanisme, c’est-à-dire du bonheur, du “style de vie”, du “standing”; quant aux derniers, leur activité se dissocie elle-même, comme celle de l’Etat, en volonté et représentation, en institutions et idéologies.” Henri Lefebvre, *La révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 200.

²⁸ See for instance: Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II*; Jennifer S. Light, *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

²⁹ See: Antoine Picon, *Les saint-simoniens: Raison, imaginaire et utopie* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

³⁰ The Commissariat du Plan, which prepared four-year national plans after the success of the Plan Monnet, was a key institution for adherents of this view. See: Gabrielle Hecht, “Planning a Technological Nation: Systems Thinking and the Politics of National Identity in Postwar France,” in *Systems, Experts and Computers: The Systems Approach in Management and Engineering*, ed. Agatha C. Hughes and Thomas P. Hughes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

³¹ See: Alain Drouard, *Le Développement des sciences sociales en France au tournant des années soixante* (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique / Institut d’histoire du temps présent, 1983); Alain Drouard, “Réflexions sur une chronologie: Le développement des sciences sociales en France de 1945 à la fin des années soixante,” *Revue française de sociologie* 23, no. 1 (1982): 55-85.

knowledge included first of all economic science and demography, but increasingly also “softer,” more humanities-based disciplines like geography and sociology. National planning, initially only economic but increasingly all-encompassing, gradually engaged these “humanist” “sciences.” It was not that they espoused science and technology to dissolve politics, but rather that they aspired to a form of scientificity modeled on that of the hard sciences. While some social scientists overtly espoused political ideologies, the view that social science - including sociology - constituted a neutral form of expertise that could advance political decision-making, if not overcome politics, was a common one. The boundaries between technocracy and humanism were thus blurred at best.³²

In the realm of housing and urban planning, this blurring was perhaps most pronounced.³³ Experts within the Ministry of Construction increasingly endorsed the use of social scientific methods to shape their policies. Initially they prioritized economic and demographic methods, but the domain of inquiry increasingly believed to offer legitimate knowledge about the realm of the user was sociology. The construction of some of the first *grands ensembles* in the mid-1950s was in fact already accompanied by sociological inquiry, both independent and commissioned by the government. The sociologist Chombart de Lauwe was the absolute pioneer of this new field, which would slowly grow up alongside urbanism. Despite initial hesitations, France’s strong centralized state apparatus channeled such sociological research into its urban policies over the next decade.

Sociology is to be understood here not only as a purely academic discipline, but as a domain of expertise that far exceeds the initially weak and relatively uninstitutionalized discourse of academic sociologists at this time.³⁴ What in postwar France was labeled sociology constituted a dispersed realm of knowledge production that did not only include academic research, but also

³² My archival research complicates Gabrielle Hecht’s argument of a clear opposition between technocrats and humanists during the 1950s and 1960s - the former attempting to elude politics and the latter calling for its autonomy. See: Hecht, "Planning a Technological Nation: Systems Thinking and the Politics of National Identity in Postwar France," 138.

³³ On the nature of expertise in French urbanism during this period, see: Gilles Verpraet, *Les professionnels de l'urbanisme: Socio-histoire des systèmes professionnels de l'urbanisme* (Paris: Economica / Anthropos, 2005); Claude, *Faire la ville: Les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle*; Gilles Massardier, *Expertise et aménagement du territoire: L'Etat savant* (Paris: Harmattan, 1996); Thoenig, *L'ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées*.

³⁴ Michel Amiot has conceived of urban sociology as its own academic discourse with an intellectual avant-garde of figures like Maurice Halbwachs, Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe and Henri Lefebvre, who are relatively autonomous of the state and can thus be critical of its actions. While he has acknowledged that state planning became central to the discipline of urban sociology in France, my study reveals urban sociology less as an autonomous discipline safely within the walls of academia, but instead as an activity of knowledge production that is highly dispersed in postwar French society. Rather than “against the State,” I therefore understand it as within and beyond the state. Even those most critical of French state planning, like Manuel Castells, have received financial support from the state and have thus legitimated its very existence to a certain extent. Urban sociology is a domain of inquiry that grew up alongside postwar urbanism, and thus we need to take into account the “demand” side of intellectual production as well - particularly government demand for sociological expertise geared towards policy-making. Alain Drouard has emphasized the importance of more “mainstream” sociological activities that include the massive amounts of studies and surveys commissioned by the state, the development of new institutions and firms outside of the university, and the enormous growth of research activity after 1958. Pierre Lassave has also conceived of the field of knowledge production as situated in between applied versus critical research, and in between professional and academic pursuit. See: Michel Amiot, *Contre l'Etat, les sociologues: Eléments pour une histoire de la sociologie urbaine en France, 1900-1980* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1986); Drouard, *Le Développement des sciences sociales en France au tournant des années soixante*; Drouard, "Réflexions sur une chronologie: Le développement des sciences sociales en France de 1945 à la fin des années soixante."; Pierre Lassave, *Les sociologues et la recherche urbaine dans la France contemporaine* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997).

popular studies, critical writing, and most importantly, a huge mass of government-commissioned studies. The latter was conducted by a burgeoning sector of semi-public and private *bureaux d'études*, research institutes and consultancy firms that had emerged in response to growing government demand for research after 1958.³⁵ As a result of this expertise, many *grand ensemble* projects functioned as life-sized laboratories under the scrutiny of social scientific experts. These projects were de facto experimental, not in the sense that they were innovative or radical, but in that their built form embodied hypotheses about everyday life and gave rise to a process of testing, evaluating and adapting. The *grands ensembles* were continually tweaked and improved in subsequent projects, often on the basis of sociological ideas and observations of existing projects. Sociological expertise thus assumed a crucial role of mediation between what policy-makers, developers and architects produced in their offices, and what happened “on the ground,” in everyday life.

While state intervention subjected everyday life to rationalization, modernization and reform at a veritably unprecedented scale, sociologists discovered in it a new theoretical concept. Planners' far-reaching grasp on everyday life - evinced by outcries of boredom in the new “bedroom suburbs” - was accompanied by a conceptual revolution of what this realm was and could be. Henri Lefebvre, in his 1947 *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, had been one of the first to rescue the everyday from oblivion, neglect, and dismissal.³⁶ In the 1958 re-edition of this work, the author remarked the growing interest of a new generation of scholars in everyday life.³⁷ Over the following decades, this generation would turn it into a prominent domain of sociological investigation. To many of them, the stakes were fundamentally ambivalent: while everyday life was victim to the alienating forces of capitalism and bureaucracy, and - following the fervent critiques of Guy Debord - to a consumer society that colonized it, it also harbored the seeds of change because critique could open it up to the real, the meaningful, and the authentic.³⁸

Meanwhile, architects had not remained at the sidelines. For an international avant-garde of architects and artists, everyday life had become a crucial vehicle to reinvigorate modernism for

³⁵ Market research - the logical form of expertise in a private housing market like that of the United States - would remain relatively marginal in France until the 1970s. Its methods and approach nevertheless infiltrated some of the research commissioned for policy-making.

³⁶ Lefebvre was critical of philosophers like Heidegger who associated “*Alltäglichkeit*” with gossip, inauthenticity, banality, in short, a lack of meaning and veritable existence. See Michel Trebitsch's preface in: Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London/New York: Verso, 1991). See also: Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne: 1 Introduction* (Paris: L'Arche, 1958), 13.

³⁸ Lefebvre wrote a series of three books about the everyday: Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1947); Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne: 1 Introduction*; Henri Lefebvre, *De la modernité au modernisme: Pour une métaphilosophie du quotidien (vol 3)* (Paris: L'Arche, 1981). On the theme of the everyday, he also wrote: Lefebvre, *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*. For a contextualization of Lefebvre's notion of the everyday, and the influence of other French intellectuals, see: Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. See also: Mary McLeod, “Henri Lefebvre's Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction,” in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997).

the postwar world. While the figure of the user had remained implicit in interwar modernism,³⁹ these architects expanded their views of functionalism and aimed to incorporate the everyday lifeworld of the user directly into the architectural conception. The 1953 *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne* meeting in Aix-en-Provence, which signified the birth of Team X, was a landmark in this project, in which sociology was heralded as a crucial partner. French urbanism however, remained shielded from this epistemological revolution until well into the 1960s.

In France, it was not Team X, but the centralized state apparatus which figured as the meeting ground for sociology, architecture, and urbanism. From the mid-1960s on then, work in multidisciplinary planning teams - most importantly for the *villes nouvelles* - allowed French architects and state planners to channel social and sociological critiques into new kinds of urbanism, meant as a clear alternative to the *grands ensembles*. After the events of 1968, which radically “re-intellectualized” French architectural culture, sociological ideas like Lefebvre’s notions of everyday life, appropriation, and the right to the city, became the staple references. Taken up by young collaborative architecture offices like the *Atelier de Montrouge* and *Atelier d’urbanisme et d’architecture* as well as younger state administrators sensitized by 1968, sociology was thus at once the main source of social critiques of urbanism and instrument in the establishment of new urban models.

Participation, or Power Beyond Politics

Despite sociologists’ loud proclamations after 1968 that urbanism was essentially political and not just art or technique, sociological expertise - more than political participation - became further entrenched in urbanism. Inhabitants were thus increasingly spoken for not by organizations aiming to *politically* represent them - local inhabitant associations and national civil society organizations - but also by the neutral, “apolitical” studies by sociologists and other state-sponsored experts. This irony led Kristin Ross to ask rhetorically: “how did a mass movement that sought above all, in my view, to contest the domain of the expert, to disrupt the system of naturalized spheres of competence (especially the sphere of specialized politics), become translated in the years that followed into little more than a “knowledge” of ’68, on the basis of which a whole generation of self-proclaimed experts and authorities could then assert their expertise?”⁴⁰ During the presidency of Giscard d’Estaing (1974-1981), the notions of user participation and quality of life would become a central preoccupation in state planning, architectural culture, and urban policies. Yet, these concerns were built upon a mindset that had been developing for two decades, originating in what continues to be seen as the heyday of technocratic France.

³⁹ Only exceptional projects like Le Corbusier’s Plan Obus had provided a more direct architectural expression to the unpredictable realm of use. On the Plan Obus, see Chapter 6, “The Crisis of Utopia: Le Corbusier at Algiers” in: Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 125-49. On a more theoretical level, Daniel Pinson has already shown how the notions of use and the user in architecture did not emerge with postmodernism in the 1970s, but rather culminated during this period as the result of concerns long present in modern architecture. See: Daniel Pinson, *Usage et architecture* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1993).

⁴⁰ Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6-7.

If this study eludes the intricacies of French politics and the political complexities of local implementation, it does so because it aims to construct an account of power in postwar French city-building that goes beyond party politics. The study that follows thus places the emergence of participation in France in a larger cultural shift that confounds clear distinctions between (right-wing) authoritarian planning and (left-wing) citizen participation. The fact that the development of urbanism crosses France's complex political spectrum discredits such an facile opposition. In terms of urbanism Left and Right were far from being in overall consensus. Nevertheless, the *grands ensembles* and the *villes nouvelles* were supported by both sides of the spectrum, be it in different ways and for different reasons. What for the Right was a matter of economic rationality and national pride, was often an issue of affordable housing and social solidarity to the Left.

At the level of the national government, the big decisions were made by centrist and rightwing politicians, in particular after 1958 with the arrival of De Gaulle, for whom participation was a matter of patriotism at most. At the same time, the urban policies of this government were developed by an elite of non-elected officials with a left-leaning political agenda, often socialist or social catholics, and with relative openness towards social critique. On the local government level, the *grands ensembles* were enthusiastically received by communist and socialist mayors while conservative municipalities tended to resist them. The concentration of modern housing projects in the "Red suburbs" of Paris is no accident in this respect.⁴¹ Many large-scale housing and urban projects however were still decided in Paris. The *villes nouvelles* program was one such unmistakably Gaullist invention, drawn up irrespective of local demands. Nevertheless, it was exactly in these new town projects that sociology - surely more on the political left than on the right - inspired various new town planning teams whose political leanings were far from socialist. The architects they commissioned included both young offices, many of which had explicitly (neo-)communist affiliations, and an older conservative generation of Beaux-Arts trained architects.

Unsurprisingly, participation and lifestyle, shared decision-making and "giving consumers what they want," were often conflated in French urbanism during the late 1960s and 1970s. Rather than a shift from "top-down" to "bottom-up" planning therefore, this study shows how the user emerged not just from "the beach underneath the paving stones," but as a result of the policies of a centralized state and the dynamics of a postwar consumer society in which power also meant *purchasing power*.⁴² The latter constituted emerging forms of agency rarely acknowledged yet often of greater concrete importance than those "given" by political decree. The overwhelming proliferation of the single family home, when a newly prosperous middle-class could afford it from the mid-1960s onwards, was an important reminder to French planners in this respect.

While this study emphasizes continuities in discourse and practice from the 1950s through to the 1970s and their importance for understanding the period that followed, it accepts the mid-1970s as a relative break. The oil crisis of 1973 was only the most tangible sign of a global economic restructuring that would mean the end of the welfare state's "golden age" in France. The Guichard bill of 1973 was the official death knell for the *grands ensembles*, which signified the

⁴¹ See: Tyler Stovall, "French Communism and Suburban Development: The Rise of the Paris Red Belt," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 3 (1985): 435-53.

⁴² The phrase "sous les pavés, la plage" was one of the famous slogans of May 1968.

official abandonment of modern urbanism as it had guided a rapidly urbanizing and modernizing France. The following years would signify the turn towards postmodernism in French urban thinking, marked by the neo-traditional form and “urban architecture” of a recently rejuvenated architectural avant-garde. Despite this apparent regime shift, the concept of the user as active participant and life-style consumer - developed during the 1960s - would remain key in what would later be coined the neo-liberal turn. Seemingly emerged from of the ashes of a withering welfare state, this user was at best emancipated from a welfare state now in crisis, but one that had given birth to it decades before. The importance of this study is therefore to historicize this “neo-liberal user” by analyzing its making *during* the “golden age” of the welfare state.

The qualitative shift it examines is situated in what Marianne Dekoven has called the “long sixties:”⁴³ the period between the late 1950s and early 1970s that is usually described as one of prosperity and relative stability, at least within the guarded borders of the French metropole. The increasing entanglement of welfare and consumer culture during this period, so this study argues, is what shaped the category of the user in modern urbanism. This category shifted from a passive receiver of mass provisions to an active, autonomous participant and distinguishing consumer. This change was paralleled by a shift in production: the gradual demise of a regime of mass production based on the uniform consumption of material goods, and the gradual diversification of production and services geared towards the consumption of lifestyle. The contrast between the mass urbanism of the first *grands ensembles* during the second half of the 1950s, and the state-led branding of the *villes nouvelles* as sites of a new urban lifestyle little more than a decade later, exemplifies this shift.

In France and many other European countries, this evolution took place under the aegis of a centralized state - a liberalizing one, but by no means a retreating one. It thus predated the regime of flexible accumulation and its concomitant postmodern turn described by Harvey and others.⁴⁴ Yet as a mode of production and consumption, it was also clearly distinct from the Fordist one, which the same scholars argue lasted until the mid-1970s.⁴⁵ To a certain extent, this evolution could be seen as simply following the logic of postwar economic expansion. In an increasingly prosperous France, individual families amassed savings that allowed them to act as middle-class consumers on the housing market. For entrepreneurs, after mass market saturation, it was only a logical step to increase market segmentation in order to create new, diversified needs.⁴⁶

⁴³ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, UK / Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989).

⁴⁵ The signs of another logic, a post-industrial post-Fordist one, appeared rather at what Harvey argued was the height of the Fordist regime. This is in contrast with the view of regulation theorists, who theorize transition from one solid regime to the next. See: *Ibid.* For the regulation school view, see: Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (London: NLB, 1979).

⁴⁶ Liz Cohen has described an evolution from mass market to the paradigm of the market segmentation in 1960s America, see: Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*.

At the same time, and that is what this study focuses on, the evolution was facilitated by a dynamic interplay between social critique and state action. Contrary to the narrative of initial embrace and subsequent vilification, critiques of state-led urbanism ran parallel to its historic development. While they did much to overcome the housing shortage, and were celebrated as the advent of modern living and social progress, the *grands ensembles* were subject to critique from day one. Journalists reported public criticism, local associations and national civil society organizations transmitted inhabitants' discontents, and most importantly, sociologists formulated critiques and recommendations based on their surveys and scrutiny of inhabitants, whose concerns found legitimacy in their neutral expertise. Beginning in 1958, with what Annie Fourcaut has called the "schizophrenic years" of Pierre Sudreau's tenure as Minister of Construction,⁴⁷ the government took an active interest in these critiques and began to internalize them. State administrators commissioned studies in order to understand and overcome what they saw as potential resistance to benevolent modernization. At the same time, they took such critiques at heart in order to veritably improve and "humanize" people's experience of this process. This made the centralized state not only a self-justifying, but also a self-criticizing institution. During the 1960s, such criticism led to a continual tweaking of urbanist doctrine, but it was only after the social contestation of May 1968 that profound changes were deemed necessary. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have demonstrated how certain critiques of capitalism in the 1960s - focused on the alienation of everyday life, the lack of participation, freedom and creativity - were subsequently harnessed in the development of new capitalist strategies.⁴⁸ Such critiques, which were perhaps first voiced by the Situationists in the early 1960s and denounced the government's share in capitalist development, were rapidly recuperated after 1968 by the state itself. This is what informed new user-oriented approaches in urbanism during the early 1970s.

Despite the potentials of critique, these new approaches nevertheless failed to deal with the basic logic of uneven development, which would ultimately shape France's still ongoing suburban crisis. While the efforts to satisfy the user by promoting new middle-class urban lifestyles intensified in the *villes nouvelles* program, increasing numbers of middle class families moved out of the *grands ensembles*, leaving large swaths of older, less desirable housing gradually to the immigrant poor.⁴⁹

What Follows

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. The first of three main parts, "Mass Production..." focuses on the development of mass housing production between the early 1950s and the mid-1960s.

⁴⁷ See: Annie Fourcaut, "Trois discours, une politique?," *Urbanisme*, no. 322 (2002): 39-45. Pierre Sudreau was Minister of Construction between 1958 and 1962.

⁴⁸ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999). See also the critiques of Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre, as well as the more popular cultural expressions of it in the work of Georges Perec and the films of Jacques Tati.

⁴⁹ For a social geographic account of this shift, see: Jacques Barou, *La place du pauvre: Histoire et géographie sociale de l'habitat HLM* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992).

In the first chapter, “Epistemologies of the User,” I look at how the turn to mass housing production in the mid-1950 brought about a novel way of dealing with questions of use and the user. The shift from Reconstruction to the mass housing of the *grands ensembles* was only possible thanks to a streamlining of production in which the state took on a more indirect, yet at once more central role. Housing slowly moved away from the realm of social reform to become a general good provided - at least in principle - by a rational, modernizing welfare state. This entailed a novel relationship between the state and the inhabitant: the latter was now understood as a universal user, positioned ambiguously in the realms of social citizenship and private consumption. On the one hand, the larger social project of which mass housing production was a part implied a standardized, modern way of living based on the middle-class nuclear family. On the other hand, the accompanying process of architectural standardization and normalization prompted the question, increasingly prominent, of how to adapt housing to perceived user needs. Bringing together state administrators, leaders of civil society organizations, architects, and sociologists - with the centralized state as primary platform - the preoccupation with the user began to organize conception and action as much as research and reflection. The imperative of mass housing thus generated a new field of knowledge production which established the user as a novel category, both for understanding and designing the built environment.

The second chapter, “*Équipement and animation*,” examines planners’ efforts to improve the mass urbanism of the *grands ensembles*. By the turn of the decade these had become the quintessential product of state-led urban development and would remain so throughout the 1960s. Incited by journalists, social scientists and policy makers alike who accused them of causing social ills - from youth delinquency to depression amongst housewives - the first strategy was to equip them with a varied program of collective facilities or *équipement collectif*, a mix of state provisions, private amenities and welfare programs. These aimed to transform housing estates into a healthy, vibrant neighborhoods. While planners’ doctrine of a universal “grid of facilities” transformed the institutions of community life into a bureaucratic series of requirements, its accompanying research projects instigated attempts which, under the banner of *animation*, centered increasingly on efforts to encourage neighborhood liveliness. This broadening of state responsibility transformed what it meant to be a user - from a passive beneficiary of services to an active participant in local social life facilitated by the centralized state - and informed the continual transformation of urban design of the *grands ensembles*.

The second part of the dissertation, “... Mass Consumption?” examines how, during the long sixties, the “consumption” of mass housing and urbanism informed policy and subsequent production.

Chapter three, “The Expertise of Participation” explores inhabitant activism in the *grands ensembles* and its impact on the course of French urbanism. Negotiations between inhabitant associations, the developer, the centralized state, and the municipal government were shaped by the ambivalence of the *grands ensembles* between housing provision and city building. With Sarcelles as a primary case study, the chapter shows how such negotiations shifted from an isolated question of participation in the management of housing to a contextual question of urban politics. Various local and national inhabitant associations instigated a debate in which state officials, national-level organizations and social scientists took part. This led to new participatory procedures of planning and management in a limited number of housing projects. Fueled by

more radical critiques and demands around 1968, these initiatives led experts to acknowledge the user as a *political* actor, embedded in local social life. Yet at the same time, exceptional instances of political mobilization in response to large-scale urbanism - like in Sarcelles and Grenoble - were harnessed as “good practice” in national-level attempts to develop an alternative, participatory urbanism. Rather than a *direct* participation of inhabitants, this entailed foremost the intensified involvement of experts - ambivalently positioned between civil society and the state - and consequently, the further institutionalization of user-oriented expertise in planning.

The fourth chapter, “Lifestyle and Critique” examines the shift in urban thinking embodied by France’s official new town project from the mid-1960s onwards. Housing provision, on its own, had proven inadequate; needed now were veritably new cities that could at once accommodate for massive urban growth, stimulate regional economic development and remedy France’s problem-ridden suburbs. Launched as an official critique of and response to the policy of the *grands ensembles*, the *villes nouvelles* were the product of a novel mindset. Planning, still indebted to zoning and hygienicism, opened up to a different kind of modernism, more directly focused on the modern consumer who was empowered by individual mobility and the right of choice in an increasingly dynamic housing market. Planning methods changed accordingly: the *tabula rasa* master plan was replaced by large-scale and flexible programming of functions in already built-up suburban areas. Such an approach required the collaboration of architects, planners, geographers, and sociologists in multi-disciplinary planning teams, closely monitored by the centralized state. The French new town project thus precipitated the reorganization of urban expertise during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fed by an architectural culture enthralled by sociology and social critique and predicated on the death of the Beaux-Arts system, these projects were also spurred by economic liberalization. Mixing branding and marketing with participation, consultation, and sociological studies, they shaped the urban imaginary of new town planning as the creation of a novel urban lifestyle.

The final part of the dissertation, “Building for the user,” looks at new architecture and urbanism during the first half of the 1970s as it was driven by concerns about the user. In the wake of 1968 French social critique was accompanied by a growing involvement of sociology in planning and engendered an ethos centered on the user. This new approach informed architectural experiments - most of them part of the *villes nouvelles* project - that can be understood as the apogee of French welfare state modernism.

Chapter five, “Megastructures in Denial,” looks at the efforts to recreate urbanity in the suburbs, converging in the construction of new urban centers in the first half of the 1970s. Focusing primarily on the project of Evry, the chapter examines how these centers were shaped by the confluence of three particular intentions. First, they were the product of a late modernism that fostered ambitions for an expanded role of architecture to shape a new “total” human environment, as much as they were inspired by the historic city center. Second, planners were faced with the proliferation of US-inspired shopping malls, and wanted to channel their success in generating popular density and liveliness in the often-dreary French suburbs into their own development. And third, the design of these centers was indebted to the idea of “*équipement intégré*,” a type of state-sponsored community facility that had emerged in the late 1960s by integrating previously disconnected socio-cultural activities and that embodied vague ambitions of social democratization and cultural participation. The programmatic combination of such

state-sponsored community services with contemporary shopping found an architectural expression in a new megastructural yet user-oriented environment that would know a short-lived but remarkable success.

The sixth and final chapter, “The Complexity of Dwelling” examines state-sponsored experimentation with alternative housing types during the first half of the 1970s. Despite its encouragement of single-family home developments and denunciation of the *grands ensembles*, the state did not give up on collective housing. Through programs, subsidies and commissions, it encouraged an architectural production that combined industrialized construction systems with formal complexity, and was cast as a vehicle in the transfer of power from producer to user. Under the banner of *habitat évolutive* or progressively changeable dwelling, their architectural principles of modularity and flexibility were to facilitate a new kind of living environment, open to transformation by its inhabitants. *Habitat intermédiaire*, another kind of typological innovation, focused on overcoming the opposition between individual and collective housing. Often inspired by a modernist re-interpretation of the (mediterranean) vernacular, such projects featured large apartments with room-sized terraces meant to attract the middle class. Architectural complexity was believed to be crucial in creating a new mode of dwelling and in some cases, a socially-mixed urban environment. Despite their ambitions to curb social segregation, and to sell collective housing to a French public mesmerized by the suburban lawn, these experiments ultimately failed to counter the problematic residential mobility patterns in which many large collective housing projects spiraled downwards, and the suburban home became the norm for the decades to come.

Chapter 1: The Epistemology of the User

In 1947, in a country paralyzed by the trauma of war, the *Institut national d'études démographiques* (INED) or National Institute of Demographic Studies published a public opinion survey that was pioneering in its kind for France.⁵⁰ Using extensive polling techniques imported from the United States, the survey aimed to reveal the preferences of the French with regards to housing.⁵¹ Its results might not be surprising to us today, but bewildered observers of the housing boom that would shape the following decades: "The preference of the French for individual homes, rather than apartments in collective housing, is obvious. In fact, nine out of ten in small towns, more than three quarters in towns of more than 30.000 inhabitants, and - what might be surprising by the way - more than half in Paris, prefer this kind of dwelling."⁵² In their conclusion, the authors of the survey emphasized that surveys of this type were lacking in France but had already taken place in other European countries, where experts were well aware of their usefulness for shaping future housing policy and urban design. They hoped therefore that the survey would be a guide to the technical experts in charge of rebuilding France.

That task was colossal. One in five buildings had been damaged during the war, and France's existing housing stock dated largely from before 1914. In 1946, 48 percent of French homes lacked running water, 80 percent did not have an indoor toilet, and no less than 95 percent was short of a shower or bathtub within the unit.⁵³ To those in charge, the gravity of the situation offered unprecedented opportunity and legitimized extreme measures.

A decade later, the road taken was abundantly clear. In response to the acute housing shortage, large-scale collective housing blocks with comfortably equipped apartments had begun to spring up like mushrooms all over the country, eliciting enthusiasm as much as public critique. In 1959, of the 320.000 homes built that year, more than 90 percent was state-aided and the vast majority was in the form of collective housing.⁵⁴ The *grands ensembles*, large-scale areas of modern

⁵⁰ Alain Girard, *Une enquête par sondages: Désirs des Français en matière d'habitation urbaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France / Institut national d'études démographiques (INED), 1947).

⁵¹ The study consulted, by means of extensive questionnaires, 2461 individuals in French cities larger than 20.000 inhabitants. It was done in 1945 by the predecessor of the *Institut national d'études démographiques* (INED), the *Fondation française pour l'étude des problèmes humains* directed by Alfred Sauvy.

⁵² "La préférence des Français pour les maisons individuelles, plutôt que pour les appartements dans des immeubles collectifs est patente. En effet, les 9/10 dans les petites villes, plus des trois quarts dans toutes les villes de province de plus de 30.000 habitants, et à Paris même, ce qui pourrait surprendre davantage, plus de la moitié, préfèrent ce mode d'habitation." in: *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵³ François Clanché and Anne-Marie Fribourg, "Evolution des politiques du logement," in *Logement et habitat: L'état des savoirs*, ed. Marion Segaud, Catherine Bonvalet, and Jacques Brun (Paris: La Découverte, 1998), 85.

⁵⁴ See: *Annuaire rétrospectif de la France, Séries longues, 1948-1988*, (Paris: INSEE, 1990). For around 90 percent of the more than 320,000 new units built, the state was involved in financing: either directly by the Ministry, in the form of social housing (rental or purchase), or through state subsidies and loans. The number of privately financed dwellings was only 23,200. See: "Le financement de la construction," Ministère de la construction, 1962-63 (CAC 19910319/011).

collective housing in consolidated areas most often at the periphery of existing cities, had become the norm for new housing.⁵⁵

That same year, the government commissioned a large-scale public survey that could be seen as a peculiarly delayed follow-up to the 1947 one. When Pierre Sudreau became Minister of Construction under Charles de Gaulle in the newly established Fifth Republic in 1958, one of his main goals was to improve state-aided housing production. With the help of Jeanne Picard, who had a long career in representing working-class families, he organized a large survey of French households and a public consultation of national women's associations. Their aim was to reveal inhabitants' dissatisfactions about their new homes as well as their suggestions for improvement. These informed the design of a new ideal dwelling unit, the "referendum apartment."⁵⁶ Designed on the basis of the survey by the Ministry's in-house architect, Marcel Roux, the prototype was exhibited as a life-sized model home at the popular *Salon des Arts Ménagers* that year and elicited an overwhelming amount of attention from the French public. The model apartment was a proud statement about the comforts of modern French family life and the national standard of living. But by bringing together commercial builders, provincial housewives, and Prix de Rome architects, the state-led initiative was meant first and foremost to "adjust mass housing to people's needs and aspirations" (figure 1.1).⁵⁷

This explicit goal, and the well-known findings of the 1947 poll, did not stop the government from imposing the *grands ensembles* as the sole policy for urban development. They were seen as the logical and inevitable outcome of social modernization and national planning. Sudreau was actually the main decision-maker behind the ZUP (*zones à urbaniser par priorité*)⁵⁸ legislation that would facilitate their proliferation all over France. Shaped by convictions about modernity, rationality, and progress, the government's purview was to improve mass collective housing without questioning it as a basic option. By proposing an ideal apartment type that would appeal to the average French nuclear household, the "referendum apartment" actually further endorsed the standardization set in motion by mass production.

⁵⁵ The term *grand ensemble* was first used by Maurice Rotival in a 1935 article, and subsequently employed by Adrien Spinetta in a 1953 article. The term was never used in official legislation until the 1973 Guichard bill that halted their construction, and it never completely replaced other terms like *nouvel ensemble urbain*, *unité de voisinage*, *ville neuve*, *ville nouvelle*, *cité neuve*, and so on. See: Maurice Rotival, "Les grands ensembles: Problème général et implantation des cités," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 1, no. 6 (1935): 57; Adrien Spinetta, "Les grands ensembles pensés pour l'homme," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 46 (1953): 24-35. On the vague definition of the *grand ensemble*, see: Christine Mengin, "La solution des grands ensembles," *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 64(1999): 105-11; Annie Fourcaut and Loïc Vadelorge, eds., *Cahiers de l'IHTP (Institut d'histoire du temps présent) no. 17, Villes nouvelles et grands ensembles* (2006).

⁵⁶ See: "L'appartement référendum," *Techniques et Architecture* 19, no. 2 (1959): 114-18.

⁵⁷ See: Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975", 229-39; Newsome, "The Struggle for a Voice in the City: The Development of Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in France, 1940-1968", 278-307. Both authors tend to emphasize the participatory aspect of this initiative.

⁵⁸ Later referred to as *zones à urbaniser en priorité*.

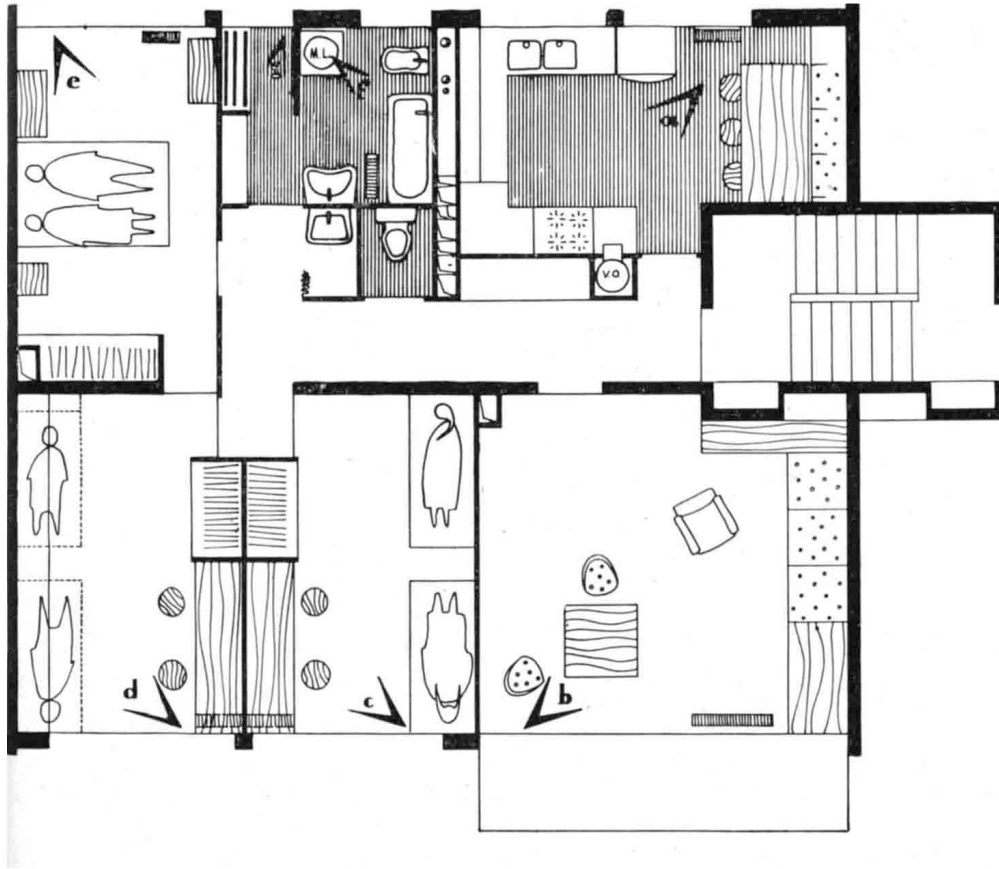


Figure 1.1: The referendum apartment of 1959 designed by Marcel Roux on the basis of surveys organized by Jeanne Picard for the Ministry of Construction (Source: “L’appartement référendum” in: *Techniques et Architecture* (19)2 (1959): 117). The apartment’s size exceeded social housing norms at the time. One of its key features was the eat-in kitchen, a popular preference in France but discouraged by housing experts.

Nonetheless, the initiative exemplified a more general trend, namely, the need to know - whether through sociological research, opinion poll, or marketing study - inhabitants’ needs and desires in the realm of housing. The evaluation of what was being built was no longer in the hands of professionals only; its success or failure was now also defined by inhabitants, albeit indirectly, through experts’ evaluations of their opinions and the way they inhabited the homes provided for them. Architects initially contested the validity of users’ claims, as they threatened the expertise that was at the heart of their profession. Whether the initiative was a hypocritical propaganda stunt or sign of a real transfer of power to the inhabitant, it made one thing self-evident: that the user had become a central concern in the production of mass housing.

1. Streamlining Production

France came out of World War II with a housing shortage that was both acute and longstanding. Contrary to popular perception, it was not only caused by wartime destruction, but also by severe lack of development during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁹ Private housing development had been sluggish for decades, and had now practically come to a halt. Stringent rent control laws had obstructed a revival, particularly in the lower segments of the housing market where needs were most dire. Scarcity was further exacerbated by population growth in the immediate postwar years. The chaotic pace of urban growth was manifested in the emergence of *bidonvilles* or shantytowns on the urban periphery - most notoriously those of Nanterre in the suburbs of Paris.⁶⁰

Surprisingly, and despite the destitution, France initially lacked Britain's or Germany's commitment to develop mass housing or to build entirely new towns.⁶¹ Emergency measures like the confiscation of unoccupied homes, loans and training programs for the construction industry, and forced rent increases to encourage private development had little direct impact on the situation: by 1950, only 70 000 new homes were built - a small number considering the pressing need at the time and the yearly production of over 500 000 units a decade later.⁶² No large-scale public debate about housing took place in the immediate postwar years. In contrast to the emphasis on mass housing in architecture culture internationally, French architects and urban planners were surprisingly mute about the issue. The focus was instead on the clean-up of war-

⁵⁹ Michel Lescure traces the crisis of the French housing market as far back as the 1880s and attributes the chronic shortage of housing in the period 1914-1940 primarily to the lack of profitability: stringent rent control laws and the difficulties of financing housing discouraged speculation and development, a situation that struck in particular the lower echelons of the market. Housing construction was concentrated in the bourgeois and luxury segments of the market. Yet this crisis of the real estate market went hand in hand with a remarkably active construction sector. Such a paradox is first of all explained by the exponential rise in the construction of (mainly self-built) lower-middle class single-family homes in the suburbs of many French cities, a phenomenon described by Annie Fourcaut, and only secondly by the rise of a social housing market, as can be seen for example the housing projects on the old fortifications of Paris. In general, as Louis Houdeville remarks, there was almost no public debate about housing during the interwar period despite the aggravating housing shortage. Lescure estimates the number of war-damaged homes after WWII around 550 000 (p. 44). Houdeville, on the other hand, speaks about two million homes (p. 21). See: Michel Lescure, *Histoire d'une filière: Immobilier et bâtiment en France, 1820-1980* (Paris: Hatier, 1982); Annie Fourcaut, *La banlieue en morceaux: La crise des lotissements défectueux en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Grâne, 2000); Louis Houdeville, "Sur quelques raisons de la crise du logement," *Cahiers du GRMF (Groupement de Recherche sur les Mouvements Familiaux)* 7 (1992).

⁶⁰ See the study: Monique Hervo and Marie-Ange Charras, *Bidonvilles* (Paris: Maspéro, 1971).

⁶¹ This fact was frequently observed in the French press. See for instance: "La construction en France et à l'étranger," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 44(1952): 21. In Britain the first decade after the war saw a massive rise in housing construction, despite the fact that this was largely according to interwar models; 1954 would nevertheless also constitute a watershed in Britain, inaugurating a move towards more large-scale mass housing schemes. See: Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972*.

⁶² See: Newsome, "The Struggle for a Voice in the City: The Development of Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in France, 1940-1968", 114-83; Gérard Dupont, "Evolution de la construction et de l'urbanisme depuis 1950," *Urbanisme* 80, no. (Theme: Bilan et objectifs) (1963), 33.

damaged areas, the reconstruction of historic town centers and the remaking of national infrastructure.⁶³

National planning was the primary way through which France addressed reconstruction and economic development after the war. Of course, France was hardly alone in this orientation. What held Europe together in the immediate postwar decades was an incontrovertible faith in planning. The “political religion of post-war Europe” as Tony Judt has called it,⁶⁴ planning was less derived from the Soviet Union, than based on earlier ideas about liberal reformism, “organized capitalism”⁶⁵ and Keynesianism, and inspired by the experiences of fascist and wartime planning. While this mentality was dominant in many European nations during this time, France’s planning ideology proved particularly strong. As Britain developed an international reputation in welfare reform, France became a world expert in supply-side economic planning aimed at stable, long-term growth.⁶⁶

French planning was guided by a longstanding tradition of political thought advocating strong leadership in the form of neutral expertise. This view, which had roots in Saint-Simonianism, had been further developed during the interwar period, and was enthusiastically received by modern architects and planners like Le Corbusier.⁶⁷ Nourished by the crisis of parliamentary politics during the 1930s, it reigned supreme during the wartime government of Vichy. Its political elite, strengthened in their views by the emergencies of war, promoted authoritarian decision-making and political *dirigisme* guided by science and technology. This group of “techniciens” or “technocrates”, for which Raoul Dautry became the paragon, corroborated the conviction that rational, centralized planning by state experts was the incontestable instrument to attain national progress and to transcend the deadlock of national and local politics.⁶⁸ The network of the *Corps des Ponts et Chaussées*, France’s elite class of government engineers, systematically installed locally over France but internally hierarchical and heavily centralized in its operations, was at the basis of how the centralized state would operate over the national territory during the following

⁶³ See: Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique*. Also state planners were surprisingly discrete about housing, see: Frédérique Boucher, "Les planificateurs et le logement (1942-1952)," *Cahiers de l'IHTP (Institut d'histoire du temps présent)* 5(1985). Rudolph emphasizes the attempts of the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism during the Reconstruction period to imagine and build modern homes. Quantitatively however, these were not significant when compared to the mass housing that would follow. See: Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975".

⁶⁴ Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, 67.

⁶⁵ This term was first used by Rudolf Hilferding during WWI. See: Kenneth D. Barkin, "Organized Capitalism," *Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 1 (1975): 125-29.

⁶⁶ Anthony Sutcliffe, *An Economic and Social History of Western Europe since 1945* (London / New York: Longman, 1996), 40-52.

⁶⁷ See: Picon, *Les saint-simoniens: Raison, imaginaire et utopie*; Charissa Terranova, "French State Vernacular: Les grands ensembles and Non-conformist Modernism, 1930-1973" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2004); Mary McLeod, "Architecture of Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy and Social Change," *Art Journal* 43, no. 2 (1983).

⁶⁸ See: Rémi Baudouï, *Raoul Dautry, 1880-1951: Le technocrate de la République* (Paris: Balland, 1992); Patrice Noviant, Bruno Vayssière, and Rémi Baudouï, "Le territoire de l'Équipement," in *Dossiers et documents IFA: Les trois reconstructions 1919-1940-1945* (Paris: Institut français d'architecture, 1983).

decades.⁶⁹ Vichy's preference for engineers would only exacerbate the century-old competition between architects and engineers in France.⁷⁰

While they distanced themselves from Vichy, the postwar governments of the Fourth and Fifth Republic continued to promote the regime's faith in planning or *planification*, which was fundamentally a faith in the centralized state and in its superiority to direct economic and social affairs. The remarkably unscathed confidence in science and technology after the Second World War allowed a range of experts to legitimate themselves at the level of national policy-making. While the country was not simply ruled by technocracy, as some critics claimed, technical expertise nevertheless had a particularly strong appeal within French political circles, transcending the different political camps.⁷¹ In the rather unstable political climate of the first postwar decade - eight successive governments were formed in the first five years of the newly established Fourth Republic - a powerful class of civil servants assured continuity in policy.⁷² Many of them had stayed on from the Vichy government and had received quick pardons for wartime collaboration. They functioned invisibly yet very effectively inside the state apparatus and provided the expertise on which different ministers came to rely.⁷³ Based on their status as neutral experts, they were able to shape long-term policies relatively independent from the uncertain dynamics of party politics.⁷⁴ What drove many of these officials in the 1940s was national pride. The Second World War - and in particular the defeat of 1940 - had left many French with the desire to assert a strong national identity. In the postwar climate of national development, this desire was channeled in the urge to "catch up" internationally, and the display of technological and economic progress was one particularly appealing way of doing so.⁷⁵

The French postwar state became an *état planificateur* or "plannerly state" in which national pride and economic modernization went hand in hand, and it was the Monnet Plan (1946-1950) that set its basic parameters. In 1946, the *Commission général du Plan* (CGP), a governmental

⁶⁹ See: Thoenig, *L'ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées*; Patrice Noviant, Bruno Vayssière, and Rémi Baudouï, "Les Plateaux sédimentaires: 1. Le Corps des Ponts," in *Dossiers et documents IFA: Les trois reconstructions 1919-1940-1945* (Paris: Institut français d'architecture, 1983).

⁷⁰ See: Antoine Picon, *Architectes et ingénieurs au siècle des Lumières* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 1988).

⁷¹ See: Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II*; Hecht, "Planning a Technological Nation: Systems Thinking and the Politics of National Identity in Postwar France."

⁷² The *hauts fonctionnaires* were the elite civil servants of the French state. They came largely from Parisian bourgeois backgrounds and attended elite national schools such as the *Ecole polytechnique* and the *Ecole nationale d'administration* (ENA). The latter had been established in 1945 to democratize access to French political leadership positions, but ended up shifting the elite's attitude to administering into a more pragmatic and pro-active style without modifying its social base. Some *polytechniciens* continued their education at the *Ecole nationale des Ponts et chaussées* (ENPC) to become well-respected state engineers. After graduation, many of these highly educated bourgeois men (rarely women) ended up working for the state. Social status for these government jobs was considerably higher than for jobs in the private sector. See: Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*, 255.

⁷³ See: Thoenig, *L'ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées*.

⁷⁴ Sutcliffe, *An Economic and Social History of Western Europe since 1945*, 40-52.

⁷⁵ Richard Kuisel has argued that France moved from a liberal political economy and a cautious pattern of industrial activity to a managed and dynamic order by the 1950s mainly because of a perceived need to overtake the most advanced capitalist nations. See: Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*.

think tank established by Jean Monnet shortly before, was charged with the creation of a detailed five-year plan for industrial modernization.⁷⁶ The Plan was only viable thanks to the counterpart funds mechanism of the Marshall plan, warmly welcomed a year later. Despite the American demand to focus on public housing - seen as a bulwark against French Communism - French planners focused on what they saw as the sole guarantee for future development: the development of basic industries, energy and agriculture, the production of primary materials and the (re)construction of basic infrastructure.⁷⁷ This meant neglecting social provisions like housing.⁷⁸ Between 1948 and 1951 only 13 % of the counterpart funds was spent on housing, dramatically inadequate to address the enormous shortage.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, during this period decisive steps were made towards the development of standardized mass housing. Part of the Monnet Plan was a *Commission de modernisation du bâtiment et des travaux publics* or Committee for the Modernization of Construction and Public Works, which proposed the development of prototype projects featuring industrialized construction processes. In this light, the government established the *Centre scientifique et technique du bâtiment* (CSTB) or the Scientific and Technical Center of Construction, which encouraged a close collaboration between the state and the private construction sector and provided a test bench for experimental projects.

Yet, the most important institution, which would serve as a laboratory for the mass housing production to follow, was the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism. Established in 1944, this ministry was a direct legacy of the authoritarian Vichy regime.⁸⁰ Focused on the reconstruction

⁷⁶ The *Commission général du Plan* (CGP) was a fairly small organization, with around 140 staff, with a relatively small budget and without executive power. Yet it was the government's main "think tank" for planning because of its systematic, comprehensive approach. While it depended on the Finance Ministry officially, the CGP had a long-term leadership structure transcending the short-lived positions of the Finance Ministers, especially before the establishment of the Vth Republic: there were 22 such ministers but only 3 directors of the CGP in the period between 1945 and 1963. See: Saul Estrin and Peter Holmes, *French Planning in Theory and Practice* (London / Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983), 92; Hecht, "Planning a Technological Nation: Systems Thinking and the Politics of National Identity in Postwar France."

⁷⁷ The Marshall plan allowed European governments through dollar credits to purchase US consumer products in order to resell them to their consumers and thus acquire domestic currency funds for reconstruction projects. In return for the aid, these projects had to be approved by the Marshall Plan Mission and this allowed the American government to exert direct political control in Europe. While the funds came with strings attached, France nevertheless attempted as much as possible to pursue its own agenda: planners happily accepted American aid, but used it to develop state-led plans for national modernization and ignored the American demands for economic liberalization (see Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, 96.)

⁷⁸ According to Richard Kuisel, "the reconstruction of non-productive buildings and houses, which was so dear to many Frenchmen in 1946, would be delayed. The planners chose investment over consumption, modernization over reconstruction, or the future over the present," see: Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*, 225. It was not until 1951 that the French invested enough in housing to satisfy the United States, according to: Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the making of postwar France, 1945-1954* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 182-83. Frédérique Boucher has shown that while the 1946 Monnet Plan allotted significant sums to reconstruction and housing construction, its subsequent revisions of 1948 and 1949 remained silent about these issues. See: Boucher, "Les planificateurs et le logement (1942-1952)."

⁷⁹ See Sutcliffe, *An Economic and Social History of Western Europe since 1945*, 48.

⁸⁰ Established out of Vichy institutions like the *Commissariat technique à la reconstruction immobilière* (CRI) and the *Délégation générale à l'équipement national* (DGEN), both of which were charged with reconstruction. See: Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique*; Baudouï, *Raoul Dautry, 1880-1951: Le technocrate de la République*.

of existing cities, the MRU did not develop a mass housing policy.⁸¹ Its experimental programs and competitions nevertheless established a high standard for modern domestic comfort and raised the hopes for a fully industrialized production. Two of its architectural competitions in particular - for 200 dwelling units in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges and for another 800 in Strasbourg, resulting in the famous Cité de Rotterdam - were directly instrumental in the development of mass collective housing. The competitions intensified technical research and showed the advantages of heavy prefab, through spin-off projects from the competition's prize winners across the nation (figure 1.2).⁸² Following these competitions, the Ministry launched the construction of six housing estates between 600 and 2600 units in Angers, Bron-Parilly, Boulogne, Le Havre, Pantin and Saint-Etienne. Under the name "secteur industrialisé," the MRU would launch in fact the first *grands ensembles*.

⁸¹ See Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique*; Bruno Vayssière, Manuel Candré, and Danièle Voldman, *Une politique du logement: Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme, 1944-1954* (Paris: Plan Construction - Architecture, 1995); Anatole Kopp, Frédérique Boucher, and Danièle Pauly, *L'architecture de la reconstruction en France, 1945-1953* (Paris: Le Moniteur, 1982).

⁸² See: Vayssière, Candré, and Voldman, *Une politique du logement: Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme, 1944-1954*, 372-91; Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975"; Nicholas Bullock, "Developing prototypes for France's mass housing programme, 1949-53," *Planning Perspectives*, 22, no. 1 (2007): 5-28.

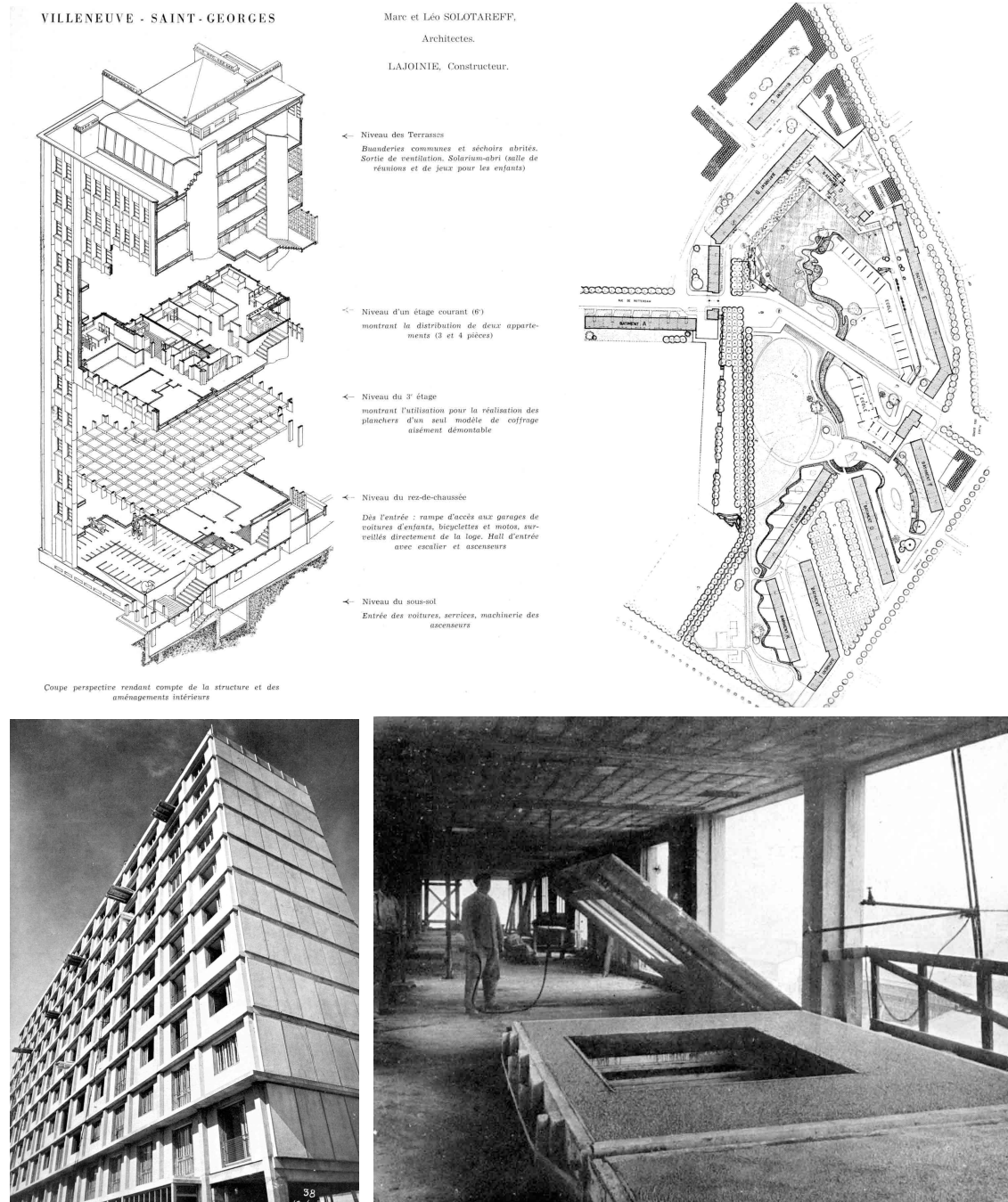


Figure 1.2: The experimental competitions of 1949 and 1951 organized by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism. Top left: First prize of the Villeneuve-Saint-Georges competition for 200 dwellings of 1949, by Marc and Léo Solotareff with construction company Lajoinie (Source: *Architecture Française*, no. 103-104 (1950): 8). Top right: First Prize of the Strasbourg competition for 800 dwellings of 1951 by Eugène Beaudoin with the construction company Boussiron. Together with Marcel Lods, Beaudoin was the architect of the Cité de la Muette in Drancy, which is often mentioned as the primary formal example for the *grands ensembles* (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 45 "Habitations Collectives" (1952): 4). Bottom: A housing project at Pont de Sèvres near Paris (1949-1952) by Zehrfuss and Sebag, based on their design for the Villeneuve-Saint-Georges competition. This project feature heavy prefabrication techniques that would subsequently used in *grands ensembles* projects during the 1950s and 1960s (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 45 "Habitations Collectives" (1952): 1-2).

Apart from encouraging the material technologies of mass production, the importance of these competitions and programs was perhaps foremost immaterial: by expanding the culture of technical expertise into the domain of housing, they positioned the organization of the everyday realm of dwelling both outside of the realm of politics and outside of the private sphere.⁸³ Because the architects, policy-makers and especially engineers in charge saw themselves as neutral experts developing a universally valid product, they expected that future inhabitants could at best optimize the dwellings provided for them, and not criticize them fundamentally. Consequently, the reception and inhabitation of mass-produced housing could thus later be treated as a matter of efficient management, not politics or individual choice.

Industrialization - one of the staples of interwar modernism ever since Le Corbusier's *Maison Domino* proposal of 1918 and his aesthetic embrace of mass production in *L'Esprit nouveau*⁸⁴ - had been part of the reconstruction debate since 1940 and was strongly promoted by progressivists. Yet the MRU competitions and experimental programs of the late 1940s and early 1950s were key in making the imperative of industrialization more tangible to the mainstream of French political culture. Nevertheless, although Minister Eugène Claudius-Petit was not alone in his championing of architectural modernism, the development of such an architecture was hindered by the hierarchical structure of decision-making of state architects and urbanists.⁸⁵ Like that of other CIAM modernists, Le Corbusier's influence remained very limited, and his failure to realize his plans for Saint-Dié only further confirmed his marginal political position. Architectural culture was determined by the Beaux-Arts system of education and rewards.⁸⁶ The diversity of housing projects built during this period provided little indication of what would follow. Varied in size, technology, morphology and spatial organization, they included allotments of individual homes, most famously experimented with at Noisy-le-Sec (figure 1.3),⁸⁷ more traditional infill projects following existing perimeter block lines (figure 1.4), monumental architecture like Perret's reconstruction of Le Havre, and compositions of modernist apartment blocks like at the Cité Rotterdam.⁸⁸

⁸³ The MRU has been referred to as populated by "techniciens du social," see: Vayssière, Candré, and Voldman, *Une politique du logement: Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme, 1944-1954*, 11.

⁸⁴ Starting with the *Maison Domino* of 1918 which addressed reconstruction after WWI, and then in the famous juxtaposition of the Doric temple and the automobile, Le Corbusier had developed architectural theories of standardization borrowing from Taylorism. See: Jean-Louis Cohen and Corbusier Le, *Le Corbusier, 1887-1965: The Lyricism of Architecture in the Machine Age* (Köln ; Los Angeles: Taschen, 2004).

⁸⁵ See: Kopp, Boucher, and Pauly, *L'architecture de la reconstruction en France, 1945-1953*.

⁸⁶ The architects winning state competitions, those employed by the ministry, and those commissioned by the state for its official architecture, housing and Reconstruction projects, came predominantly from the *Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts* (ENSBA). As the official state architecture school, ENSBA was a bastion for conventional academism, ignoring both modernism and the challenge of reconstruction. A toned down version of the Athens Charter would nevertheless find its way into the school through the teachings of Gutton and later on, Auzelle. See: Courses by André Gutton and Robert Auzelle (AN ENSBA AJ/52/978).

⁸⁷ Nicole Rudolph, "Domestic Politics: The Cité expérimentale at Noisy-le-Sec in Greater Paris," *Modern & Contemporary France* 12, no. 4 (2004): 483-95; *Petites maisons construites depuis la guerre: La cité expérimentale de Noisy-le-Sec*, (Paris: Ch. Massin & Cie / Librairie Centrale des Beaux-Arts, 1951).

⁸⁸ See: Vayssière, *Reconstruction, déconstruction: Le hard French, ou l'architecture française des trente glorieuses*; Kopp, Boucher, and Pauly, *L'architecture de la reconstruction en France, 1945-1953*.



Figure 1.3: Prefabricated single-family home at Noisy-le-Sec, result of the MRU's 1946 experimental competition (photo by the author, 2008)

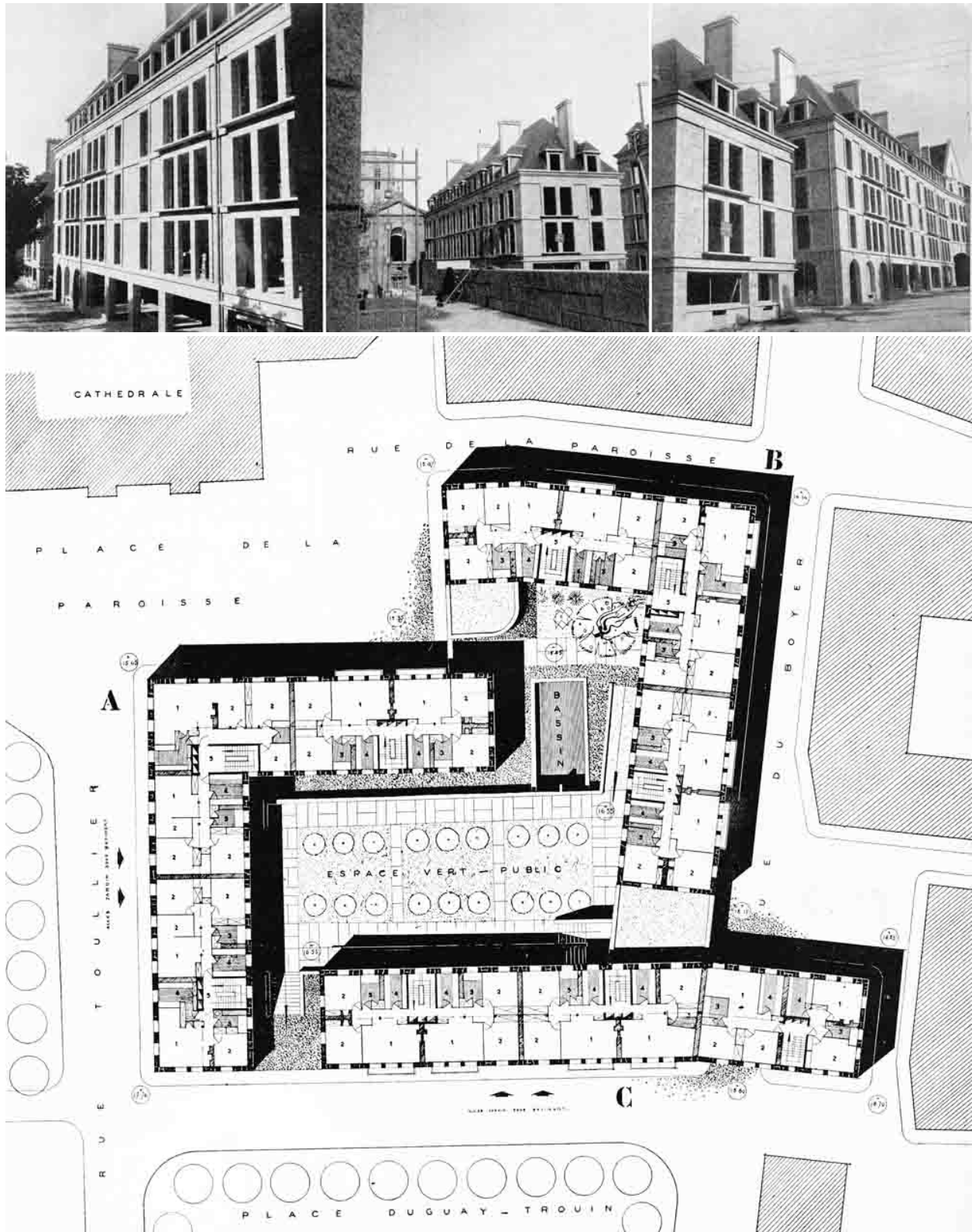


Figure 1.4: Photos and plan of a reconstruction project at Saint-Malo by Auffret & Hardion architects (with Louis Arretche as *architecte en chef*, and Marc Brillaud de Laujardière as *urbaniste en chef*) (Source: *L'Architecture Française*, no. 125-126 (1952): 21).

It was only around 1953-54 that French housing production took a fundamental turn and “modern” - read: collective housing in large estates - became the natural language of economic and social modernization.⁸⁹ By this time, strong migration and the French baby boom had led the situation in metropolitan areas to become so acute that housing was now had to become an increasingly central preoccupation for the government. What marked this turning point in French public consciousness was the heavily mediated activism of Abbé Pierre. In the particularly cold winter of 1953-54 this catholic cleric and social activist gained national attention with his fight against the intolerable conditions of the homeless in France and brought the housing shortage to the center of public attention and national politics.⁹⁰

Nonetheless, the summer before, a series of laws had been passed that constituted the veritable vehicle of change in the transition from disparate Reconstruction projects to the streamlined housing production of the *grands ensembles*. Known as the Plan Courant because it was fabricated under the brief tenure of Pierre Courant as Minister of Construction, the legislation aimed to encourage the rapid and massive construction of low-cost standardized housing. The Plan was unprecedented in that it tied together land use legislation (to facilitate expropriation and hence allow for larger scale urban development), a way to finance housing (through state subsidies and 1% employers contributions⁹¹) and a program of normalized dwelling units known as *Logécos* (*logements économiques et familiaux* or low-cost family dwellings).⁹² Courant’s goal was the production of 240,000 housing units per year, a target easily surpassed before the end of the decade.⁹³ The combination of these measures - supplying land and money while standardizing the program and process of building - is what would ultimately allow for the rapid proliferation of the *grands ensembles* in the second half of the 1950s.

The *Logécos* marked the “golden age” of a new category of state-subsidized housing called the “secteur aidé.” This procedure would be responsible for the largest part of housing production during the *trente glorieuses*, more than the social housing sector and the private sector.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Scholars of postwar French housing and urbanism converge on the years 1953-54 as a key turning point, see: Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique*; Jean-Paul Flamand, *Loger le peuple: Essai sur l'histoire du logement social en France* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989); Kopp, Boucher, and Pauly, *L'architecture de la reconstruction en France, 1945-1953*; Guy Groux and Catherine Lévy, *La possession ouvrière: Du taudis à la propriété, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, 1993); Tellier, *Le temps des HLM 1945-1975: La saga urbaine des Trente Glorieuses*.

⁹⁰ About how the role of particular social movements (squatter movements, Abbé Pierre, and so on) in bringing about the idea of a universal right to housing, see: Bruno Duriez and Michel Chauvière, eds., *Cahiers du GRMF (Groupement de Recherche sur les Mouvements Familiaux) no. 7, La bataille des squatters et l'invention du droit au logement 1945-1955* (1992).

⁹¹ This was a national agreement that obliged French companies to contribute 1% of their salary budget to the housing of its employees. It originated in the CIL in northern France. See: Christine Tréboulet, *Habitat social et capitalisme: Les comités interprofessionnels du logement dans les rapports Etat/Patronnat* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001).

⁹² The *Logéco* were created in 1953, see: "Loi du 15 avril 1953 facilitant la construction de logements économiques," *Journal Officiel de la République française*, 16 April 1953.

⁹³ Roughly 120,000 homes were built in 1953 and 320000 in 1959, see: *Annuaire rétrospectif de la France, Séries longues, 1948-1988*.

⁹⁴ For an economic history of this category of housing production, which was invented with the law of 21 July 1950, see: Sabine Effosse, *L'invention du logement aidé en France: L'immobilier au temps des Trente Glorieuses* (Paris: Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, 2003).

Interestingly, the sector's initial goal was not collective rental housing; it was meant to stimulate individual home ownership for the French lower-middle classes. The situation turned out differently. Logéco housing could be purchased by intermediaries and many middle-class speculators preferred to rent out their dwellings in a market where offer was far below demand.⁹⁵ When the initiative was relaunched in 1958 under the influence of Pierre Sudreau's *grands ensembles* policies, the *Logécos* became rental units.⁹⁶ Rental housing, which prevailed until the 1970s, was a conscious strategy meant to encourage the geographic mobility of the national workforce.

In contrast to the Reconstruction period, when the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism (MRU) often acted directly as the project developer, the state was no longer directly in charge of building mass housing. Social housing organizations, semi-public, and large private developers were.⁹⁷ In order to assure mass production, the government also created its own housing developer, the *Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse* (SCIC), with funds from the national public finance institution, the *Caisse des dépôts et consignations* (CDC).⁹⁸ Despite the dissemination of command, decision-making about qualitative issues with regards to housing was still concentrated in the centralized state, which controlled large parts of the banking and construction sector. The purely private sector of housing amounted to less than 10 % of the total production in the 1950s.⁹⁹ The housing market was thus overwhelmingly defined by the state - first of all through the technical norms it imposed on the housing construction it would help finance, secondly as a result of the increasing purview of national planning.

This situation blurred some of the distinctions between state and market housing; it transformed the very nature of housing, now more than ever situated in the ambiguity between government service and private consumer good. Contemporaneous developments in the United States, of which Levittown would become the most famous, offer a sharp contrast: despite their fundamental dependence on the financial incentives of the federal government, they were privately developed and sold as consumer goods in a private market. In 1950s France, the equivalent standard in housing production was at once carrier of a new consumer comfort and product of the modernizing state. Epitomized by places like Sarcelles (figure 1.5), many of these projects were perceived by local inhabitants as "landing from Paris." Consequently, because of their relationship with the centralized state as provider, the new inhabitants of these housing areas were defined as "users" rather than private consumers. While housing production remained distributed over different state bodies, social housing organizations, semi-public institutions, and

⁹⁵ Jean-Paul Flamand has argued that the *Logéco*, despite being even more minimal than the HLM, actually led to a surge in middle-class apartment ownership, which in turn prolonged the housing shortage - despite their inferior quality set by the government to target the lower classes in particular. See: Flamand, *Loger le peuple: Essai sur l'histoire du logement social en France*, 201.

⁹⁶ See Effosse, *L'invention du logement aidé en France: L'immobilier au temps des Trente Glorieuses*, 419-22.

⁹⁷ The *société d'économie mixte* became a popular formula for large-scale development.

⁹⁸ See: Paul Landauer, "La Caisse des dépôts et consignations face à la crise du logement, 1953-1958" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Université de Paris I, 2004).

⁹⁹ For instance in 1957, of the 270,000 dwelling units built that year only 22,000 were privately financed. See: "Le financement de la construction," Ministère de la construction, 1962-63.

private companies, it was no longer the weak and fragmented domain it was during the 1940s.¹⁰⁰ The complex and dynamic relations of these various institutions, and the social differentiation of norms and categories - LEPN, HLM, or *Logéco* - did not prevent housing production from becoming a unified domain held together by the indirect yet central role of a plannerly state.



Figure 1.5: Sarcelles Lochères, postcard image of around 1960 (Source: Mathieu Pernot, *Le grand ensemble* (Paris: Le Point du Jour, 2007): 7).

The brief history of the Castor movement offers a striking indication of how the multitude of initiatives of the immediate postwar gradually dissolved into a generalized state-aided housing paradigm. The Castors or “Beavers” gained force in late 1940s France as self-building organizations in which the individual members contributed their own labor (*apport-travail*) to

¹⁰⁰ During the immediate postwar, the landscape of social housing organizations was fragmented, and their relationship with the state was neither stable nor always productive. During the 1950s, in particular after the 1957 *loi cadre*, that relationship became much more univocal. See: Flaman, *Loger le peuple: Essai sur l'histoire du logement social en France*.

housing construction projects - initially mainly single-family home allotments.¹⁰¹ The movement had a vision of cooperative living and direct user participation, which, according to their spokesperson Michel Anselme from the *Union nationale des Castors*, was linked to 19th century utopianism.¹⁰² After having united nationally, the Castors quickly lost momentum and joined the larger “cooperative movement” as it was called. Such organizations, of which Bâticoop was the most prominent, only selectively adopted the self-help ideology of the Castors. Created in 1952 by Anselme himself, Bâticoop was less interested in utopian living or self-building, than in providing its members with affordable homes. Its projects shifted towards collective housing and cooperation was often limited to everyday management like the cleaning of communal spaces.¹⁰³ In the end, the Castors did not offer a veritable alternative to state-led housing production. Their self-help advocacy merely underlined the shortcomings of the national government in housing construction, rather than contesting its very responsibility in this realm. While the initial movements tended to be mistrusting of state initiative, the cooperative societies replacing them utilized state resources just like regular social housing organizations did. Ultimately, they actively contributed to rather than questioned standardized state-led urbanism. In 1953 Bâticoop submitted plans for *logéco* approval, which were subsequently used by other cooperative societies to build standardized housing projects financed by the state.¹⁰⁴ It would build several *grands ensembles*, one of which was La Dame Blanche in the Parisian suburb of Garges (figure 1.6).¹⁰⁵ Projects like these demonstrated how potential alternatives, like that of self-building, simply converged into the dominant paradigm of state-led urbanism.

¹⁰¹ The movement was officially born in Pessac near Bordeaux on 21 november 1948 from militant organizations like *Jeunesse ouvrière catholique*, *Coopératives de consommation*, and *Communautés de travail*. See: Vincent Lourier, "Une forme originale d'autoconstruction: Les Castors," in *Les bâtisseurs de la modernité*, ed. Bernard Marrey (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2000); Maurice Imbert, "Logement, autoconstruction, solidarité: L'exemple des Castors," in *Les formes de la solidarité* (Paris: DRAC Ile-de-France / CNRS, 1999); *Castor "service."* *Bulletin de liaison et d'information de l'Union nationale des Castors*, (1950-1951).

¹⁰² Michel Anselme was Président Directeur Général de Bâticoop, Membre de la Commission de la Construction du Commissariat Général au Plan. See: Albert Meister, *Coopération d'habitation et sociologie du voisinage: Etude de quelques expériences pilotes en France* (Paris: Minuit, 1957).

¹⁰³ In the words of inhabitants, “we have come here to be housed, not to live in a phalanstery” [*“on est venue ici pour se loger, pas pour vivre en phalanstère”*]. See: *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁴ See Newsome, "The Struggle for a Voice in the City: The Development of Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in France, 1940-1968", 166-68.

¹⁰⁵ See the préface de Michel Anselme in: Meister, *Coopération d'habitation et sociologie du voisinage: Etude de quelques expériences pilotes en France*, 6-7.



Figure 1.6: Aerial photo of La Dame Blanche (Garges, near Paris) in the early 1960s (Source: ADVO Fonds Henrard 29Fi 202). The cooperative housing organization Bâticoop was at the origin of this grand ensemble. The first plan was for 800 units. Construction started in 1958. The lead architect, Noel Lemaesquier, was a Prix de Rome architect, and he subsequently drew up a master plan for 7000 units.

This generalization entailed an extension of the social groups for whom housing would and should be provided. Instead of the *existenzminimum* of interwar modernism and the French efforts to base housing design on what was called a “minimum vital” during the prewar and interwar periods, housing production was now geared towards what was called *l’homme moyenne* or the average man. The idea of a “normal dwelling” for a “normal user,” stripped of the particularities of class and culture, was developed long before the *grands ensembles*, but only predominated when the machinery of mass housing was put in motion during the 1950s.¹⁰⁶ Standard mass housing thus shaped and was shaped by the notion of an average, universal user.

State-aided housing could no longer be considered as a domain pertaining only to a single segment of society - those in dire need. Calls for a universal “right to housing” and the view,

¹⁰⁶ Patrice Noviant, Bruno Vayssière, and Rémi Baudouï, “Normation sociale et naissance du logement d’état,” in *Dossiers et documents IFA: Les trois reconstructions 1919-1940-1945* (Paris: Institut français d’architecture, 1983), 30. On “minimum vital” see: Dana Simmons, “Minimal Frenchmen: Science and Standards of Living, 1840-1960” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2004). For a genealogical history of such “middling modernism” see: Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

increasingly common, that the provision of housing was a governmental responsibility further encouraged the centralized state to take a more overarching position in the realm of housing. The official name change in 1950 - from *Habitations à bon marché* (HBM) or “cheap dwellings” to *Habitations à loyer modéré* (HLM) or “dwellings with moderated rent” - was part of this move to distance the category of social housing from a particular social class.¹⁰⁷ Both the government and civil society organizations promoted the idea of a universalized housing provision: anybody in need of housing should be afforded it. Of course, the beneficiaries of state-aided housing did not include the bourgeoisie, and the French government did not suddenly lose its classism. State housing attribution continued to discriminate: not everybody was provided with the same housing options. Immigrants - often those who were actually constructing the new housing complexes of the French middle classes - were forced to live in shantytowns situated in the margins of the suburban landscape or in shacks near the construction sites themselves.¹⁰⁸ While racial distinction was officially invisible, it was implicit in the norms and social scientific parameters - in particular in what were called the “socio-professional categories,” like those of “immigrant workers” (*travailleurs immigrés*) and “managers” (*les cadres*), whose racial make-up was obvious. Despite its promises of an average universal user, the advent of mass housing was accompanied by an intensified social categorization: the nuclear family became the basic norm, while youth, women, the elderly, and so on, became subject to a specialized taxonomy of expected behavior, and thus, again, specific yet standardized needs.

The shift towards state-aided mass housing production needs to be understood in light of a broader, cultural shift with regards to housing. Part of the reason why the state could assume unprecedented responsibilities in the realm of housing, was that during the 1950s housing provision moved away from the realm of social reform. During the interwar period, when centralized state intervention was limited and social housing was first of all a municipal affair, the work of housing advocates was concentrated on improving the lives of the working classes. Philanthropic projects like those of the Fondation Rothschild, and the network of reformers around the Musée social embodied the hygienicist ideology of social reform.¹⁰⁹ While this paradigm, which went back to the second half of the 19th century, set an important basis of the architectural normalization of housing, after the Second World War it gave way to a scientific, rationalist paradigm.¹¹⁰ The shift in state competency over housing from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism in 1947 was indicative of this shift. State

¹⁰⁷ "Loi no. 50-854 du 21 juillet 1950 relative au développement des dépenses d'investissement pour l'exercice 1950 (prêts et garanties)," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 23 July 1950.

¹⁰⁸ See: Bernard Granotier, *Les travailleurs immigrés en France* (Paris: Maspero, 1970), 94-111; Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard, "Les immigrés et le logement en France depuis le XIX siècle," *Hommes et Migrations*, no. 1264 (2006): 20-34.

¹⁰⁹ Interwar social housing was built mainly by municipal social housing organizations who were particularly active in socialist municipalities like those of the “red belt” suburbs around Paris, and by philanthropic institutions like the *Fondation Rothschild*, who built the housing projects on the former fortifications of Paris. See: Stovall, "French Communism and Suburban Development: The Rise of the Paris Red Belt."; Annie Fourcaut, *Banlieue rouge 1920-1960: Années Thorez, années Gabin: Archétype du populaire, banc d'essai des modernités* (Paris: Autrement, 1992); Janet Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France: The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State* (Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹¹⁰ Christian Moley has described how this shift implies important changes in architectural typology - W.C., bathroom and staircases for instance are not longer open to the facade and now become situated in the center of the building. See: CREPAH-GERASE, *Conditions et évolution de la production architecturale dans l'habitat social, à partir du cas de la Seine-Maritime* (Paris: Secrétariat de la recherche architecturale, 1982); Christian Moley, *L'architecture du logement: Culture et logique d'une norme héritée* (Paris: Anthropos, 1998).

housing was no longer primarily stigmatized as pertaining to a problematic social class. The widespread perception that traditional class-lines were becoming blurred, or at least irrelevant in a rapidly democratizing postwar society, only strengthened such views. The state's growing stake in housing was no longer legitimized by the idea of social justice, but by a more abstract idea of rationalization - economic, technical and functional - and the project of social modernization.

When after the completion of the Plan Monnet, national planning began to focus on housing and urbanism, it was with this idea in mind. The conviction that the centralized state, as the carrier of a superior rationality, was to direct and guide the housing sector, informed the subsequent four-year plans. The Second Plan (1954-1957), prepared under Etienne Hirsh, shifted the focus from heavy industry to "social provisions" like housing and education. The plan was different not only in its content, but also in method: it was more comprehensive in its attention to other economic sectors, and moved away from direct interventionism and the nationalization of industry. National planning initially meant not more than the establishment of quantitative targets for yearly housing production.¹¹¹ This implied a radical quantification of need: how many people needed to be housed, and how many dwelling units were to be provided? To answer these questions, state planners took five factors into account: demographic growth, internal migration, the effects of slum clearance, new housing projects and the gradual phasing-out of overpopulation in the existing housing stock.¹¹² Their calculations were based not only on facts, but also on *norms*. To determine what constituted "overpopulation," planners needed a series of norms for which an - albeit rough - social scientific survey was needed.¹¹³

Such planning methods initially reduced inhabitants to generic, interchangeable entities in objective, quantified need. Yet, in subsequent years, planners continually refined their evaluations of housing need and began to include more sophisticated, qualitative aspects.¹¹⁴ After the questions about numbers, the logical next question was: what kind of dwellings to build? To this end, the *Commission général du Plan* (CGP) commissioned France's national statistics institute (INSEE) in 1955 to pursue a large-scale social scientific survey, questioning inhabitants about

¹¹¹ The first evaluation of housing need was in 1950 by Louis Henry. He proposed a rudimentary calculation that set the basis for the quantification of housing needs during the 1950s. See: Jean Bosvieux, "Besoin et demande de logement," in *Logement et habitat: L'état des savoirs*, ed. Marion Segaud, Catherine Bonvalet, and Jacques Brun (Paris: La Découverte, 1998).

¹¹² See: Evaluation des besoins en logement de la France pour les périodes 1957-1963 et 1963-1970. Rapport du Groupe spécialisé "Besoins en logements" à la Commission de la Construction du Commissariat Général au Plan de Modernisation et d'Équipement, n.d., around 1957 (CAC 19770816/007).

¹¹³ Created by the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Public Health in 1955, these norms were subsequently used for the preparation of the Third Plan. See: L'adaptation des programmes de construction de lots aux structures familiales, UIOF Conference Barcelona 1956, Commission du Logement Familial (CAC 19770775/005).

¹¹⁴ See for instance the *Groupe d'études des problèmes du logement*, which brought together Paul Vieille, Pierre Clement and Louis Couvreur to study the "methodological problems of the evaluation of quantitative needs in terms of housing." See: Centre d'Études Économiques, 30.01.1959: méthodologie besoin en logement (CAC 19770775/007).

their households, rents, opinions and intentions.¹¹⁵ This and other studies served as the basis for determining objectives for future housing construction.¹¹⁶

In short, the transition from Reconstruction to the collective mass housing that ultimately embodies the postwar French city was possible because of a streamlining of production in which the state took on a multifarious and at once more central role. Housing production, as it now moved away from the realm of social reform to become a generalized good assured - at least in principle - by a rational, centralized welfare state, entailed a novel relationship between state and the inhabitant, now as a “user” ambiguously positioned both in the realms of social citizenship and private consumption.

¹¹⁵ Institut national des statistiques et des études économiques, "Une enquête par sondage sur le logement," *Etudes Statistiques* (April-June 1957): 35-48.

¹¹⁶ Other studies, for example one on rents by CREDOC were also commissioned by the CGP. See: Sous-groupe 4: enquête sur le logement (CAC 19770775/029).

2. Modern Architecture For a Standard User

As housing production became increasingly streamlined during the 1950s, and yearly production more than quadrupled, its quality changed fundamentally. In contrast to the architectural variety during Reconstruction, the outcome was remarkably homogeneous: by the end of the decade, concrete slabs and blocks of modern collective housing separated by green lawns in *grands ensembles* prevailed. Out were the single-family homes, the masonry and steel structures, and the traditional urban forms. The *Logéco* program, part of the 1953 Plan Courant, was a key trigger in this process of homogenization. By imposing technical and architectural norms on the housing financed through this program, the state had an unprecedented role in shaping the architecture of national housing production. It was hardly the first time the state enforce housing norms - technical norms for social housing had long been in existence. But the application of such a comprehensive set of norms on different categories of housing was unprecedented.¹¹⁷

The program was the expression of a concerted effort by government officials, architects, engineers, and leaders of civil society organizations to create a standardized architecture of mass housing.¹¹⁸ In early 1953, the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism created regional committees led by state-appointed engineers to study housing projects from all over France.¹¹⁹ Based on projects submitted by architects, sent in by professional journals, and dug up from the archives of the Ministry, these committees created a series of *plans-type* or prototype plans to be promoted nation-wide for large-scale reproduction. The projects were selected by a government-appointed jury of experts, which included representatives of social housing organizations and prominent architects. These were both modernists like Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé, and Prix de Rome architects, some of which, like Alexander Persitz, Jacques-Henri Labourdette, and Bernard Zehrfuss, had already participated in the experimental state competitions of 1949 and 1950. The jury selected around fifty projects. Remarkably, only twelve of them were for collective housing, the others were either terraced or semi-detached single-family home typologies. State-employed architects subsequently transformed the selected projects into *plans-types* by uniformly presenting them and by eliminating construction details, materials and facades.¹²⁰ These stripped-down plans were then assembled in a two-volume catalogue.

Published as the *Catalogue des plans types: Logements économiques et familiaux* in June 1953, the collection only contained basic floor plans divided into those suitable for collective housing, and those for individual home construction. The deal was simple: if they chose from this catalogue of typical plans, interested housing developers would receive a state subsidy and be

¹¹⁷ The HLM organizations were forced to adopt the Logéco norms as well. See: Antoine Prost, "La périodisation des politiques urbaines françaises depuis 1945: Le point de vue d'un historien," *Bulletin de l'IHTP (Institut d'histoire du temps présent)*, no. 5 (1984): 32-47.

¹¹⁸ *Catalogue des plans types: Logements économiques et familiaux*, Juin 1953, Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme (CAC 19771096/001).

¹¹⁹ Circulaire no. 53-164 du 25.11.1953, Journal Officiel (CAC 19771096/001).

¹²⁰ CAC 19771096/001.

able to borrow 80% of the funds from the *Crédit foncier* for their project, for which the legal procedures, controls and building permits would be simplified.¹²¹

The impetus of architectural standardization was written in the plans themselves. The catalogue contained no sections and no facades. Hardly any distinctions were made in the norms and descriptions between individual and collective housing units. And yet, despite minister Pierre Courant's claim that they would leave plenty of individual freedom to designers and builders, these typical plans were, if not entirely restrictive, highly prescriptive in their application.¹²² The Plan Courant prescribed stringent maximum floor areas below that of even the most stringent HLM norms of the time, a maximum construction price, and minimum standards of modern comfort. The stringency of these prescriptions forced developers either into standardized production or shoddy construction.¹²³ Despite the absence of any indication of how these units would fit into their surroundings, or how they would facilitate social life outside the dwelling unit, the catalogue implicitly promoted an architectural context in which the units would fit: for the collective housing types, almost all plans assumed a thin 8-meter slab in which the units would be placed parallel, each staircase giving access to two apartments per floor. Only two of the fifty-some plans contained a *coursive*, and another two suggested isolated blocks around a single core staircase. The floor plans of the first generations of *grands ensembles*, from Sarcelles to places like Chevilly-Larue, were almost exact copies of the catalogue plans (figure 1.7).

Soon after the publication of the catalogue, the *Logéco* procedure was extended to include not only typical plans but typical *projects*, to be proposed by architects and construction companies. The goal was a further streamlining of the process of construction and state control. The submitted projects were varied, containing of both single-family home projects and collective housing, submitted by developers like the single-family home builder Maisons Phénix, social housing organizations like BâtiCoop, and well-known architects like Claude Parent and Ionel Schein (figures 1.8, 1.9, 1.10).¹²⁴

¹²¹ CAC 19771096/001.

¹²² Pierre Courant wrote in the introduction to the catalogue that "each builder needs to be able to choose according to his individual taste, needs, and the habits of the region" and that "the typical plans do not impose an exterior architecture nor a construction system." See: Catalogue Plans Types: Logements Economiques et Familiaux, Juin 1953, Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme (CAC 19771096/001).

¹²³ The *Logéco* norms were between 53 and 68 m² for a four-room apartment, see: "Caractéristiques des logements économiques et familiaux," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 12 March 1954. HLM norms, in comparison, were between 53 and 74 m² for a four-room apartment. The regime of urgency and the goal of affordability led to a reduction of unit sizes compared to the official social housing norms of the 1940s and interwar period. In 1947, the HLM norm for a four-room apartment was 71 m². In 1951 it was reduced to 68 m².

¹²⁴ Projets-types homologués, classified per department (CAC 19771096/001-002).

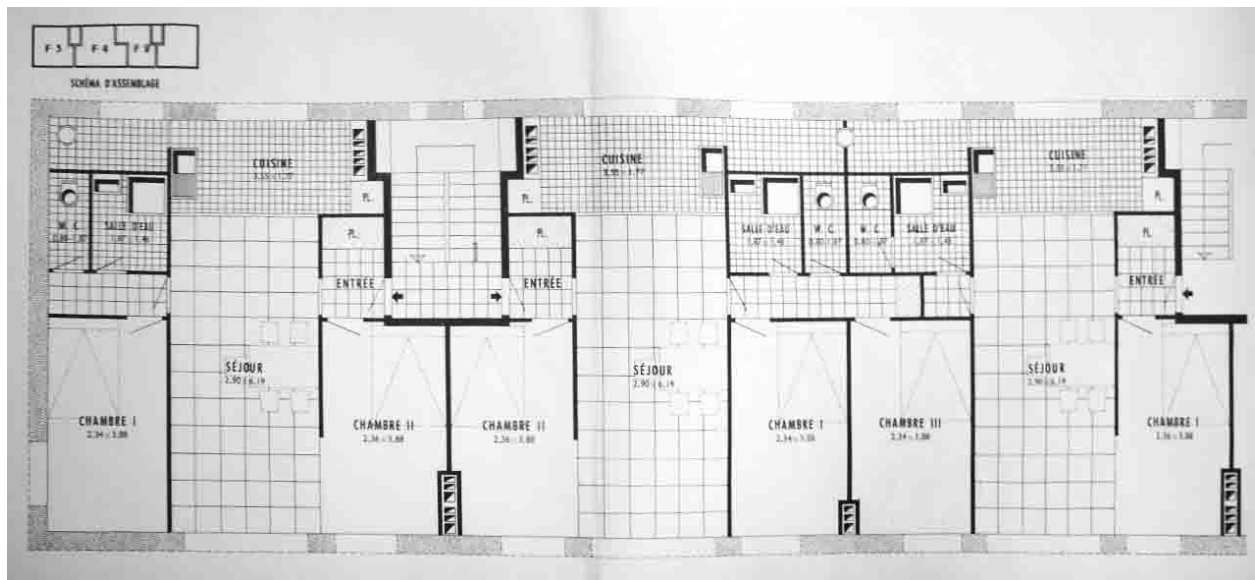
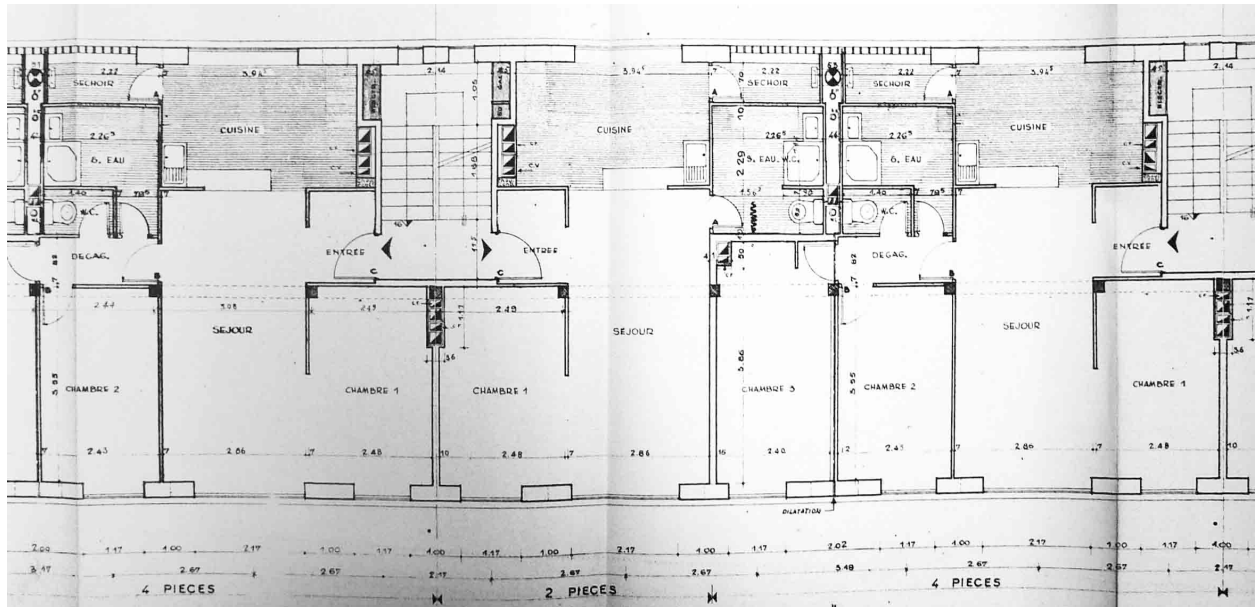


Figure 1.7: A comparison between Boileau and Labourdette’s first phase of housing slabs at Sarcelles in 1957 (top), and one of the Logéco typical plans as published in the 1953 catalogue (bottom) (Source: AM Sarcelles, Dossiers des permis de construire; CAC19771096/001). Apart from the separation of bathroom and WC in the Sarcelles plan, the basic layouts are identical.

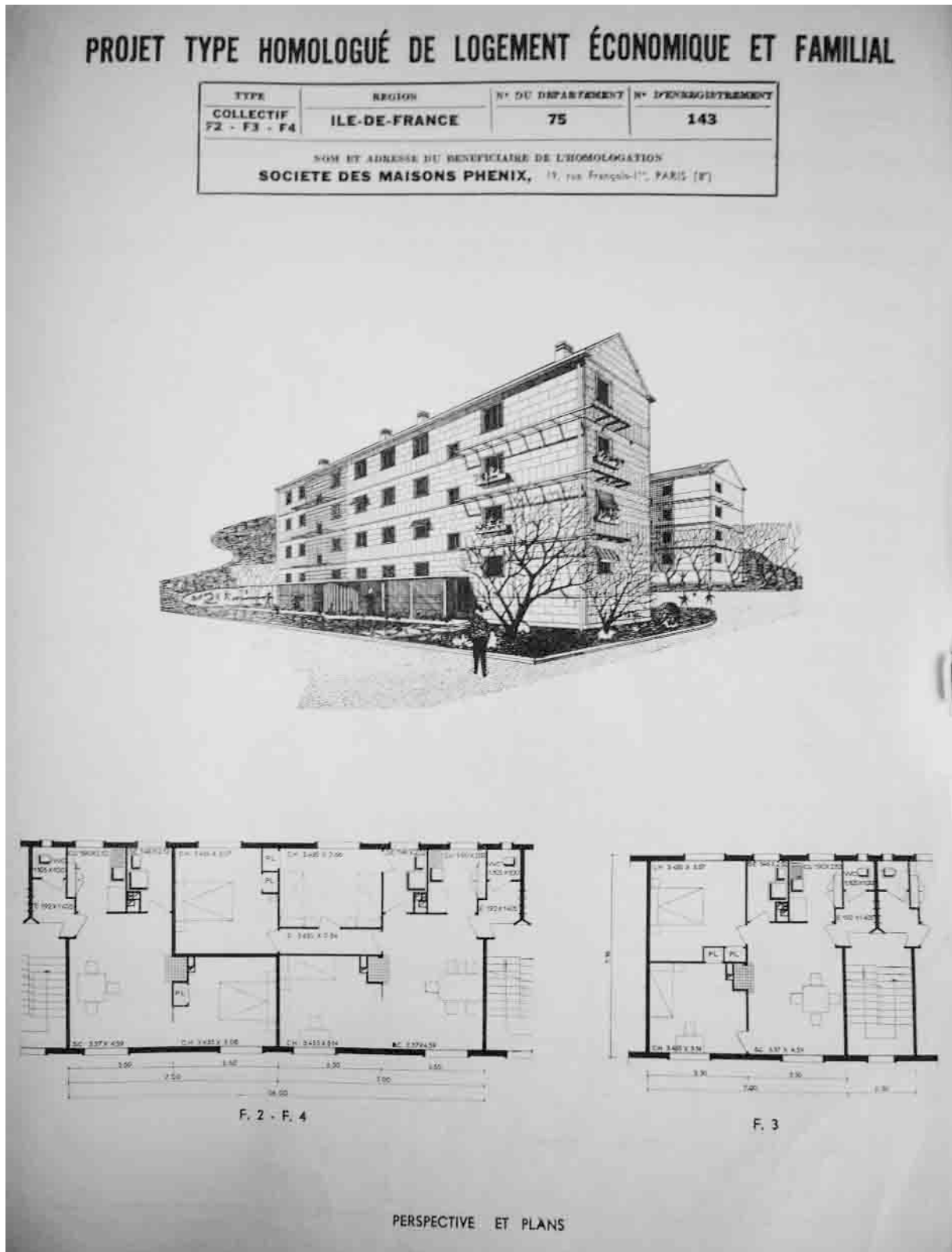


Figure 1.8: *Logéco* project by Maisons Phénix, which later became a major single-family home builder in France, 1953 (Source: CAC 19771096/002).



Figure 1.9: *Logéco* project by Baticoop, 1953 (Source: CAC 19771096/002).

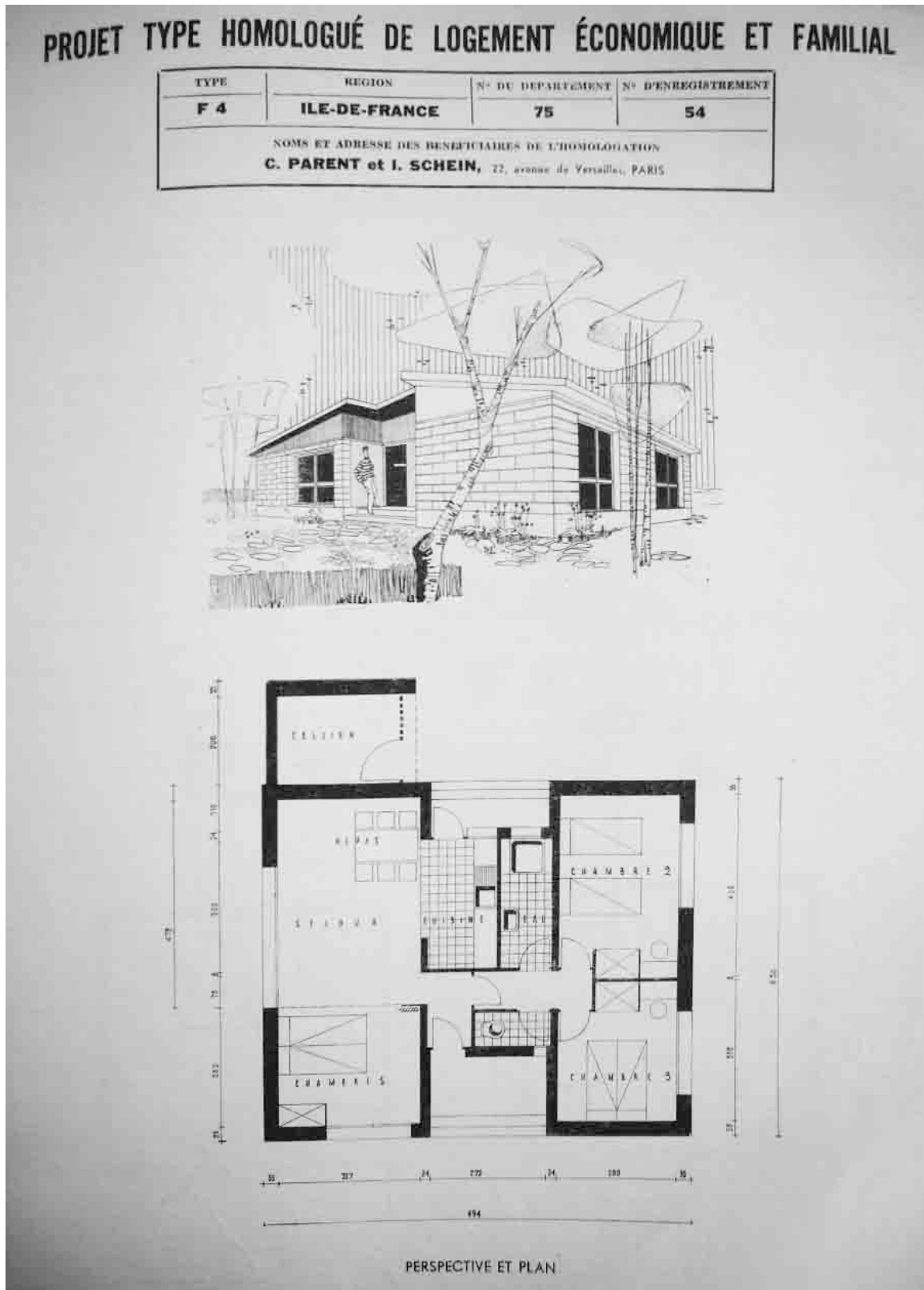


Figure 1.10: *Logéco* project by the architects Claude Parent and Ionel Schein, 1953 (Source: CAC 19771096/002).

In its attempt to smoothen the process of evaluating submitted projects, the Ministry explicated the selection criteria in an internal note.¹²⁵ These illustrate the government's modernizing agenda. State administrators assumed a strict functional specialization per room, which practically reduced the purview of design to the making of efficient connections between already defined spaces. This kind of floor plan rationalization was indebted to interwar modernism, and more particularly, reminiscent of the Frankfurter Küche laboratory kitchen.¹²⁶ The ministerial note specified the following: "The relative position of the rooms needs to satisfy a double condition: 1) to reduce to a minimum the routes most frequently taken by the dwelling's occupants, 2) to assure family life the possibility for socializing during certain hours (meals, collective recreation) and for isolation at other times (at night, for toilette, or demanding work)."¹²⁷ The document also mentioned the need to discourage, by means of the spatial layout, the use of a parlor that would be used only for special occasions. This popular working-class custom was to be replaced by "modern" family socializing in the "living room" - for which the English term was explicitly used.

While modernists were and had since long been adamant about this kind of social agency their architecture could exert, the assumption that the modern housing could help carry the national project of social modernization was in fact more generally shared. State administrators, planners, and architects promoted an implicit approach to the user which, at least initially, conceived of his or her actions as a direct and simple consequence of architectural design. The role of the architects, which they understood as their "civilizing mission," was therefore to guide and to educate its user by means of the architecture provided for them. Marcel Lods for instance, affirmed this conviction when he espoused that "the role of the architect is to teach them [users] how to live. They do not know and there is no literature on the question."¹²⁸

The design of the kitchen was one of the most conspicuous terrains where these ideas were played out. Some of the Logéco plans proposed to integrate the kitchen with the living room, while others proposed a small, separate "laboratory kitchen," which only allowed for meal preparation (figure 1.11). None of them suggested a proper eat-in kitchen, which was nevertheless known to be in popular demand at least since the 1947 INED survey, in particular with the working classes (figure 1.12). The architects and state administrators behind the plans seemed to have been in general agreement that the function of the eat-in kitchen, a space of familial sociability around the activity of cooking, was a traditional, non-urban habit that did not belong in the modern middle-class family home. In the new culture of dwelling, the living room was to be the central space for socializing. As such, the *Logécos* did not only supply basic

¹²⁵ See: Plan d'examen des projets sous l'aspect qualité de l'habitat et de l'architecture (CAC 19771096/001).

¹²⁶ Susan R. Henderson, "A Revolution in the Woman's Sphere: Grete Lihotzky and the Frankfurt Kitchen," in *Feminism and architecture*, ed. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

¹²⁷ "La position relative des pièces doit satisfaire à une double condition: 1) réduire au minimum les parcours empruntés le plus fréquemment par les occupants à l'intérieur du logement; 2) Assurer à la vie familiale des possibilités de groupement à certaines heures (repas, distractions communes) et d'isolement à d'autres (vie nocturne, toilette, travail absorbant)." In: Plan d'examen des projets sous l'aspect qualité de l'habitat et de l'architecture.

¹²⁸ "Le rôle de l'architecte est de leur apprendre à habiter, ils ne savent pas et il manque une littérature sur la question." in: Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, *Famille et habitation, Tome I: Sciences humaines et conceptions de l'habitation* (Paris: CNRS, 1960), 159.

principles of architectural standardization, but also carried normative conceptions of everyday life and domestic culture, both of which were considered a logical consequence of good planning and modern design.¹²⁹

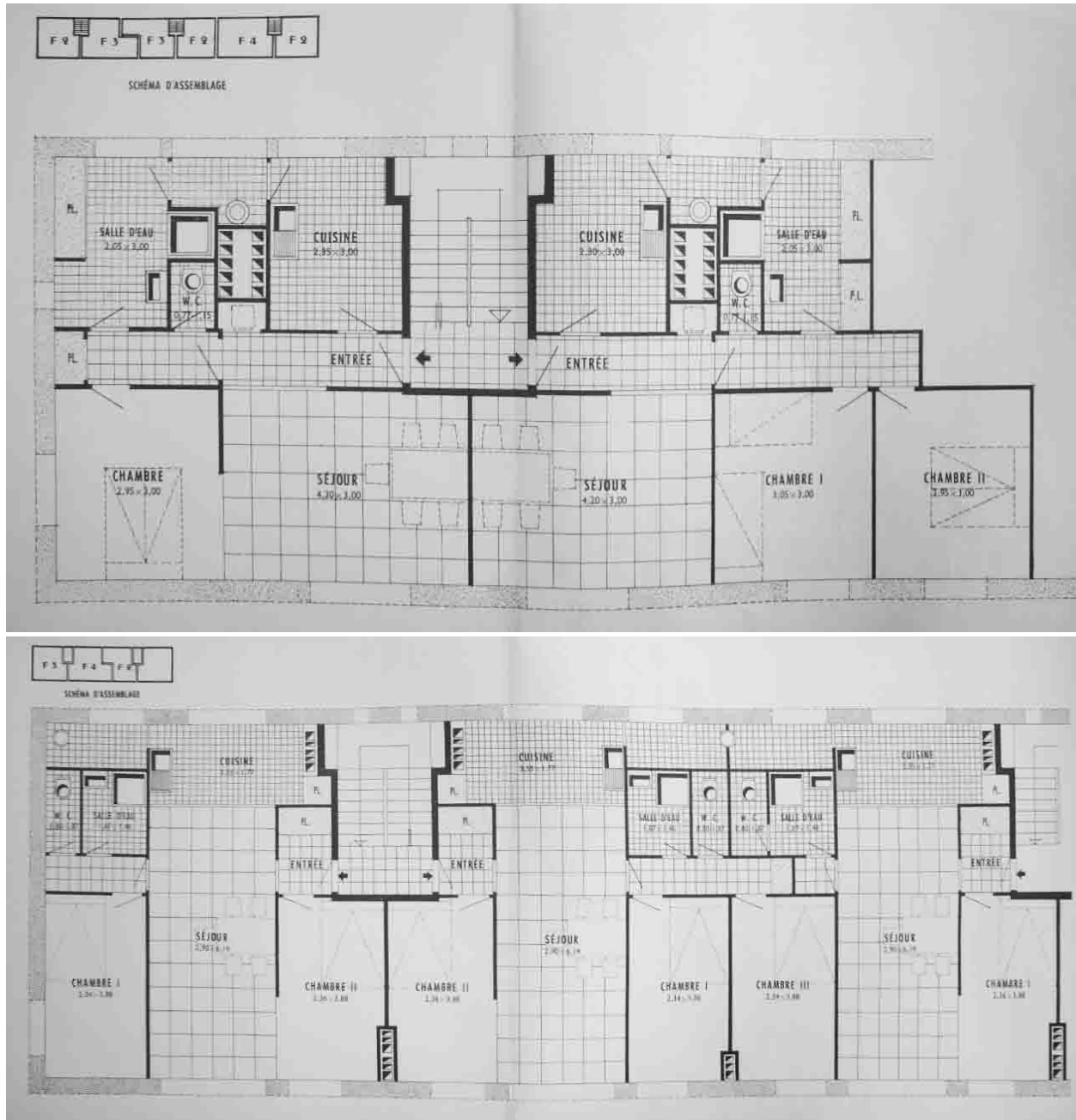


Figure 1.11: Two Logéco plans from the 1953 catalogue (Source: CAC 19771096/001). The top plan shows a laboratory kitchen separated from the living and dining area by a hallway. The bottom plan features a kitchen integrated into the living and dining room.

¹²⁹ See Rudolph for a more in-depth analysis of this kind of modernization of dwelling practices: Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975".

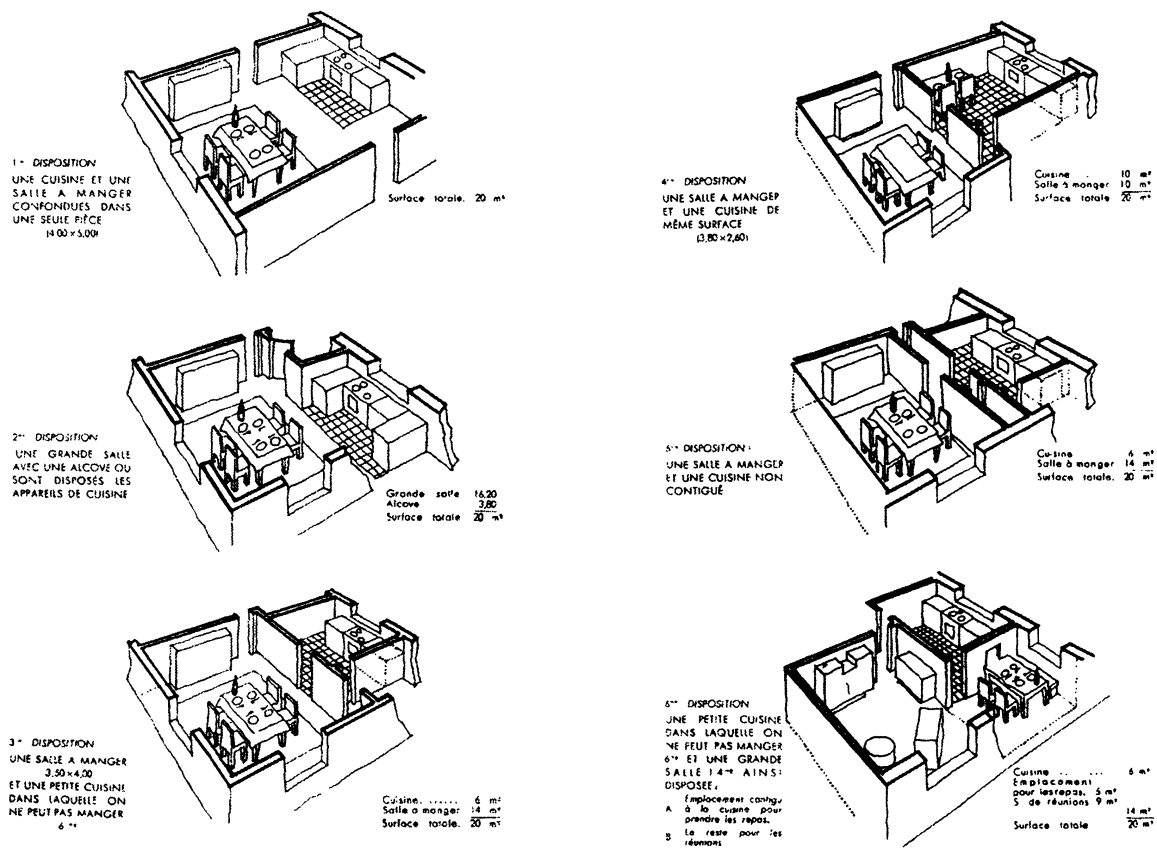


Figure 1.12: Six options for the kitchen and dining space layout, presented to the interviewees of the 1947 INED survey on housing (Source: Girard, Alain. *Une enquête par sondages: désirs des Français en matière d'habitation urbaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France / Institut national d'études démographiques (INED), 1947): 48-49). The first option featured kitchen and dining room in a single space: 6% of interviewees preferred this option. The second option, preferred by 4 %, was similar but with the kitchen in an alcove. The third option, preferred by 19 %, featured a small kitchen and a separate dining room. The fourth option, generally the most popular with workers, civil servants and salaried employees, and preferred by 28 % of the interviewees, had a large eat-in kitchen and a separate, formal dining room. The fifth option, preferred by 18 %, separated the kitchen and dining room with a hallway. And the final option, popular with 24 %, featured a small kitchen, linked to a dining area integrated into the living room.

Ultimately, the value of the Logéco project was considered to depend on “the possibility to give a project a domain of application as wide as possible. [The commission’s] judgement will definitely favor conceptual simplicity and execution.”¹³⁰ Functional and minimal design was thus officially sanctioned, and with it came the modernist architectural language introduced by the international avant-garde decades earlier. This type of modern now became the single standard for housing. To many postwar architects, the social agenda of interwar modernism - architecture as the vehicle for the making of a new, egalitarian society - seemed to have simply been

¹³⁰ “...la possibilité de donner au projet un champ d’application aussi répandu que possible. C’est en définitive sur sa simplicité de conception et d’exécution que ce jugement portera.” In: Plan d’examen des projets sous l’aspect qualité de l’habitat et de l’architecture.

reversed: architects' mission now was to simply accommodate for the changes already underway in a new, rapidly transforming postwar society. The belief in an inevitable process of democratization and the rise of the middle class - which overturned traditional class hierarchies - helped architects across the political and aesthetic spectrum to embrace a simple modern architectural language for housing.¹³¹ The more traditional architectural forms of the interwar social housing projects built by municipal HBM organizations, whose apartment types were clearly organized in terms of social class, had become anathema.¹³² The architecture of housing was to be built around a universal *cellule* (cell) or basic dwelling unit, whose rational design and modern comfort could both satisfy deserving workers and a novel middle class less committed to status and expensive appearance. Functionalism was no longer the radical ideology of an avant-garde; it was the logical way design a one-size-fits-all apartment for a minimum budget.

The architects working within the dominion of the centralized state were thus faced with a new category of design: the user. No longer working for an individual patron, with which they were in direct contact, architects now needed to design for this anonymous, abstract figure, behind which a multitude of different inhabitants and dwelling cultures remained hidden. The development of a single, standardized architecture of mass housing further entrenched the assumption of a universal use to which class, gender, and age were no more than statistical details.

The *Logécos* initiative constituted a watershed moment in French housing, on which the urbanism of the *grands ensembles* could be based. By developing a systematic approach to the individual dwelling unit, the program delivered the unquestioned building block for the *grands ensembles*, the design of which could be practically limited to issues of urban composition. Initially however, the program resulted in a different kind of housing. Spurred by Abbé Pierre's mediatization of the inhumane consequences of the housing shortage, the government first used the Plan Courant legislation to build low-cost emergency housing. During the harsh winter of 1954, it organized a competition for the construction of such housing, resulting in the expedient construction of what were called *cités d'urgence*. These were emergency housing areas consisting of low-rise strips of very simple, modest dwelling units. As they turned out to be very similar to the much-despised barracks built by the wartime government, these projects were soon denounced for being *taudis neuf* or "new slums."¹³³ They lent force to the concerns of social housing organizations, who lamented the *Logécos* for their degradation in size and quality of housing.¹³⁴ While this episode showed that the Plan Courant in and of itself did not imply the solution of the *grands ensembles*, it made it clear that a more persuasive solution was called for.

¹³¹ On the breaking-up of traditional class structures in postwar France, see: Henri Mendras, *Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic* (Cambridge / Paris: Cambridge University Press / Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1991).

¹³² Marie-Jeanne Dumont, *Le logement social à Paris 1850-1930: Les habitations à bon marché* (Liège: Mardaga, 1991). Christian Moley has shown the influence of the internal layouts of this period on postwar housing, see: Moley, *L'architecture du logement: Culture et logique d'une norme héritée*.

¹³³ See: Gwenaëlle Legoullon, "La politique des cités d'urgence 1954-1958" (Master's Thesis, University of Paris, 2000). Legoullon sees this as a transition between Reconstruction and "*trente glorieuses* urbanism," resulting both from a "strong but brief" movement of contestation and an effort by the state to address the housing shortage through low-cost housing construction.

¹³⁴ See for example the articles in *Coopération Habitation* in the mid-1950s.

While the Plan Courant largely resolved the question of the *cellule* for architects, the government nevertheless continued to further regulate the architecture of mass housing through a *Règlement national de la construction* (RNC). Established between 1955 and 1960, the regulation was applicable to all housing construction.¹³⁵ Per dwelling unit and per functionally specialized room, it specified minima for inhabitable volume, floor area, natural lighting and ventilation. It also stipulated minimum norms with regards to comfort, utilities and appliances. Collective spaces were subjected to similar rules for hygiene and security. Despite their rigor and detail, these norms did not indicate spatial relations between the rooms in the dwelling unit, nor did they stipulate a particular housing typology or architectural form. Although the regulations were certainly influential, state-led normalization again did not in and of itself determine the architecture of mass collective housing during the subsequent decades.

The rationale of normalization was ultimately based on the promise of industrialized production to cheaply and efficiently generate housing units of approved, standard quality. Impelled by the gravity of the housing crisis and urged by popular discontent about the insufferable conditions of the *mal-logés* as well as the inadequacies of temporary housing, the government decided to prioritize to a singular solution. Carried by the infamous slogan “massivement, rapidement, économiquement,” the efforts of industrialization were channeled into the technical and economic rationality of heavy prefabrication. While the Plan Courant and the CSTB established the legal framework for standardization, only *technological* developments like concrete structures and closed heavy prefabrication made it an architectural reality. The impetus of industrialization, which exacerbated the competition between architects and engineers, led the latter to become increasingly organized in *bureaux d'études techniques* or technical research firms. These were immediately successful in inserting their technical expertise into the workings of the state administration and large construction companies. While industrialization did not necessarily imply uniformity or collective housing - as the experiments with prefabricated single-family homes at Noisy-le-Sec had proven - engineers considered the most efficient and rational method to be that of the *chemin de grue*. This was a construction system that generated linear blocks of collective housing using a construction crane that moved along a linear rail (figure 1.13).

¹³⁵ See: "Décret no. 55-1394 du 22 octobre 1955 fixant les règles générales de construction des bâtiments d'habitation, visé à l'article 22 du code de l'urbanisme et de l'habitation," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 25 October 1955. See also the subsequent bills of 14 November 1958. Sudreau also published a complement to these laws on 2 June 1960: "Cahier des prescriptions techniques et fonctionnelles minimales unifiées," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 3 July 1960.

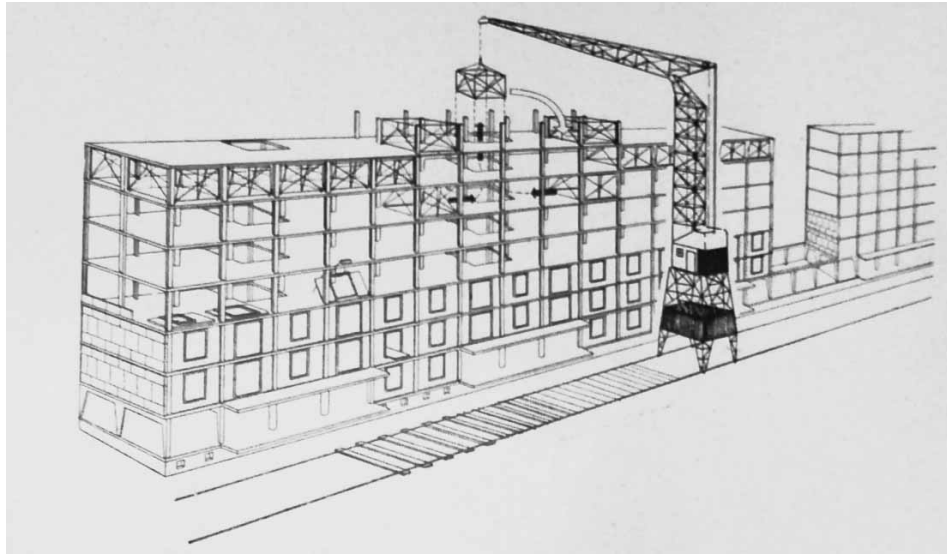


Figure 1.13: The *chemin de grue* method illustrated for the competition project at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges by Zehrfuss and Sebag (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 45 "Habitations Collectives" (1952): 10)

Exceptional proposals, like Jean Prouvé's *Maison des jours meilleurs*, a prototype of which was exhibited on the Parisian banks of the Seine, would not be accepted for mass production (figure 1.14). While its prefab steel structure allowed it to fall within the cost limits of the Logéco program, it was refused on the grounds of its unorthodox interior organization.¹³⁶ Instead, the most typical result were rectangular housing blocks made of factory-produced, on-site assembled concrete slabs which including window details and finishings. These were championed by large construction companies with patented methods like Camus, Logirex, and Coignet (figure 1.15).¹³⁷ Complete industrialization was never achieved and traditional methods of construction continued to persist even if the results looked similar:¹³⁸ the first phases of Sarcelles were built using traditional techniques like stone masonry.¹³⁹ While industrialization failed to guarantee the efficiency and productivity it did deliver in other economic sectors, it led to a significant increase in speed and a reduction in both cost and working hours - in many cases more than half.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ See: Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975", 200-03.

¹³⁷ The state had a hand in the emergence of large industrial construction firms in France, see: Lescure, *Histoire d'une filière: Immobilier et bâtiment en France, 1820-1980*; Dominique Barjot, "Introduction," in *Histoire des métiers du bâtiment aux XIXe et XXe siècles: Séminaire des 28, 29 et 30 novembre 1989 à la Fondation Royaumont*, ed. Jean-François Crola and André Guillerme (Paris: Plan Construction et Architecture, 1991). This evolution corresponded with that of other economic sectors in France, see: Maurice Lévy-Leboyer, "The Large Corporation in Modern France," in *Managerial Hierarchies: Comparative Perspectives on the Rise of Modern Industrial Enterprise*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler and Herman Daems (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). For the Camus system, see: "Les procédés Camus," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 64(1956): 96-99.

¹³⁸ See: Barjot, "Introduction."

¹³⁹ For the first three phases of Sarcelles (1955-1959), traditional techniques were used: facades were load-bearing stone masonry walls; floors were reinforced cast concrete which incorporated the piping for the heating system; the only prefab elements were details like window sills and cornices. From phase IV, around 1959, construction was more industrialized. See: AM Sarcelles; Sarcelles ville nouvelle, SCIC, 1969 (ADVO BIB D618).

¹⁴⁰ See: Lescure, *Histoire d'une filière: Immobilier et bâtiment en France, 1820-1980*, 56.

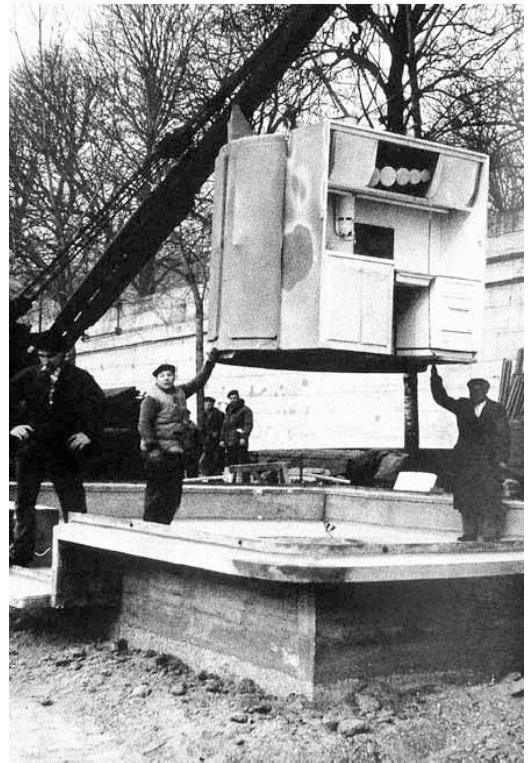
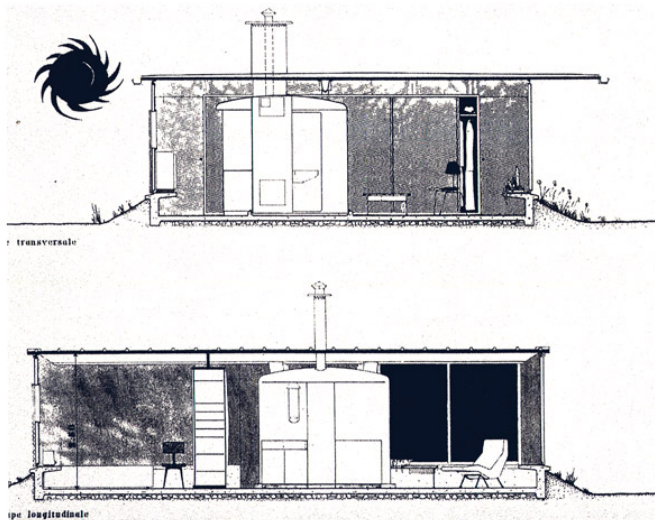
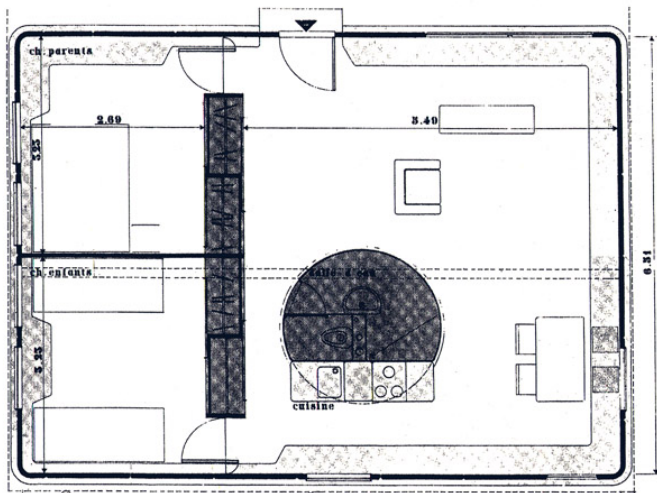
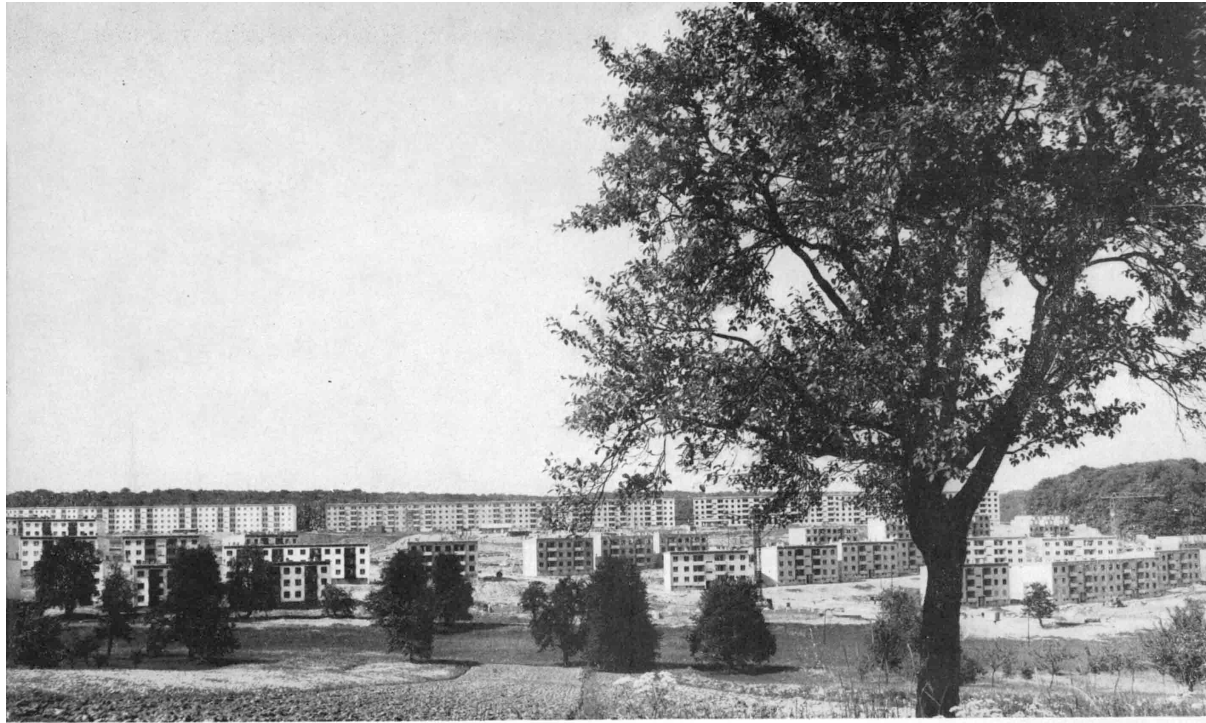


Figure 1.14: Jean Prouvé's *maison des jours meilleurs*, exhibited on the banks of the Seine in Paris, 1956 (Source: CAC 19771142/043).



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R. L. Dupuy

Figure 1.15: Advertisement for the Camus heavy prefabrication system: “More than 18,000 dwelling units built since 1950; Lowering of the construction costs; Gain in time; Flexibility in the architectural expression: the technique loans itself to the most diverse constructions: individual homes, luxury housing developments, and social housing areas” (Source: *Urbanisme* 62-63 “Équipement des grands ensembles” (1959): XXXVII).

In short, neither state-led normalization nor industrialization really completely determined the architectural form or urban typology of housing. At the root of the standardized architecture and urbanism of mass housing was a more implicit set of shared cultural norms - set in motion by the concrete interactions of architects and government officials.¹⁴¹ Modern, collective, efficient, rational and planned: those were the cultural norms guiding the decision towards a homogeneous production of mass housing. Remarkably little debate has been recorded about this decision, suggesting just how broad the consensus about these values really was.

Part of this cultural mindset was the radical dismissal of the single-family home as an option for modern housing provision. This conviction was shared across the political spectrum and transcended the rationale of pragmatic planning. Collective housing production eclipsed that of single-family home building already in 1956, and it would continue to have the upper hand until 1976.¹⁴² Rather than the result of a socialist ideology or an authoritarian government careless about its citizens, the ideas of modernity underlying national modernization were determinant for the intellectual and bourgeois condemnation of the suburban single-family home or *pavillon*. Despite the fact that in some neighboring countries, Belgium most remarkably, the development of single-family homes rendered collective housing estates both unnecessary and unwanted,¹⁴³ French observers and policy makers saw it as synonymous with the allotments of often-shabby and self-built cottages on the urban periphery. The absence of any positive imagery about single-family home living in postwar France - France's interwar experiments with garden cities were off the table and the seducing models of Levitt would only reach France in the mid-1960s¹⁴⁴ - left the *pavillon* as signifier of modernity's opposite. As Kristin Ross has shown, in postwar French culture, "modern" meant orderly, white, and clean; on the urban level this basically meant everything that the existing suburbs were not (figure 1.16).¹⁴⁵ State administrators shared similar convictions: they were particularly adamant on breaking with the past, in this case the disorderly suburbanization of France.

¹⁴¹ In the words of Christian Moley, the architectural normalization of mass housing is an "*autonormalisation consensuelle preproduisant*." See: Moley, *L'architecture du logement: Culture et logique d'une norme héritée*, 276.

¹⁴² See the chart in: Marion Segaud, Catherine Bonvalet, and Jacques Brun, eds., *Logement et habitat: L'état des savoirs* (Paris: La Découverte, 1998), 227. See also: "La construction de maisons individuelles," *Etudes statistiques sur la construction et l'équipement* 46(1978).

¹⁴³ Bruno De Meulder, Jan Schreurs, Annabelle Cock et al., "Sleutelen aan het Belgische stadslandschap," *Oase* 52(1999): 78-113.

¹⁴⁴ Levitt France was established in 1963, and their first project was finished in 1965. See: Isabelle Gournay, "Levitt France et la banlieue à l'américaine: Premier bilan," *Histoire urbaine* 5(2002).

¹⁴⁵ see Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*.



Figure 1.16: The fabric of the Parisian suburbs photographed in 1933 (Source: Bastié, Jean. *La croissance de la banlieue parisienne* (Paris: PUF, 1964): 241).

In popular accounts, the French architecture of mass housing is often brought back to Le Corbusier. Throughout the postwar period however, the “high priest of modernism” played a very minor role in the development of French architecture and urbanism. Despite his outspoken critique of the *grands ensembles*, the popular conviction nevertheless remained that he was responsible for the “errors of modern urbanism” in France.¹⁴⁶ The positive reception of his *Unité d’habitation* project in Marseille, its overall praise in architecture journals and Minister Claudius-Petit’s outspoken enthusiasm for it, were undoubtedly instrumental in creating this impression.¹⁴⁷ In an article published in the influential journal *Population*, Le Corbusier had proposed the *Unité* as a national prototype, whose mass production could solve the housing crisis.¹⁴⁸ His article offered a rational defense of collective living fueled by an outright

¹⁴⁶ Observers tended to blame Le Corbusier for the *grands ensembles*. Jacques Riboud for instance, wrote in 1968 that “the concentration, density and implantation ‘in dominos’ of the grands ensembles derive from his precepts.” See: Jacques Riboud, *Les erreurs de Le Corbusier et leurs conséquences* (Paris: Mazarine, 1968). Despite his stature and the patronage he had found in the support of minister of construction Claudius-Petit however, Le Corbusier had no direct impact on French mass housing production. His failure to realize the plan of Saint-Dié was significant of this, as was his failure to win the *concours expérimentaux* of 1949 and 1950. On Le Corbusier at Saint-Dié, see: Baudouï, *Raoul Dautry, 1880-1951: Le technocrate de la République*, 313-16.

¹⁴⁷ As Minister of Reconstruction and Urbanism between 1948 and 1953, Claudius-Petit was France’s most important defender of architectural modernism, and subsequently, as mayor of Firminy, he commissioned Le Corbusier for its new town plan.

¹⁴⁸ Le Corbusier, “L’habitation moderne,” *Population* 3, no. 3 (1948): 417-40.

condemnation of the individual home and its suburban fabric (figure 1.17). This vision corresponded to that of many state planners who deplored of the “chaos” of the lower-middle class *lotissements défectueux* of the interwar period.

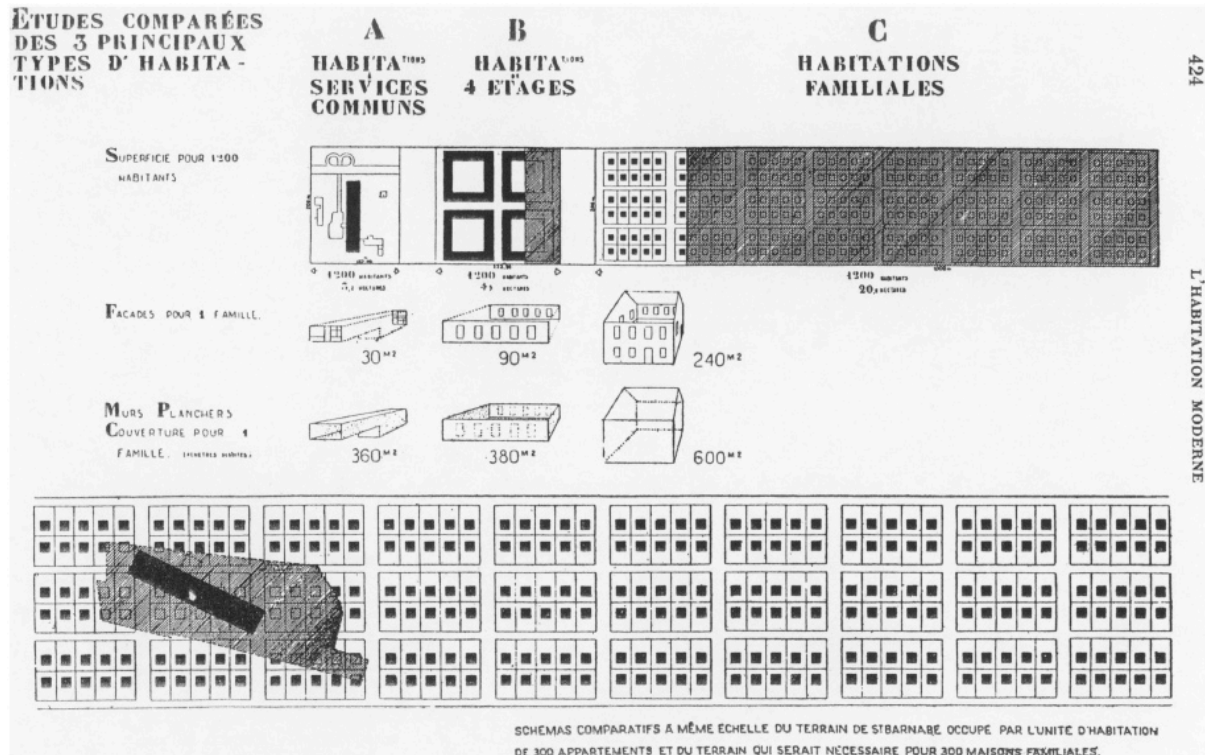


Figure 1.17: A diagram by Le Corbusier explaining the land use rationality of his *Unité d'Habitation*: collective housing in high-rise slabs required considerably less land (Source: Le Corbusier, “L’habitation moderne” *Population 3*, no. 3 (1948): 424).

Nevertheless, formally speaking the *grands ensembles* had little to do with the *Unité d'habitation* as it was built in Marseille. The concept of a sculptural object, a free-floating and self-contained “city in a building” was miles away from the compositional massing of the first generation of *grands ensembles*. The Beaux-Arts tradition of monumental composition - as it was taught by Georges Gromort at ENSBA during the 1930s and 1940s - would prove to be an essential guide for *grands ensembles* architects, the majority of which were trained at this school.¹⁴⁹ Many master plans aimed to provide an aesthetic composition of *grandeur*, meant to elicit awe and express the dignity of the new Frenchman. Regardless of the concrete inspiration for their grand compositions, the bird’s eye view supplied the architects with the essential technique of conceiving them. The experience of the pedestrian, the driver, and even that of the inhabitant from the windows of their apartment, was the often ill-considered result, rather than the starting point, of this top-down compositional order.

¹⁴⁹ Georges Gromort, *Essai sur la théorie de l'architecture: Cours professé à l'École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de 1937 à 1940* (Paris: Vincent Fréal, 1946).

Scale was a first strategy to express compositional grandeur. Bernard Zehrffuss' housing project at Haut-du-Lièvre in Nancy for example featured two colossal slabs of housing, a 400 meter-long fifteen-storey one and a 300 meter-long seventeen-storey one (figure 1.18).¹⁵⁰ At Lyon La Duchère, the same effect was achieved because the slabs were impressively located on top of a steep hill (figure 1.19). Their architects undoubtedly recalled the monumental scale of palace architecture, with Versailles or the Escorial as primary examples. Sequence was another strategy. The *grand ensemble* of Bron-Parilly, by Pierre Bourdeix, René Gagès and Franck Grimal, also in Lyon, featured four series of near-identical T-planned housing slabs along a new monumental boulevard (figure 1.20). Repetition constituted a third. At Marly-les-Grandes-Terres, by Marcel Lods, Jean-Jacques Honneger, and Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry, couples of smaller parallel blocks separated by collective park space were distributed across the terrain, giving viewers from the road surrounding the ensemble a perspective of dynamic repetition (figure 1.21).¹⁵¹ Axial composition was yet another strategy, used to create a monumentality evocative of Hausmannian Paris. For the Surville neighborhood, located on the hill above the town of Montereau, the brothers Arsène-Henry placed the housing blocks along a single boulevard crossing the terrain, articulated by a large square in the center (figure 1.22). Orthogonality, finally, was perhaps the most typical organizing principle. At Sarcelles, Mont-Mesly, and Massy-Antony for example, the urban composition was based on an orthogonal grid of towers and blocks that were grouped so as to create open centrifugal figures (figure 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8).

¹⁵⁰ See: Joseph Abram, *L'architecture moderne en France, Tome 2: Du chaos à la croissance, 1940-1966* (Paris: Picard, 1999), 120-25.

¹⁵¹ *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 74 "Habitations collectives" (1957): 62-65 and *L'Architecture Française* 205-206 (1957): 54-59. See also: Bernard Marrey, "Les Grandes terres à Marly-le-Roi," in *Habiter la modernité*, ed. Xavier Guillot (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2006).



Figure 1.18: Bernard Zehrffuss' housing project at Le Haut-du-Lièvre (1956-1962), a project of 3400 dwelling units financed in large part by the Office public HLM de Nancy (Source: CAA Fonds Zehrffuss, IFA 75).



Figure 1.19: The housing project of Lyon La Duchère by the architects Coulon, Cottin and Grimal, 1957-1966 (Source: CAC 19771142/019). The project was developed by the *Société d'équipement de la région de Lyon*, a subsidiary of SCIC, and contained around 5300 dwelling units.

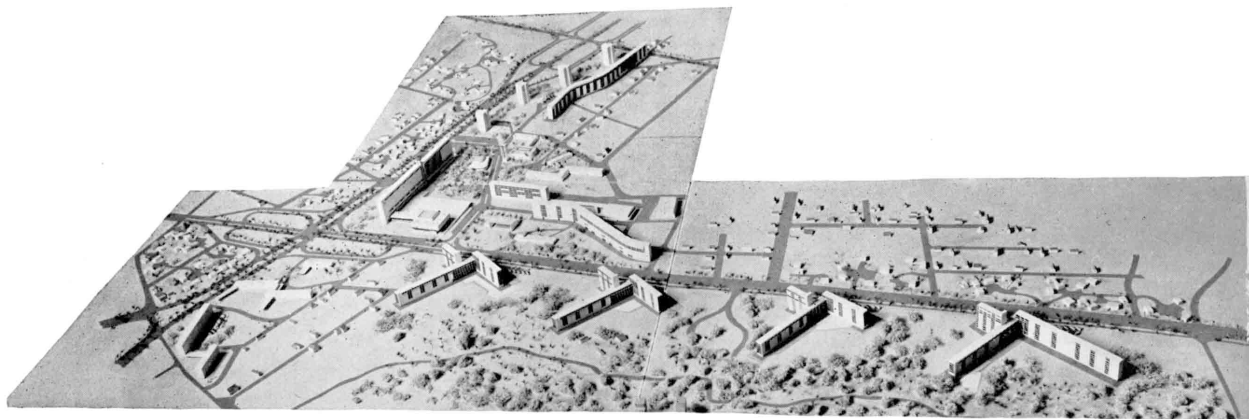


Figure 1.20: Model of the *grand ensemble* of Bron-Parilly by the architects Pierre Bourdeix, René Gages and Franck Grimal, built between 1954 and 1960 (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 66 "Habitations collectives" (1956): 12). The project was for 2600 dwelling units by the *Office départementale HLM du Rhône*.

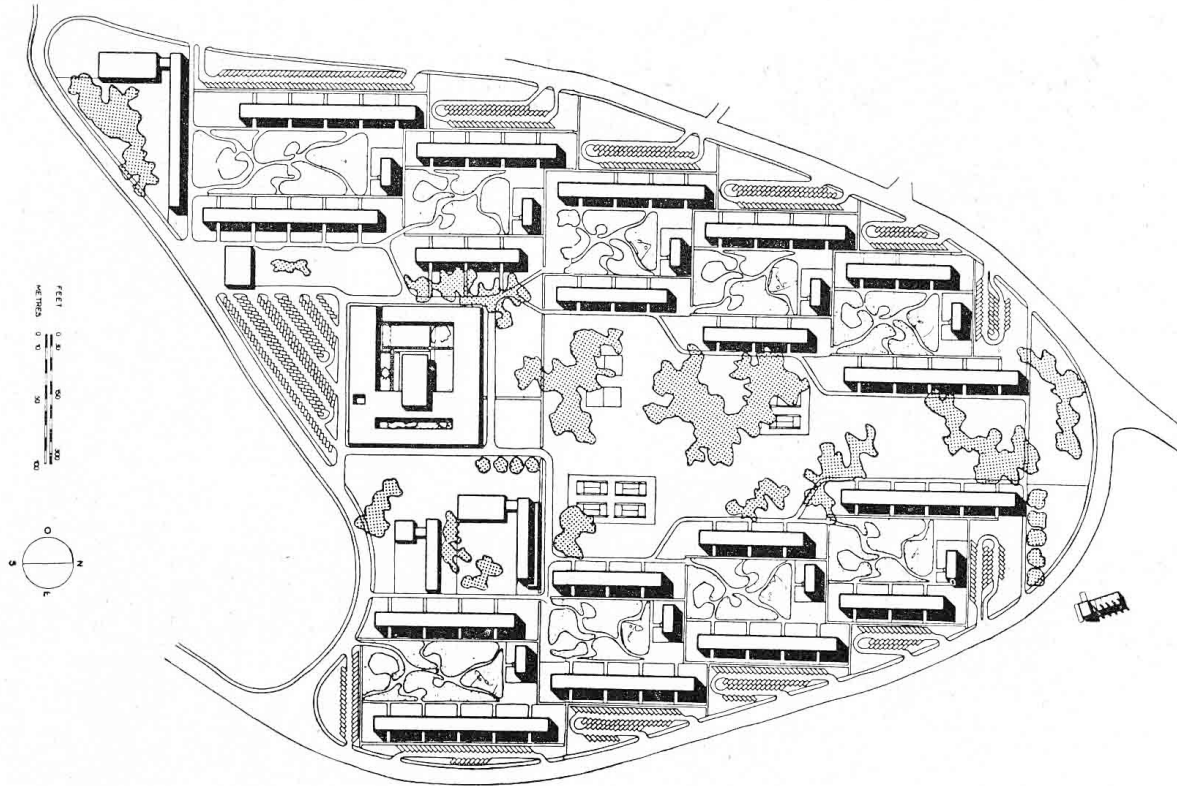


Figure 1.21: Master plan for the *grand ensemble* of Marly-les-Grandes-Terres by the architects Marcel Lods, Jean-Jacques Honneger, and Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry, built between 1955 and 1958 (Source: *L'Architecture Française*, no. 205-206 (1957): 54).

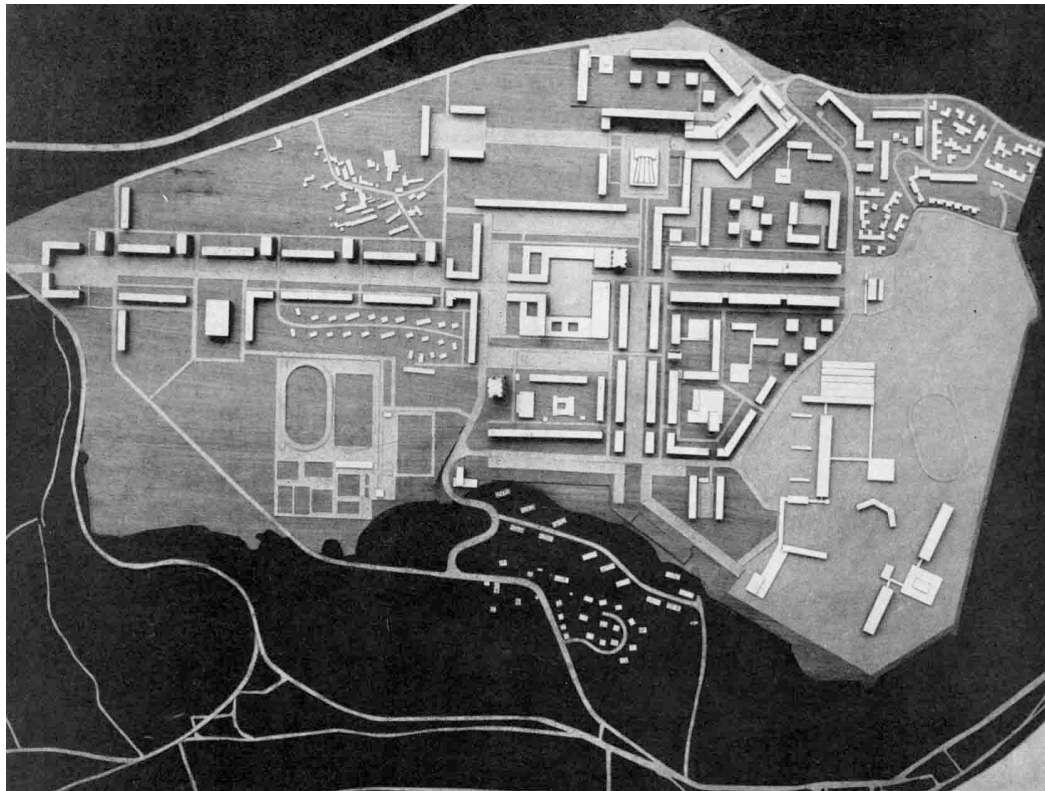


Figure 1.22: Model of the *grand ensemble* of Surville in Montereau by the architects Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry, built between 1961 and 1974 (Source: *Urbanisme* 75-76(1962): 147).

While such projects had much in common with interwar modernist dogma as it was so famously espoused in the 1933 Athens Charter - its functionalist separation of functions, its hostility to the traditional street and perimeter block, and its imperative of air, light and openness - their compositional qualities were more closely related to the traditions of the Beaux-Arts. This is what ultimately provided the visual vocabulary for the *grands ensembles*. It confirmed one of the basic paradoxes of national modernization in France: the desire to break with the past while remaining undeniably French.

Despite the diversity in compositional strategies of individual architects, the pages of leading magazines like *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* or *Urbanisme* during this time revealed the limits of variety. The standardization of dwelling units was mirrored in the similarity between *grands ensembles* nationally: just like the F4, France's standard four-room apartment, appeared thousands of times with minimal layout variations across the country, so did the *grands ensembles* they made up appear as ever so many variations on a theme - whether they were built in the suburbs of Lille or the outskirts of Marseille. Even when architects, like Emile Aillaud, attempted to create an entirely different architecture for mass housing, like at Les Courtilières, the project's odd-shaped windows and curved facades hardly distracted the inhabitants from the fact that they were living in the exact same standardized units (figure 1.23).¹⁵²

¹⁵² *L'Architecture Française* 205-206 (1957): 62-64; *Urbanisme* 68 (1960): 24-25. See also: Abram, *L'architecture moderne en France, Tome 2: Du chaos à la croissance, 1940-1966*, 125-29.



Figure 1.23: Aerial photo of the *grand ensemble* Les Courtilières in Pantin, a nearby suburb of Paris, by the architect Emile Aillaud (Source: *Urbanisme* 68 “Réalizations H.L.M.” (1960): 25).

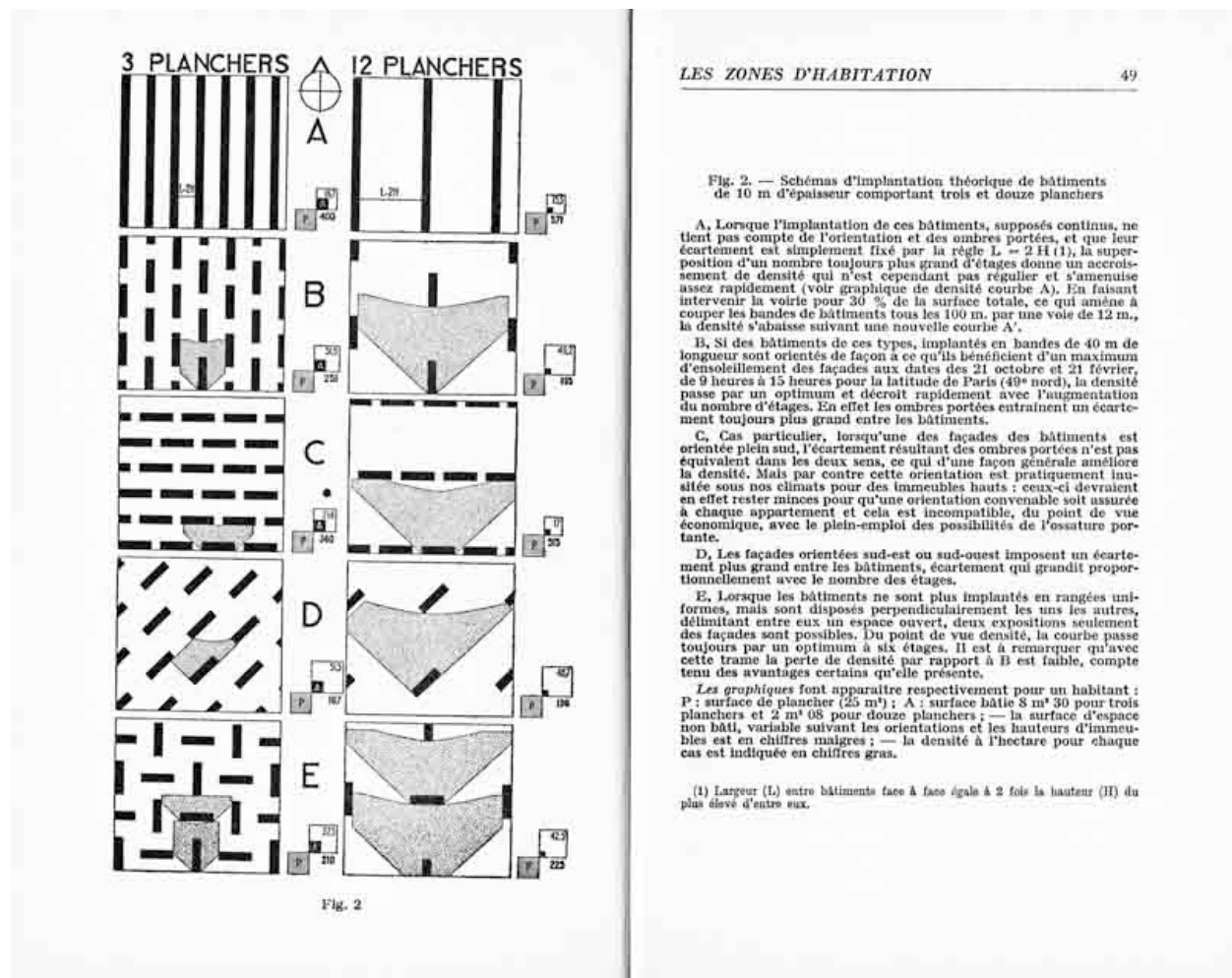
In *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, Christian Rochefort’s classic novel about the life of a young girl in Paris’ suburban mass housing, the protagonist expressed inhabitants’ ambivalent reception of this new standardized environment when she observed its nocturnal state:

“In the evening, the windows were illuminated and behind it were nothing but happy families, happy families, happy families, and happy families. In passing you could see, under the lightbulbs, all the happiness in a row, all equal like twins, or like a nightmare. The happiness of the west facade could see from their homes the happiness of the east facade like they were watching each other in the mirror. Eating noodles from the coop. The happiness was piling up, I could have calculated its volume in cubic meters, in stere and in tons, me who loved creating problems.”¹⁵³

Robert Auzelle’s *Technique de l’urbanisme* of 1953, published in the popular book series “Que sais-je?”, also illustrated how easily the highly normalized, standardized approach to mass

¹⁵³ Christiane Rochefort, *Les petits enfants du siècle* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1961), 62.

housing production carried a concept of the user that was as universalistic as it was humanistic. The wide distribution of this work shows that modern urbanism could now be considered a well-oiled technique. In the large section on housing areas, the fundamental starting point was an evaluation of basic “needs and aspirations of inhabitants”, summarized in a “summarizing chart” listing basic needs according to four categories of users: men, women, children, and the elderly. For women, these included a variety of demands from shops to “the proximity of a small park or a boulevard to walk the stroller.”¹⁵⁴ Yet, when it came to the actual design of residential zones, his “theoretical implantation diagrams” are proof of a radically systematizing approach that prefigures the spatial monotony of the *grands ensembles* (figure 1.24).



LES ZONES D'HABITATION

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Fig. 2. — Schémas d'implantation théorique de bâtiments de 10 m d'épaisseur comportant trois et douze planchers

A. Lorsque l'implantation de ces bâtiments, supposés continus, ne tient pas compte de l'orientation et des ombres portées, et que leur écartement est simplement fixé par la règle $L = 2H$ (1), la superposition d'un nombre toujours plus grand d'étages donne un accroissement de densité qui n'est cependant pas régulier et s'amenuise assez rapidement (voir graphique de densité courbe A). En faisant intervenir la voirie pour 30 % de la surface totale, ce qui amène à couper les bandes de bâtiments tous les 100 m. par une voie de 12 m., la densité s'abaisse suivant une nouvelle courbe A'.

B. Si des bâtiments de ces types, implantés en bandes de 40 m de longueur sont orientés de façon à ce qu'ils bénéficient d'un maximum d'ensoleillement des façades aux dates des 21 octobre et 21 février, de 9 heures à 15 heures pour la latitude de Paris (49° nord), la densité passe par un optimum et décroît rapidement avec l'augmentation du nombre d'étages. En effet les ombres portées entraînent un écartement toujours plus grand entre les bâtiments.

C. Cas particulier, lorsqu'une des façades des bâtiments est orientée plein sud, l'écartement résultant des ombres portées n'est pas équivalent dans les deux sens, ce qui d'une façon générale améliore la densité. Mais par contre cette orientation est pratiquement inutilisée sous nos climats pour des immeubles hauts : ceux-ci devraient en effet rester minces pour qu'une orientation convenable soit assurée à chaque appartement et cela est incompatible, du point de vue économique, avec le plein-emploi des possibilités de l'ossature portante.

D. Les façades orientées sud-est ou sud-ouest imposent un écartement plus grand entre les bâtiments, écartement qui grandit proportionnellement avec le nombre des étages.

E. Lorsque les bâtiments ne sont plus implantés en rangées uniformes, mais sont disposés perpendiculairement les uns les autres, délimitant entre eux un espace ouvert, deux expositions seulement des façades sont possibles. Du point de vue densité, la courbe passe toujours par un optimum à six étages. Il est à remarquer qu'avec cette trame la perte de densité par rapport à B est faible, compte tenu des avantages certains qu'elle présente.

Les graphiques font apparaître respectivement pour un habitant : P : surface de plancher (25 m²) ; A : surface bâtie 8 m² 30 pour trois planchers et 2 m² 08 pour douze planchers ; — la surface d'espace non bâti, variable suivant les orientations et les hauteurs d'immeubles est en chiffres maigres ; — la densité à l'hectare pour chaque cas est indiquée en chiffres gras.

(1) Largeur (L) entre bâtiments face à face égale à 2 fois la hauteur (H) du plus élevé d'entre eux.

Figure 1.24: “Diagram for the theoretical layout of 10m-thick slab buildings of 3 and 12 storeys” by Robert Auzelle (Source: Robert Auzelle, *Technique de l'urbanisme* (Paris: PUF, 1953): 48-49).

¹⁵⁴ Robert Auzelle, *Technique de l'Urbanisme: l'aménagement des agglomérations urbaines* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1953), 31.

The new Frenchman that was implicitly constructed in the architecture of mass housing was a standardized one. Yet, as soon as this standardized user was constructed, its legitimacy was questioned. If experts agreed on the need for norms and standards, they increasingly disagreed on what these should be. The state was not the only institution establishing norms for mass housing during the 1950s: national civil society organizations like the *Union internationale des organismes familiaux* (UIOF) or International Union of Familial Organizations were also engaged with norm-making and as such had their own role in housing production. Established in 1947 to act as a common platform for France's family organizations, UIOF quickly became a crucial organization, operating on both national and international levels.¹⁵⁵ Its subcommittee on housing focused on ways to "better adapt housing to the needs and desires of the family." In 1957 at its yearly conference, the organization established a new set of norms based on surface minima for national housing production (figure 1.25). With a more encompassing definition of the user, including "both physical and spirituals needs," these norms included ideal floor plans that were subsequently promulgated in France.¹⁵⁶ The plans were based on activities rather than simply surface; and instead of four official types promulgated by the state, they proposed nine different types. While they were critical of the existing norms, they confirmed rather than questioned the need for universal norms to be applied to all forms of housing. Naturally, they assumed the nuclear family as the single category for evaluating housing. The norms, soon known as the "Cologne norms," were promulgated on an international scale.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ See various reports and conference proceedings in CAC 19770775/005

¹⁵⁶ Not only by the UIOF itself, but also the *Fédération internationale de l'urbanisme de l'habitation et de l'aménagement des territoires*. See specialized journals like *HLM* and *L'habitation*, and the proceedings of the Congrès mondial de la famille, in: CAC 19770775/006-007.

¹⁵⁷ See CAC 19770775/005.

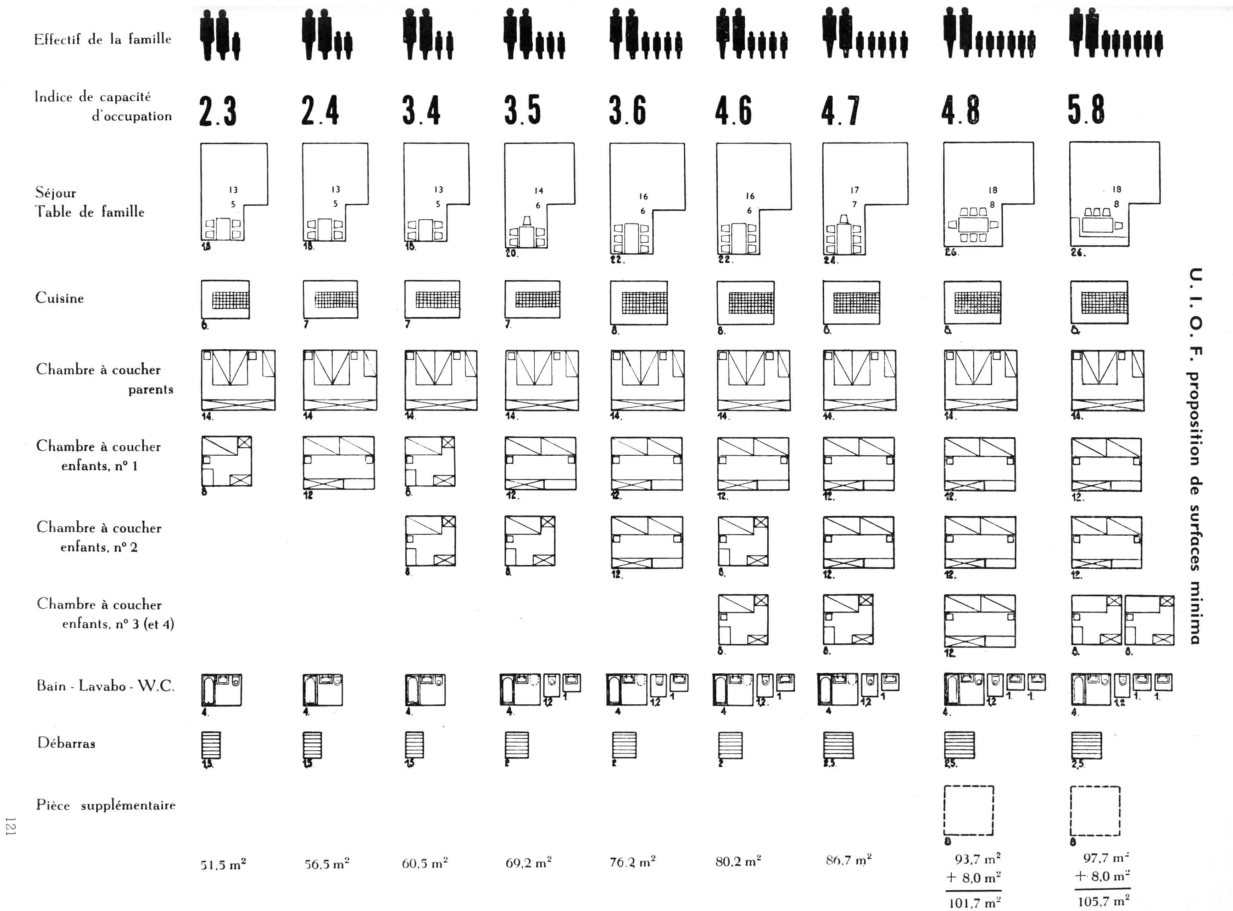


Figure 1.25: An diagram by the *Union internationale des organismes familiaux* (UIOF) to illustrate the calculation of minimum surface norms for apartments, 1959 (Source: *Techniques et Architectures* 19, no. 2 (1959): 121).

Caught in a larger complex of social and cultural norms promoting the modern middle-class nuclear family, the process of architectural standardization and technical normalization was thus an ongoing and a contested one, expressly exceeding the domain of the centralized state. This process engendered a situation in which the notion of the user appeared as a *question* for discussion rather than a fixed assumption. As one of the presenters at the yearly conference observed: “In contrast to the method of making plans for individuals of which the social milieu and needs are known - as it happens most often in the case of the single-family home - the making of plans for an “anonymous” user demands a greater degree of reflection and imagination in the calculation of needs in order to attain satisfying results...”¹⁵⁸ On the one hand, the larger project of national modernization of which mass housing production was a part, implied a standardized, modern way of living; on the other hand, it prompted the question of how to adapt housing to increasingly complex and unknown user needs.

¹⁵⁸ “A l’inverse de la méthode, qui consiste à faire des plans de logements pour des personnes individualisées, dont le cadre social et les besoins sont connus – comme cela se passe le plus souvent dans le cas de la maison unifamiliale - l’élaboration de plans pour l’utilisateur “anonyme” exige une plus grande somme de réflexion et d’imagination dans la prévision des besoins, pour pouvoir attendre des résultats satisfaisants...” See: Adaptation des plans de logements aux impératifs familiaux: Recherche de solutions non-traditionnelles, Contribution by Sepp Stein to the 1961 UIOF Conference in Coventry (CAC 19770775/005).

3. Epistemologies of the User

The development of mass housing production and the processes of normalization that accompanied it entailed the inclusion of new domains of knowledge about the user. While these were initially largely quantitative and normative in nature, they soon expanded to include qualitative expertise guided by research. The conviction that the production of housing needed to be adjusted to inhabitants and their needs first emerged at the margins of architectural production. At a relative distance from state policy, certain architects and sociologists had already begun to develop such “user knowledge” as a basis for design and planning. During the 1950s, the state then gradually yet selectively adopted this new field.

During the immediate postwar years, a number of exceptional yet isolated projects already explored ways to engage users in the architectural and urban conception. One of these was Lurçat’s reconstruction for the town center of Maubeuge.¹⁵⁹ Lurçat - a modernist architect with communist allegiance - insisted that inhabitants’ input during the making of the master plan was not only important for its success, but also constituted a more efficient form of planning. In an article published in *Urbanisme*, he declared that “only by directly collaborating with the population the urbanist can respond with maximum efficiency and speed to the problems at hand. Surveying in order to fix the exact facts of the whole problem, informing the population, educating and then convincing it in order to assure its help and well-considered approval, these are the essential and determining elements of success.”¹⁶⁰ He illustrated his approach with a diagram of the planning process (figure 1.26). While the architect and the urbanist remain the two central actors, the role of the latter was first and foremost to mediate with the inhabitants and to formulate their needs based on public consultation. This implied a two-way process of knowledge flow. Concretely, the project engaged inhabitants through a *Comité local d’urbanisme*, Lurçat’s own interviews with local inhabitants, weekly information sessions, and a big public assembly. These exceptional procedures informed the final project, which by explicit request of the inhabitants entailed the preservation of the old fortifications, an emphasis on preserving and reinforcing commerce in the city center, and a variety of housing types including grouped single-family homes. The modernist re-articulation of the historic, war-torn urban fabric suggested an approach to modernizing urban life while refusing a radical break with the local past (figure 1.27). Despite the success of the plan, its lessons remained unheard and Lurçat himself was not able to further develop his method in subsequent housing projects.

¹⁵⁹ See Jean-Louis Cohen, *André Lurçat, 1894-1970: Autocritique d’un moderne* (Liège: Mardaga, 1995), 243-61.

¹⁶⁰ “Il est évident que ce n’est qu’en agissant en étroite collaboration avec la population que l’urbaniste pourra répondre avec le maximum d’efficacité et de rapidité aux problèmes posés. Enquêter pour fixer les données exactes du problème d’ensemble, informer la population, l’éduquer, puis la convaincre afin de s’assurer son concours et son agrément réfléchi, sont les éléments essentiels et déterminants de la réussite.” See: André Lurçat, “Synthèse d’une collaboration étroite entre techniciens et population,” *Urbanisme* 37-38(1954): 99-114, 100.

ETABLISSEMENT DU PLAN D'AMENAGEMENT ET DE RECONSTRUCTION

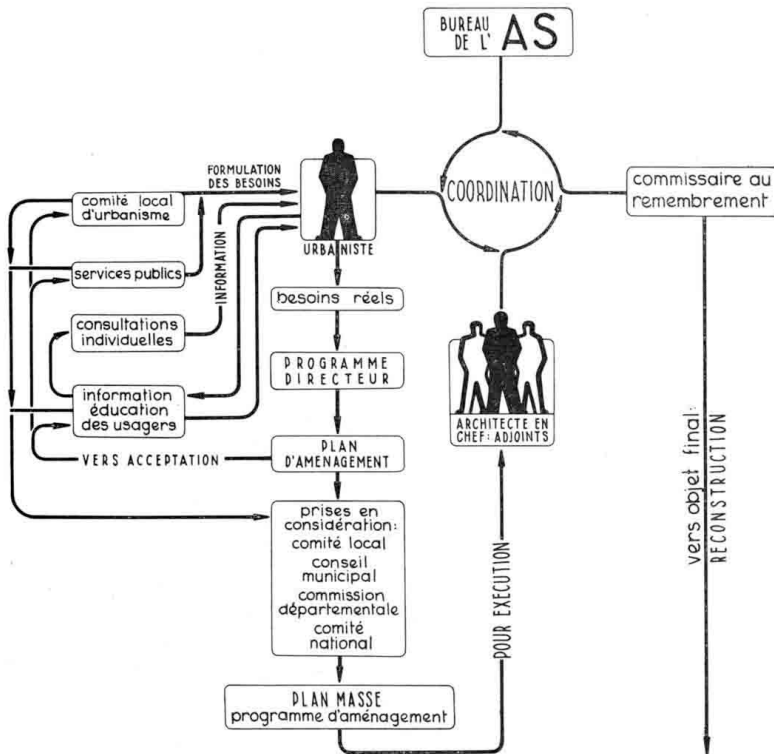


Figure 1.26: A diagram of the planning process for Maubeuge by André Lurçat (Source: *Urbanisme* 37-38 (1954): 100).

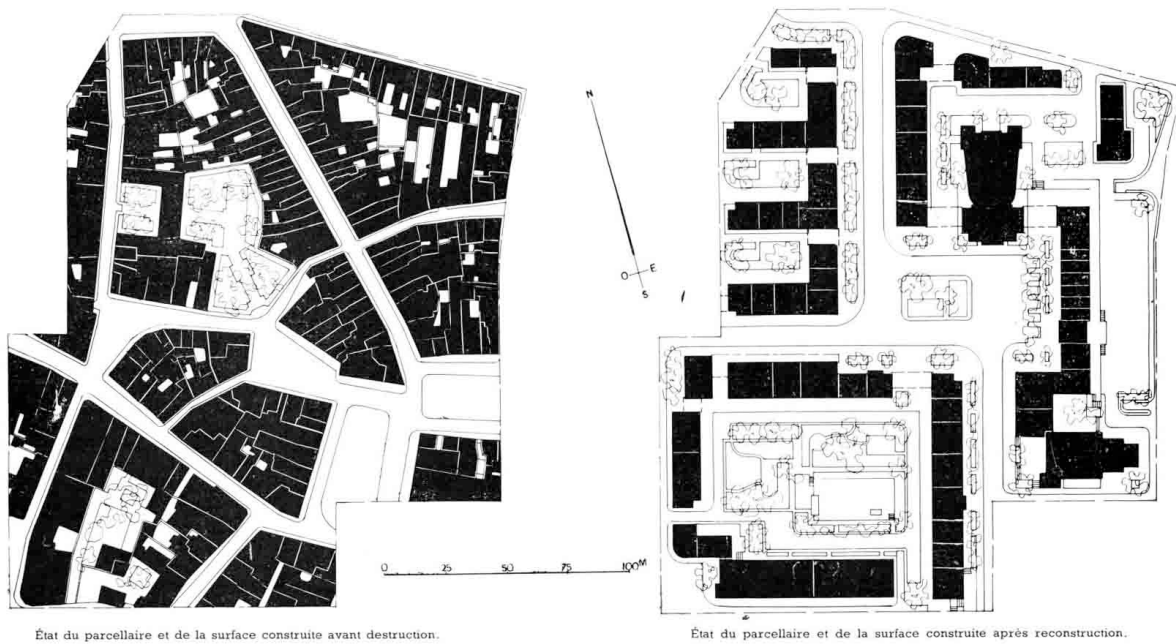


Figure 1.27: A comparison of the existing building block pattern of Maubeuge's historic city center and Lurçat's reconstruction project (Source: *Urbanisme* 37-38(1954): 105).

Closer to Paris was an equally exceptional project, the Cité de la Plaine at Clamart by Robert Auzelle.¹⁶¹ To inform the design for this local housing project, the architect used a study of the existing area by the urban sociologist Chombart de Lauwe.¹⁶² His study revealed the particular social homogeneity of this “fake village of the suburbs,” which was shaped by its geographic isolation yet economic dependence on Paris. Chombart de Lauwe had gone further than description and analysis: his report also stipulated a number of planning recommendations, later published in his book *Paris et l’agglomération Parisienne*. These included improved public transport to Paris and the surrounding suburbs and local cultural facilities. Furthermore, Chombart recommended that new housing be accessible to workers of the same salary level as the existing population and that some of the existing inhabitants be able to move to the new housing area. His proposal was to connect old and new communities and discourage segregation and social conflict.¹⁶³ Auzelle attempted to take these recommendations at heart in his design. Refusing both the Beaux-Arts academism of the Prix de Rome winners and the strict modernism of Le Corbusier, he claimed instead to take “the social organization of space” as the basis for planning, using a method originally developed by Gaston Bardet in the 1940s called “polyphonic organization.”¹⁶⁴ Concretely, Auzelle asked five different architects to each produce a plan. These were then synthesized using Chombart’s ideas.¹⁶⁵ The resulting plan was then divided in five sectors that were allotted to the individual architects. This approach was meant to allow modern planning to emulate the diversity of an organically grown city (figure 1.28).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ A 1936 master plan reserved the terrains to the east of the allotment of Petit-Clamart for development. After WWII, the mayor started a larger program for housing, leading to the creation in 1947 of a departmental HLM office and the construction of more than two thousand housing units between 1951 and 1967.

¹⁶² During the creation of the plans, Robert Auzelle was director in charge of the study center at the urbanism department of MRU. Auzelle convinced Claudius-Petit to sponsor Chombart de Lauwe’s research for Paris, resulting in: Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, *Paris et l’agglomération parisienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 228-40.

¹⁶⁴ See: Frédéric Bertrand, “La Cité de la Plaine à Clamart,” in *Les bâtisseurs de la modernité*, ed. Bernard Marray (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2000).

¹⁶⁵ Four architects under direction of Auzelle were involved: Raymond Gervaise (architect in charge of Reconstruction), Edouard Déchaudat (architect of the city of Clamart), André Mahé and Armand Taponier, as well as one engineer (Emile Monvoisin). In collaboration with Chombart de Lauwe, Auzelle chose a neighborhood unit size of 30-60 units grouped around a small public space. Apart from a section of individual houses built at the start of the project, the ensemble consists of collective housing in blocks of 4 to 5 storeys. See: Visite au Groupe de l’Office d’HLM de Clamart, Quartier de la Plaine, 3 sep 1963 (CAC 19771142/019).

¹⁶⁶ Bardet was influenced by the organicism of Marcel Poète. See: Gaston Bardet, “Marcel Poète,” *News Sheet of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning* 17(1950): 5-7; Marcel Poète, *Introduction à l’urbanisme* (Paris: Sens & Tonka, 2000).

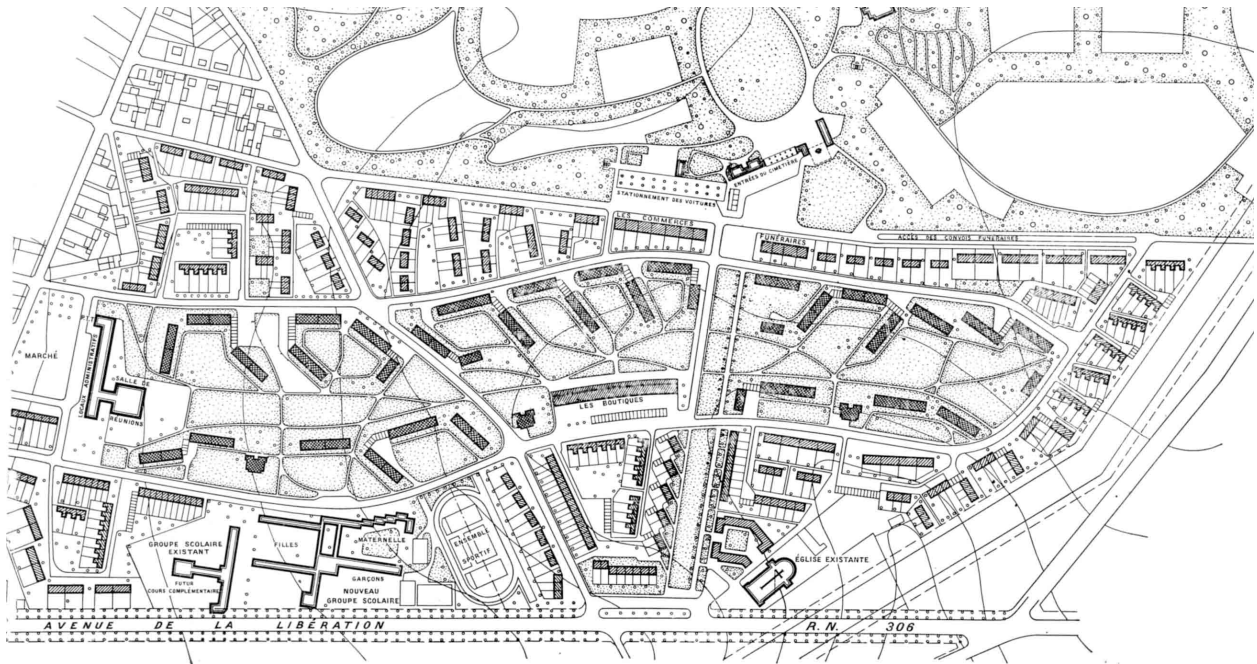


Figure 1.28: Master plan for the Cité de la Plaine at Clamart by the architect/urbanist Robert Auzelle (Source: *Architecture d' Aujourd'hui*, no. 32 “Reconstruction France 1950” (1950): 58).

Both Auzelle’s and Lurçat’s project failed nevertheless to influence the mainstream of French architecture and urbanism at the time. Their influence was perhaps also lessened by the ambivalent position of the architects themselves, which at times confirmed the conventions of normal state-led development. Nevertheless, during the early 1950s, some of their views would be further developed - at least theoretically - in the context of the postwar CIAM. Provoked by the challenges of reconstruction and mass housing production, its members began to challenge some the premises of the Athens Charter. The transition towards a younger generation that gradually replaced the interwar avant-garde and soon united as Team X was part and parcel of a fundamental shift in architectural knowledge, amounting to the incorporation of the experiential realm of the user into architectural design.¹⁶⁷

This process really began when Le Corbusier at the 1949 CIAM in Bergamo declared that the organization’s main goal should be the making of a “Charter of Habitat” to replace the Athens Charter. Despite the fact that the next CIAM would largely ignore this call (the theme of the 1951 Hoddesdon meeting would be “The Heart of the City”), it became a major preoccupation in the debate.¹⁶⁸ At the 1952 preparatory meeting in Paris then, where the generational shift within CIAM was first openly acknowledged, the validity of interwar CIAM ideas for the postwar situation were collectively questioned. The group’s doubts were heightened by the obscurity of

¹⁶⁷ Until recently, scholarly emphasis was on the generational shift from CIAM to Team X, which assigned only a secondary role to the changes in architectural knowledge that were at the basis of this shift. Tom Avermaete, in his work on Candilis-Josic-Woods, argues for an epistemological shift towards the everyday as most fundamental to this change. See: Tom Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-war Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005).

¹⁶⁸ See: Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*.

the notion of “habitat” itself, as Jacqueline Tyrwhitt observed: “The ‘Habitat’ is clearly an element of living space - Corbu is not sure ‘urbanisme’ is the correct word - but how it should be organized with the other elements is less and less clear.”¹⁶⁹ While the concept never became all-encompassing, and terms like house, dwelling, *habitation*, *logement*, *foyer* and *maison* continued to be used, habitat was the term consistently employed in the context of mass housing. This expressed the desire to address the everyday realm of the user as part of architectural mass production. The notion of habitat remained a central topic at the 1952 Sigtuna meeting, and would finally be in the spotlight during the 1953 Aix-en-Provence meeting, entitled “La Charte de l’Habitat.”

It was here where in the words of Tom Avermaete, the “epistemological turn towards the everyday” became clear.¹⁷⁰ The program, prepared by André Wogenscky, suggested that the meeting study “LIVING and everything that man plans and constructs for living.” Amongst the forty-some presentations was the Smithsons’ groundbreaking Urban Re-identification Grid.¹⁷¹ Another remarkable contribution came from a group called CIAM-Paris, established a year earlier by the architects Edith and Roger Aujame, Pierre Riboulet, Gérard Thurnauer and Jean-Louis Véret.¹⁷² Unlike the majority of contributors, they did not present a project but an “analytical study of habitat” of the Parisian suburb of Boulogne-Bilancourt. The group’s postulate was that habitat was “the meeting point between sociology and architecture. No worthwhile housing without an organized environment.”¹⁷³ Their study did not only include a quantitative survey of the population but also photographic documentation, cartographic analysis, and first-hand sociological observations. This approach would portray Boulogne-Bilancourt “from the perspective of everyday life” rather than as “abstract entity.”¹⁷⁴ The analysis was inspired by Chombart de Lauwe, with whom they had been in contact in 1953, but also by the North-African urban research of Ecochard, with whom Gérard Thurnauer had gained working experience, and by Jean-Paul Tristram, whose studies in Marocco had opened their eyes to the sociological approach of the urban.¹⁷⁵ They were not alone in their approach: Ecochard’s interdisciplinary *Groupe d’architectes modernes marocains* (GAMMA), which had already

¹⁶⁹ Tyrwhitt quoted in *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁷⁰ Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-war Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, 74.

¹⁷¹ See: Team 10, Max Risselada, and Dirk van den Heuvel, *Team 10: 1953-81, In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005), 30-33.

¹⁷² As described in Chapter 4, the latter three would become future members of the Atelier de Montrouge, which would play a key part in the changing architecture culture following the social critiques around 1968.

¹⁷³ “[...] habitat est le point de rencontre entre la sociologie et l’architecture. Pas de logis valable sans milieu organisé.” CIAM-Paris, Introduction à l’étude d’une grille de présentation, juillet 1953. In: Catherine Blain, “Du ‘droit à l’habitat’ au ‘droit à la ville’: L’héritage des CIAM chez les architectes de l’atelier de Montrouge,” in *Autour du CIAM 9 d’Aix-en-Provence, 1953*, ed. Jean-Lucien Bonillo, Claude Massu, and Daniel Pinson (Marseille: Imbernon, 2006); Catherine Blain, “Thurnauer et le groupe CIAM-Paris” in *Autour du CIAM 9 d’Aix-en-Provence, 1953*, ed. Jean-Lucien Bonillo, Claude Massu, and Daniel Pinson (Marseille: Imbernon, 2006).

¹⁷⁴ “sous l’angle de la vie quotidienne” instead of as “entité abstraite.” Catherine Blain and Dominique Delaunay, *L’Atelier de Montrouge: La modernité à l’oeuvre, 1958-1981* (Paris: Actes sud / Cité de l’architecture et du patrimoine, 2008), 20, 84-88.

¹⁷⁵ Thurnauer had learned from his job with Ecochard about “the urban reality and its problems of the mass, of the bidonvilles.” Blain, “Thurnauer et le groupe CIAM-Paris”, 273-76.

presented similar work at the previous meeting, now presented “The Moroccan Habitat, or Habitat for the Greatest Number,” and Emery’s Algiers group showed its ethnographic analyses of Algerian *bidonvilles*.

Regardless of their developmentalist tendencies - a hierarchy of habitat that moved up from basic self-building to “advanced” housing solutions like the *Unité d’habitation* - the work of the Smithsons, the French and the North African groups all emphasized the primacy of an architectural knowledge centered on everyday life and on the user. The Doorn Statement on Habitat, established the following year by a group of mainly Dutch and British architects rounded up the new approach by insisting on “studying urbanism as communities of varying degrees of complexity,”¹⁷⁶ as well as the necessity of architects’ collaboration with sociologists and psychologists.¹⁷⁷

Team X thus represented an international paradigm shift in architectural modernism. This nevertheless remained at a distance from the mainstream production of mass housing in many countries. In France, despite Candilis-Josic-Woods’ many contributions to *grands ensembles* projects, the theories of Team X would pass practically unknowingly in mainstream architecture and urbanism discourse until the mid-1960s.¹⁷⁸ The majority of *grands ensembles* architects remained resistant towards the idea of incorporating users’ opinions or experiences into the design process.¹⁷⁹ Rather than architecture, it was the emerging field of sociology that became central to the changes in French urban policy-making.

Much of the honor in this respect has been given to Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe. Now recognized as one of the pre-eminent sociologists of postwar France, Chombart de Lauwe was one of the most influential advocates for the inclusion of sociological expertise in urban planning.¹⁸⁰ Years before Sudreau’s “apartment referendum” and his consultation of inhabitants, Chombart had emphasized - both in academic and government circles - the need for what he called “applied” urban sociological studies prior to urban planning projects. Chombart de Lauwe, who came out of WWII with links to French technocratic thought,¹⁸¹ promoted the idea that

¹⁷⁶ See: Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, 240.

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Louis Viouleau, "A Critique of Architecture: The Bitter Victory of the Situationist International," in *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture*, ed. Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault (Montréal / Cambridge, Mass.: Canadian Centre for Architecture / MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁸ For example Candilis-Josic-Woods projects for Blanc-Mesnil, Bobigny, and their winning competition “Opération Million” in 1955. See: Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-war Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*.

¹⁷⁹ See Chombart’s interviews with architects: Chombart de Lauwe, *Famille et habitation, Tome I: Sciences humaines et conceptions de l’habitation*.

¹⁸⁰ See: Amiot, *Contre l’Etat, les sociologues: Eléments pour une histoire de la sociologie urbaine en France, 1900-1980*; Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe and Marc Augé, *Les hommes, leurs espaces, et leurs aspirations: Hommage à Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe* (Paris: Harmattan, 1994); Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, *Un anthropologue dans le siècle: Entretiens avec Thierry Paquot* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1996); Jean Remy, ed. *Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe et l’histoire des études urbaines en France*, *Espaces et Sociétés*, no. 103 (Paris: Harmattan, 2001).

¹⁸¹ Chombart de Lauwe had graduated from the *Ecole des cadres d’Uriage*, a wartime think tank founded in 1940 after the French defeat to form a strong political elite. The school produced numerous engineers who would work for the MRU later on. It harbored a culture of “men of action,” fighting for national grandeur.

habitat or dwelling was a universal condition:¹⁸² “The house [*habitation*] cannot be separated from the material living environment of a society in space, in other words, from *habitat*. The topic we set out thus poses, in its essence, the general problem of relations between the material manifestations of a civilization, its social structures, and its modes of thinking. Studying *habitat* in this perspective, is to observe the image of a society on the ground.”¹⁸³

Chombart de Lauwe proposed an important expansion of the notion of need as it was understood by French planners and architects. Rather than a matter of quantity, function, or biology, he insisted that inhabitants’ needs with regard to dwelling were physiological, psychological and cultural in nature. Apart from minimum floor surface and standards of modern comfort, his research revealed a multitude of needs: “a need to organize and appropriate space, a need for independence of groups of inhabitants inside an apartment, a need for rest and relaxation, a need to separate functions, a need for well-being and freedom from material constraints, a need for familial intimacy, a need to be appreciated, a need for external social relations, and so on.”¹⁸⁴

Such findings shaped his calls for the inclusion of sociological research in state-led urbanism, which were further strengthened by his collaboration with Robert Auzelle. Around the time of their collaboration in Clamart, Auzelle became his best advocate at the Ministry and helped him get some of his research projects funded. For Chombart de Lauwe, planning could either be shaped by economic and demographic calculations and the personal ideas of designers, thus imposing plans on the population. Or it could take into account “a more profound knowledge of the real behavior and most importantly, the motivations behind this behavior” which should allow architects and planners to “avoid the tensions and the revolts they threaten to encounter.”¹⁸⁵ Chombart de Lauwe advocated for France to “catch up” with other countries where sociological study was more prominent in planning, like British and Scandinavian housing and new town developments, as well as the efforts of various American and European architects to incorporate studies about user needs.¹⁸⁶

Methodologically, Chombart de Lauwe proposed a mutual development of fundamental and applied research. He was convinced that these were not antithetical and would fertilize each other without compromise. The *Groupe d’Ethnologie Sociale*, founded in 1950, channelled his fundamental research, while its spin-off, first created in 1953 under the name *Bureau d’études*

¹⁸² Jeanne Haffner has situated Chombart in an intellectual network of people concerned with what they called “social space” as a way of understanding the intersection between society and the built environment. See: Jeanne Haffner, “Social Space Revolution: Aerial Photography, Social Science, and Urban Politics in Postwar France” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2008).

¹⁸³ “L’habitation ne peut pas être séparée du cadre matériel de vie d’une société dans l’espace, c’est-à-dire, de l’habitat. Le sujet que nous abordons pose donc, dans son fond, le problème général des rapports entre les manifestations matérielles d’une civilisation, les structures sociales, et les modes de pensée qui lui sont propres. Etudier l’habitat dans cette perspective, c’est observer l’image de la société sur le sol.” See: Chombart de Lauwe, *Famille et habitation, Tome I: Sciences humaines et conceptions de l’habitation*, 11.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹⁸⁵ “une connaissance plus approfondie des comportements réels et surtout des motivations de ces comportements.” See: Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, “Sciences humaines, planification et urbanisme,” *Annales (ESC)* 16, no. 4 (1961): 686-98.

¹⁸⁶ He mentioned a list of such studies in “le logement le ménage et l’espace familial” (1955). See: Reports by Chombart de Lauwe (CAC 19770775/004).

sociotechniques and soon renamed *Centre d'étude des groupes sociaux*, focused on applied research. His fundamental research cell was already contracted by the Ministry in 1951, but it was the applied one in which state-commissioned research really took off.¹⁸⁷ Its projects at this time included research on Bordeaux, Maubeuge, Rouen, Saint-Etienne, and Paris for various state institutions like the Ministry, the District of Paris and the CSTB. Towards the end of the decade, the surge in demand for applied research projects had engendered a new institutional structure which emulated the emerging category of (semi-)private research firms.¹⁸⁸ With his applied research, Chombart envisaged urban sociology as an experimental science that turned the built environment, at least metaphorically, into a life-sized laboratory:

*“Research needs to be oriented towards an experimental observation pursued in increasingly controlled conditions, methodically choosing the samples and terrains for comparison, and progressively developing hypotheses from the first observations onwards, following the approach by Claude Bernard in the medical sciences. The second step is to move towards a veritable experimental intervention by preparing plans in which predefined elements following precise hypotheses are introduced in order to observe the results. Research also needs to be participatory, that is to say obliging researchers to live close to local populations and engage them in researchers’ work. Research needs to be active and dynamic to the extent to which it studies social phenomena in relation with transformations that are on their way. In such conditions, fundamental research, disinterested in the scientific sense of the word, will be most efficient and most useful for the applications themselves, because it would bring new solutions instead of getting stuck in routines, like it would risk doing if one wanted to channel it entirely in the narrow framework of short-term studies.”*¹⁸⁹

Such views about sociology as an experimental science were not uncommon at the time, and dovetailed with the popularity of what was referred to as the “attitude prospective,” a loose movement of futurist politicians, high-level civil servants, businessmen, and scientists.¹⁹⁰ Sociologists of such stripe were eager to prove the importance of their science in assuring a better future. Even those who did not conceive of it as interventionist, seemed to perceive the

¹⁸⁷ GES became part of the large research group of the *Centre d'Etudes Sociologiques* (CES) after 1959. During the 1960s, it was moved to Montrouge and was renamed *Centre d'Ethnologie Sociale et Psychosociologie*, and then IRESCO. In contrast, CEGS was a private non-profit organization. It was renamed *Centre de sociologie urbaine* (CSU). Individuals, projects and money flowed in between both institutions. See: Christian Topalov, "Centre de recherche: Le Centre de sociologie urbaine," *Politix* 5, no. 20 (1992): 195-201.

¹⁸⁸ Chombart de Lauwe, "Sciences humaines, planification et urbanisme," 686.

¹⁸⁹ “La recherche doit alors s’orienter vers une observation expérimentale poursuivie dans des conditions de plus en plus contrôlées, en choisissant méthodiquement les terrains de comparaison et les échantillons et en élaborant progressivement des hypothèses à partir des premières observations, suivant la ligne ouverte par Claude Bernard dans le domaine médical. La seconde étape consiste à passer à une véritable intervention expérimentale en préparant des plans dans lesquels sont introduits des éléments définis d’avance suivant des hypothèses précises pour observer ensuite les résultats. La recherche doit également être participante, c’est-à-dire obliger les chercheurs à vivre proches des populations et associer la population aux travaux des chercheurs. Elle doit être active et dynamique dans la mesure où elle étudie les phénomènes sociaux en relation avec les transformations qui sont progressivement apportées. Dans ces conditions, la recherche de base, désintéressée au sens scientifique du mot, sera la plus efficace et la plus utile pour les applications elles-mêmes, car elle apportera des solutions nouvelles au lieu de s’enliser dans des routines, comme elle risquerait de le faire si on voulait la canaliser uniquement dans le cadre étroit des études à court terme.” *Ibid.*, 691.

¹⁹⁰ In political clubs, like the *Club Jean Moulin*, the *Association d'étude pour l'expansion de la recherche scientifique*, and the *Centre d'études prospectives – Association Gaston Berger*.

field of sociology as shifting gears. At the *Colloque national de démographie* in 1960, Alain Girard claimed that “sociology has left the cabinet of the scholar and the thinker, in order to insert itself more and more in contemporary life, and apply itself to the observation of current problems.”¹⁹¹

Henri Lefebvre, who tended to be more critical towards the reigning technological optimism, described his 1960 research of Mourenx as considering “the new town as a social laboratory (not in the sense of Kurt Lewin, but nevertheless in a sufficiently specific sense: as a melting pot in which well-defined social forces take place and where tangible results of macro-decisions appear.)”¹⁹² By the mid-1960s the mass of studies on housing estates and new large-scale urban developments had become so overwhelming that Henri Coing, in the introduction to his well-known sociological study of Parisian urban renewal, felt the need to acknowledge that the fashionable domain of sociological enquiry was elsewhere: “Urban sociology in France has found in the housing groups that are localized at the periphery of our cities a vast field of research and experimentation: the spontaneous or directed suburban growth supplies a privileged terrain for the observation of ways of life and new behavior of urbanites. The ‘grand ensemble’ figures as an improvised laboratory.”¹⁹³ The experimental condition of the *grand ensemble* was thus appearing under the very eyes of sociologists, whether they partook or stood by. At the same time, state planners and a variety of like-minded researchers crossing in and out of the state administration were already involved in adjusting mass housing production, as they could and wanted, to the social scientific evaluation of built projects. As the next chapter will show, the *grille Dupont* would function as one of the essential log of this process of adaptation.

Together with a small group of state administrators, civil society leaders, and architects from the mid-1950s onwards, Chombart de Lauwe argued for multidisciplinary planning teams that would bring together policy makers, planners, architects, and sociologists.¹⁹⁴ After sociological analysis of how modernist architects designed housing, he remained unconvinced that architects could really design for inhabitants’ real needs.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, so he contended, “the work of researchers in the human sciences needs to consist - in collaboration with architects, administrators, and social services - of analyzing these needs in all their complexity and variety

¹⁹¹ “La sociologie est sortie du cabinet de l’érudit et du penseur pour s’insérer davantage dans la vie contemporaine, et s’appliquer à l’observation des problèmes actuels.” See: *Colloque national de démographie*, Strasbourg 1960 (CAC 19770775/007).

¹⁹² “[...] la cité nouvelle comme un laboratoire social (pas au sens de Kurt Lewin, et cependant d’une façon suffisamment précise: comme un creuset dans lequel se manifestent des forces sociales bien définies et où apparaissent les résultats tangibles de macro-décisions).” In: Henri Lefebvre, “Les nouveaux ensembles urbains, un cas concret: Lacq-Mourenx et les problèmes urbains de la nouvelle classe ouvrière,” *Revue française de sociologie* 1, no. 2 (1960): 186-201.

¹⁹³ “La sociologie urbaine en France a trouvé dans les groupes d’habitation qui s’implantent à la périphérie de nos villes un vaste champ de recherches et d’expérience: la croissance spontanée ou dirigée des agglomérations fournit un terrain privilégié pour l’observation des modes de vie et des comportements nouveaux des citoyens. Le “grand ensemble” fait figure de laboratoire improvisé.” Henri Coing, *Rénovation urbaine et changement social l’îlot n° 4 (Paris 13e)* (Paris: Editions ouvrières, 1966), 12.

¹⁹⁴ He saw this happening in the work of the *Commission générale du Plan* (CGP), which consulted sociologists on a regular basis. See: Chombart de Lauwe, “Sciences humaines, planification et urbanisme,” 690.

¹⁹⁵ Chombart de Lauwe, *Famille et habitation, Tome I: Sciences humaines et conceptions de l’habitation*; Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, “Sociologie de l’habitation,” *Urbanisme* 65, no. (Theme: Habitation - Agglomérations) (1959).

so that housing can be adapted to families and allow them to flourish [*épanouir*] instead of imposing on them.”¹⁹⁶

Ultimately, his idea of such collaboration was based on the conviction that “the basic approach shared by urban planners and sociologists consists of thinking people in space and research for them the means to appropriate space.”¹⁹⁷ The notion of appropriation - which would become one of the main concepts of Lefebvre’s thought as inspired by Situationism - was in fact first formulated by Chombart de Lauwe. Despite his lofty ambitions however, his recommendations to planners tended to fall all too easily into the familiar format. In a 1959 issue of *Urbanisme* for example, he stipulated maximum surface norms that varied per geographic region, but using the same universal method of calculation. He predicted that when surfaces were too small - he located a significant threshold at 14-16 m² per person - tensions would arise within the family. He also advocated for improvements to mass housing that were already well known, like better sound insulation and more collective amenities.¹⁹⁸ In its essence, Chombart’s approach was based on an objective science of human need. His belief that user needs could be better known and subsequently better accommodated for by experts was unwavering. He espoused the dominant intellectualist bias against the single-family home, arguing that opinion polls like the 1947 INED survey could not reveal inhabitants’ real needs.¹⁹⁹ And he preferred collective over individual housing because the latter was less efficient and often resulted in “badly organized urbanization patterns.”²⁰⁰

His applied research in Bordeaux revealed even more normative assumptions. The goal of this study, commissioned after the positive reception of his studies for Paris, was to help the developer, a regional social housing organization, in adapting their housing program to users’ needs.²⁰¹ Based on sociological profiles of household types in three local housing estates, the study questioned the validity of generic norms, defining “this standard family or this average Frenchman, a rare sample that does not really exist if it were not for the arbitrary intervention of statistics or the lack of imagination of model makers.”²⁰² Despite this critique however, Chombart de Lauwe did not question standardized mass production itself. On the contrary, a

¹⁹⁶ “Le travail des chercheurs dans les sciences humaines doit consister, en collaboration avec les architectes, les administrateurs, et les services sociaux, à analyser ces besoins dans toute leur complexité et leur variété pour que l’habitation puisse s’adapter aux familles et leur permettre de s’épanouir au lieu de s’imposer à elles.” Chombart de Lauwe, *Famille et habitation, Tome I: Sciences humaines et conceptions de l’habitation*, 19.

¹⁹⁷ “La démarche d’esprit commune aux urbanistes et aux sociologues consiste à penser les hommes dans l’espace et à rechercher pour eux les moyens de s’approprier l’espace.” Chombart de Lauwe, “Sciences humaines, planification et urbanisme,” 688.

¹⁹⁸ Chombart de Lauwe, “Sociologie de l’habitation.”

¹⁹⁹ Chombart de Lauwe, *Famille et habitation, Tome I: Sciences humaines et conceptions de l’habitation*, 17.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 205-14.

²⁰¹ See: Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, Jacques Jenny, and Louis Couvreur, “Logement et comportement des ménages dans trois cités nouvelles de l’agglomération bordelaise,” *Cahiers du Centre scientifique et technique du bâtiment* 30, no. 282 (1958): 1-56. The results of this study were deemed less than impressive by those who commissioned it and did not leave a substantial impact on urban policy in Bordeaux.

²⁰² “... cette famille standard ou de ce Français moyen, échantillon rare n’ayant de réalité que grâce à l’intervention arbitraire des statistiques ou au manques d’imagination des créateurs de modèles.” in: *Ibid.*, 53.

better understanding of how families used their domestic space further legitimized the mass production of identical housing units. Echoing Le Corbusier's pleas for the mass production of a standard architectural prototype, he contended:

“Another contradiction subsists also between the recommended fluidity - so that to different stages of the development of households correspond living environments adapted at least by their size [pointure] - and the lasting attachment of the tenant to his dwelling, which seems desirable to a certain extent - so that the user can arrange his home according to personal taste, anticipating for a future as remote as his personal projects allow. The solution to this apparent dilemma could be found in the construction of large homogeneous series of dwelling units of which the layout and fittings are identical thanks to the global conception of the F3 or F4 [three or four-room apartments]. Analogous to other industrial sectors, one could talk of “brands” of dwellings, like makes of cars or brands of household appliances - independently of their characteristics of power or the capacity of the models. One could moreover reproduce these series in multiple geographic sections of a single urban agglomeration, in order to maximize changes of apartment from one estate to the other, and thus respond to the need for mobility prompted by change of workplace or school (to just cite these factors of mobility).”²⁰³

Concepts of the home as a “neutral” standardized cell were commonplace for architects during the 1950s. Asked if the architect “can or has to influence the lifestyle of his contemporaries” Emile Aillaud responded, in a 1958 meeting with Sudreau: “I do not think that we can or should weigh on the life of the tenant by way of the dwelling layout. To impose a mold adapted to intellectuals or the bourgeoisie would lead to trivial results and a rapid degradation of the dwelling space. Therefore, I think the cell needs to be as anonymous and interchangeable as possible, so that “anybody” could live in it.”²⁰⁴

Scholars have revealed Chombart de Lauwe's ambivalent position in academic, professional and government circles.²⁰⁵ On the one hand, despite the fact that his relation to academic sociology was a tenuous one, his work was meant to be inscribed in the growing academic field of sociology. The prominent “prospectivist” Gaston Berger offered support, but Gurvitch obstructed

²⁰³“Une autre contradiction subsiste également entre la fluidité à préconiser - afin qu'aux différentes étapes de la croissance des ménages correspondent des cadres de vie adaptés au moins par leur “pointure” - et l'attachement durable du locataire à son logement, qui paraît souhaitable dans une certaine mesure - pour que l'utilisateur puisse aménager son foyer à son goût en prévision d'un avenir aussi reculé que le permettent ses projets personnels. La solution à ce dilemme apparent pourrait être trouvée dans la construction de grandes séries homogènes de logements dont l'agencement et l'équipement seraient identiques quant à la conception d'ensemble du F.III au F.V. Par analogie avec les autres secteurs de l'activité industrielle, on pourrait parler de “marques” d'habitations, comme il existe des marques d'automobiles ou d'appareils ménagers - indépendamment des caractéristiques de puissance ou de capacité des modèles. On pourrait par ailleurs reproduire ces séries en plusieurs secteurs géographiques d'une même agglomération urbaine, pour faciliter au maximum les échanges d'appartements d'une cité à l'autre et répondre ainsi aux besoins de mobilité que peuvent entraîner les changements de lieux de travail ou d'écoles (pour ne citer que ces facteurs de mobilité).” Ibid., 53-54.

²⁰⁴“(…) je ne crois pas que l'on puisse et que l'on doive peser sur la vie du locataire par le plan de la cellule. Lui imposer un moule adapté à des intellectuels ou à des bourgeois aisées, aboutirait à des résultats dérisoires, à une dégradation, à un avilissement rapides des locaux d'habitation. Je pense donc que la cellule doit être aussi anonyme et interchangeable que possible, afin que “tout le monde” puisse s'y loger.” Statement by Emile Aillaud during a debate entitled “L'Architecte peut-il et doit-il influencer sur le mode de vie de ses contemporains?” See: Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles, 1957-58 (CAC 19770816/005).

²⁰⁵ Amiot, *Contre l'Etat, les sociologues: Eléments pour une histoire de la sociologie urbaine en France, 1900-1980*, 35-46.

him from entering the university and Levi-Strauss was “embarrassed that he was doing ethnography in Paris, and not in the tropics.”²⁰⁶ Chombart de Lauwe was also in contact with Georges Friedmann, who introduced him to Chicago School sociology - but he remained critical of the urban ecology model.

On the other hand, his work would become inscribed in the growing demand for expertise of the French state to accompany the project of modernization, particularly after 1958 as we will see. While he was at time critical of state-led urban planning, his repeated calls to take better account of the users’ needs and desires did not imply a fundamental critique of state-led modernization in and of itself. On the contrary, it vindicated it. Chombart criticized the “hard” way of bringing about modernization as it was supported by some policy makers during the 1950s, but his own work was a way to smoothen the process rather than eliminating it. Ultimately, he never questioned the premise for social modernization based on housing:

“We have been able to observe at multiple occasions that some imposed behavior, materialized by a certain disposition of the dwelling unit, are in flagrant opposition with the cultural models, desires or aspirations of households. In contrast, we have been able to notice changes in the traditional way of “living” that fully satisfy the beneficiaries of new dwellings. It is when the plan leaves a certain degree of freedom to the user in the choice of his lifestyle, without encouraging undesirable habits incurred in the old dwellings, not to say slums, that the progress is best experienced as a liberation and not like an obligation to give way to modernism. [...] it is important that its innovative quality is not experienced like an inconvenience or hindrance to family life but like a liberation from old habits and outdated cultural models.”²⁰⁷

While Chombart de Lauwe was certainly influential, there was more than a single cause to the gradual inclusion of user concerns in mass housing policy. Another precedent was the experience of urban renewal, and in particular, the development of preliminary social surveys. Since 1947, Auzelle had been in charge of slum clearance and urban renewal at MRU, where he had developed a new method of surveying based on studies by the group *Economie et Humanisme* and the *Institut national d’hygiène*. His basic method was a system of two-sided index cards for each dwelling unit. One side contained information about the material condition of the dwelling or its *habitabilité*, the other side described its occupants. This information was to guide the project of gradually moving inhabitants - using re-usable temporary housing facilities - to appropriate new homes. He believed this could help systematize the renewal of old city

²⁰⁶ Drouard, *Le Développement des sciences sociales en France au tournant des années soixante*, 35.

²⁰⁷ “On a pu observer en maintes occasions que certains comportements imposés, matérialisés par tel ou tel emplacement dans le logement, sont en opposition flagrants avec les modèles culturels, les désirs ou les aspirations des ménages. On a pu constater en contrepartie d’autres changements dans la manière traditionnelle d’habiter” qui satisfont pleinement les bénéficiaires de ces logements neufs. C’est quand le plan laisse à l’usager une certaine part de liberté et d’initiative dans le choix de son mode de vie, tout en ne flattant pas les habitudes néfastes contractées dans les anciens logements, voire dans les “taudis”, que ce progrès semble être le mieux ressenti comme une libération et non comme une obligation de céder au modernisme. [...] il importe que son empreinte innovatrice ne soit pas ressentie comme une gêne ou une entrave à la vie familiale mais bien comme une libération d’anciennes habitudes et de modèles culturels périmés.” Chombart de Lauwe, Jenny, and Couvreur, “Logement et comportement des ménages dans trois cités nouvelles de l’agglomération bordelaise,” 55.

centers.²⁰⁸ The experience of rehousing forced state planners for the first time to deal concretely with the “problem” of people, and faced them with the social repercussions of their plans. The approach to include a rudimentary sociological survey into the process of urban renewal established an important precedent for a more user-concerned form of planning.

The gradual inclusion of social scientific expertise into state-led urban planning began with the economic sciences, which prevailed over the “softer” approaches of sociology and psychology. During the 1950s, the social sciences were shaped by the desire to overcome the perceived national “delay” (*retard*) on the international scene, and a key way of doing so was to assert a scientificity inspired by the exact and natural sciences.²⁰⁹ Many social scientists borrowed this model of legitimacy, as it would provide leverage in their engagement with the state apparatus. On the other hand, national planning increasingly expanded its view of the economy to include “humanistic” dimensions - like the social and psychological repercussions of modernization on everyday life. This precipitated the inclusion of sociology, in particular the “prospectivist” kind that dovetailed with the mindset of planning.

From the end of the 1950s onwards, national planning, scientific expertise and national pride became more closely intertwined than ever. Unlike the previous plans, which attracted little international attention and for which the government did little to bring them before the public eye, the Fourth Plan gained national and even international prominence.²¹⁰ The economic prosperity after the reforms of 1958-1959 strengthened the belief in planned economic growth. But more importantly, planning now found a strong spokesperson in the person of De Gaulle, who turned the Plan into France’s big project - “la grande affaire de la France.” In marked contrast to for instance West Germany, which had seen a quick return to a liberal market economy after the end of Marshall aid, France strengthened its national planning. De Gaulle’s Fourth Plan constituted a major change in emphasis and scope, aiming not only to build a systematic picture of the national economy, but also to more comprehensively target social development and welfare. The widely distributed publication of the Fourth plan in 1962 summed up this shift by describing previous plans as “a less partial idea of the economy” and the new Fourth plan as “a less partial idea of Man: more hospitals, more schools, more youth and cultural centers, modernized cities and villages, less social injustice. A better way of life.”²¹¹

In many respects, 1958 was a historic turning point; for the social sciences it was most certainly. Despite the consensus that modernization was led first of all by technological progress, planners were increasingly convinced that it also required a humanistic approach, which could only be ensured by engaging the social sciences and humanities. Before 1958, institutional demand for

²⁰⁸ See: Robert Auzelle, “Vers une généralisation des enquêtes sur l’habitat,” *Urbanisme* 7-8(1951); *Théorie générale de l’urbanisme*, Cours Robert Auzelle, année 1959-1960, Institut d’Urbanisme de Paris Créteil (CAC 19890277/002).

²⁰⁹ Drouard, *Le Développement des sciences sociales en France au tournant des années soixante*.

²¹⁰ See: Vera Lutz, *Central Planning for the Market Economy: An Analysis of the French Theory and Experience* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1969), 4.

²¹¹ Previous plans: “une idée moins partielle de l’économie: plus de logements, une agriculture modernisée, des industries de transformation rénovées, un pouvoir d’achat croissant.” The Fourth Plan: “Une idée moins partielle de l’homme: plus d’hôpitaux, plus d’écoles, des maisons de la jeunesse et de la culture, des villes et des villages modernisés, moins d’injustice sociale. Un genre de vie meilleur” See: *Le 4ème Plan 1962-1965*, (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1962).

social scientific research was marginal and there was little political will to utilize it. Most of the knowledge production was fundamental and the social sciences were institutionally poorly embedded. At the university, there were only a couple of chairs and there was no degree in sociology. Only the *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS) had some *directeurs d'études* in sociology. During this time, the *Centre d'études sociologiques* was a principal place for sociological research in France, but its researchers, with backgrounds mainly in philosophy and history, had little contact with the universities.²¹² After 1958 however, the demand for social scientific research grew spectacularly, in tune with rising interest from the government. National modernization came to be portrayed as a *social* project more than anything else. The social sciences were to play an unprecedented role and were rapidly institutionalized during the following decade - first of all at the university, but gradually also inside the state apparatus. The number of researchers and experts skyrocketed and the main demand for social scientific research now came from state planners.²¹³

The work of Chombart de Lauwe, Robert Auzelle, and others was thus inscribed in a larger shift in French planning. Several forms of “user knowledge” - in the form of demographic studies, public opinion polls²¹⁴ and the collaboration of civil society organizations uniting users and families with the state administration²¹⁵ - had already become standard in French policy-making by the mid-1950s. Chombart's calls to include *qualitative* sociology in national planning, urbanism and housing policy were certainly pioneering when he first launched them, but by the mid-1950 public authorities began to realize that sociological research could help them improve the construction of new housing and the planning of urban expansion.

The career of André Trintignac, a mid-level civil servant in the ministry, was representative of the changing mindset within the state apparatus.²¹⁶ He began his career in the early 1950s at the ministry's section on regional planning and development, where he was responsible for establishing programs based on the quantification of housing need. During the 1950s, he participated in international housing conferences like those of UIOF and the European Economic Community, where he advocated for more in-depth sociological research preliminary to

²¹² Drouard, *Le Développement des sciences sociales en France au tournant des années soixante*.

²¹³ Drouard, "Réflexions sur une chronologie: Le développement des sciences sociales en France de 1945 à la fin des années soixante."

²¹⁴ Jean Stoetzel had founded IFOP as the French counterpart of the American polling firm Gallup. The firm executed many polls for the French state.

²¹⁵ One key such association was the *Union nationale des associations familiales* (UNAF), established in 1945 to represent French families in the national government. UNAF, a union of local associations, had seats in the *Conseil Economique et Sociale*, just like the labor unions. See also chapter 3.

²¹⁶ Until 1954, André Trintignac worked in the office *Besoins en logements et programmes* at the *Direction de l'Aménagement du Territoire* (DAT) of the Ministry. Between 1954 and 1959 he worked in the office *Service de l'Aménagement National – Groupe des Etudes: Territoire et population, aménagement régional*, where he further developed his expertise in demographic and housing studies. Between 1959 and 1963, he led the office of *Documentation et synthèse* at DAT and then the *Service de l'habitation, GRECOH, Bureau des études sociologiques de l'habitat*. In 1967, he directed a working group on the resorption of shantytowns, resulting in the “rapport Trintignac” which argued for the necessity of social work and education as indispensable elements of urban renewal projects to remove shantytowns. He was also associated with the *programmes d'aménagement social concerté* of DATAR, which was the first generation of experimental programs that eventually led to the *Habitat et vie sociale* (HVS) policies during the 1970s. CAC 19770775 (introduction to the deposit in the catalogue).

programming housing. One such conference was the 1958 *Congrès mondial de la famille* in Paris, which brought together specialists of diverse nations and disciplines, both governmental and private institutions.²¹⁷ The conference-goers were in overall agreement that, before the establishment of a construction program, a proper and careful sociological enquiry as well as a collaboration between sociologists, architects, urbanists and social workers was indispensable. Future users needed to be consulted and subsequently informed about the urbanism provided for them, and many countries were engaged in doing so. The International Council for Building Research Studies and Documentation confirmed this recent surge in sociological studies of housing.²¹⁸ Trintignac was actively involved in the making of national housing norms during the 1950s and became one of the main figures in the development of sociological housing studies within the Ministry of Housing and Construction, as director of the Office of Sociological Studies of Habitat, the *Bureau des études sociologiques de l'habitat*.

There was nevertheless more than one kind of “user knowledge” that vied for legitimacy, and many policy-makers deemed Chombart’s model ill-suited for urban planning. In 1959, when he applied for funding at the *Commission générale du Plan* (CGP) for a six-year urban research project in association with CSTB, André Trintignac sent in the following advice: “As you know, the *Direction de l’Aménagement du Territoire* has had numerous contacts with Mr. Chombart de Lauwe in the past: we have notably attempted to ensure a connection between the work of urbanists and that of sociologists; the agreement has not been realized with Mr. Chombart de Lauwe as he was oriented essentially towards a research with fundamental character. [...] We can question whether in these conditions the Administration needs to subsidize studies that are not directly useful to it.”²¹⁹ State administrators like Trintignac preferred a kind of expertise that was simpler, less time-consuming and more efficient.

Other kinds of expertise, also sociological but in competition with a “properly sociological” - meaning academic and critical - kind, emerged almost simultaneously with Chombart’s. Private market research was one such conspicuously new domain. Established in 1954 and shortly after renamed COFREMCA, the Office of Applied Sociology and Psychology (*Bureau de sociologie et de psychologie appliquées*) was a pioneering firm in this respect. It developed its own research methods and worked with large corporate clients like L’Oréal and Air France.²²⁰ Its founder, Alain de Vulpian, was influenced by American cultural anthropology and psycho-sociology.²²¹ In opposition to the French proclivity for social structure, particularly in academic research, and the predominance of demography and quantitative sociology, he endorsed what he would later call a

²¹⁷ Conference proceedings of the *Congrès mondial de la famille*, Paris 1958 (CAC 19770775/006-007).

²¹⁸ Conseil International du Batiment pour la recherche, l’étude et la documentation (CAC 19770775/006).

²¹⁹ “Ainsi que vous le savez, la Direction de l’Aménagement du Territoire a eu, dans le passé, de nombreux contacts avec M. Chombart de Lauwe: nous avions notamment tenté d’assurer une liaison entre les travaux des Urbanistes et ceux des sociologues; L’accord n’avait pu être réalisé, M. Chombart de Lauwe étant orienté essentiellement vers une recherche de caractère fondamental. [...] On peut se demander dans ces conditions, si l’Administration doit subventionner des études qui ne sont pas directement utilisables par elle.” CAC 19770775/004.

²²⁰ The firm was renamed COFREMCA in 1959. It still exists today, under the name Sociovision. See: Personal interview with Alain de Vulpian, October 2008.

²²¹ Alain de Vulpian attended Sciences-Po from 1947 to 1950 and then worked for IFOP until 1953. See: Personal interview with Alain de Vulpian, October 2008.

“micro-systemic sociology” that aimed to give more attention to individuals and their own understanding of the world. The firm had mostly private clients, but would also be commissioned by local governments and the centralized state. While it had some contracts with the state, like in 1957 with CSTB to analyze the user satisfaction in the realm of mass housing, it would never become a fixed partner in state policy-making.

The emerging kinds of expertise during this time were in direct competition and the centralized state offered the platform where much of the conflicts were played out. After CSTB had received Chombart de Lauwe’s commissioned study in 1957, it established a working group to put its results into practice and to improve the dwelling layouts of mass housing.²²² Both Chombart de Lauwe and De Vulpian contributed to the working group. When the latter presented his methodology as a “new, efficient and manageable” alternative, the former responded that it not only already existed, but that the results of such market research could not be compared with that of properly sociological studies “because the issue is not to study choices but the underlying situations and structures.”²²³ Chombart de Lauwe continued by mentioning that statistical surveys of large samples were outmoded, and instead, in-depth surveys with a small number of participants were the way to go. The director of the group felt forced to remind both researchers of the ultimate goal, namely “letting housing developers know what types of dwellings they should build.” He went on to show the types of dwelling layouts created by CSTB, and as a follow-up, proposed a “botanical” classification of a large sample of existing units. Chombart de Lauwe nevertheless continued to insist on in-depth sociological interviews, while others suggested more pragmatic solutions such as a “*service “après-vente,”*” a post-purchase customer service for new state-aided dwellings.²²⁴ What most members of the group did agree on was that ideal dwelling typologies based on sociological expertise constituted the only way to improve the quality of mass housing.

An entirely different domain of expertise that also laid claim to the evaluation of housing and urbanism was based on the medical sciences. The most prominent advocate for such an approach was Robert-Henri Hazemann, a doctor and inspector at the Ministry of Health who also taught at the *Institut d’urbanisme de l’Université de Paris* (IUP) and published prolifically about the *grands ensembles* in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His attempts to medicalize the problems of everyday life in mass housing estates were based on an environmental determinism that was hardly new. Since mid-19th century doctors had produced a significant body of “slum knowledge” based on the assumed link between behavior and environment. Hazemann shifted the focus from the biological to the psycho-sociological, arguing in particular against what he saw as urban planners’ “*gigantisme*.” “When it is too tall and its units too cramped, the building does not allow low-income families to develop themselves freely both from a physical and a moral point of view. [...] The mastodons should not be built but in absolutely exception circumstances, that is to say when nothing else can be done. [...] The grouping of buildings poses psycho-social problems that are far from clarified. The neighborhood contacts, notably that of the

²²² CAC 19770775/004

²²³ “car il ne s’agit pas d’étudier les choix mais bien des situations et des structures.” June 1957 meeting minutes (CAC 19770775/004).

²²⁴ Ibid.

children, certainly have very serious and permanent consequences in the formation of character; [...].²²⁵ Other medical specialists had similar recommendations about the physical and mental consequences of mass collective housing. Despite their immediate appeal in the popular press and success in mobilizing critiques of the *grands ensembles*, this medicalizing approach never attained the legitimacy of sociology when it came to the problematization of mass housing.

In short, the conviction that the production of mass housing needed to be better adjusted to “real” user needs was increasingly shared by the mainstream of professional and state-employed actors involved in housing and urban planning. Despite conflicting claims to expertise, the domain of inquiry that was increasingly believed to offer the legitimate knowledge with regards to such issues was sociology. Rather than an academically bounded discipline, sociology constituted a domain of inquiry that exceeded the initially weak and relatively uninstitutionalized discourse by academic sociologists. What could be labeled sociology constituted a dispersed realm of knowledge production including academic research like that of Alain Touraine and his students, but also popular studies like Marc Bernard’s *Sarcellopolis* and Jean Duquesne’s *Vivre à Sarcelles*, works of social critique like some of Henri Lefebvre’s, and most importantly, a mass of government commissioned sociological reports.

The latter were executed by the burgeoning sector of consultancy firms (*bureaux d’études*).²²⁶ COFREMCA, as a private firm, remained an exception until the mid-1960s; most consultancy firms grew out of the government and remained either public or semi-public. One of these was the Center for Economic and Social Research (*Centre de recherches économiques et sociales*), established in 1956 to collaborate with the Ministry in research on collective amenities for the *grands ensembles*. The center’s research was shaped by meetings at the ministry, in conversation with state administrators, architects, and social workers.²²⁷ Many other public and semi-public research institutes soon followed.²²⁸ These newly emerging institutions often collaborated with each other, and would supply much of the expert “user knowledge” upon which subsequent housing and urban planning policies were based.²²⁹

Pierre Sudreau’s famous “apartment referendum” and other efforts during his tenure as Minister of Construction in 1958 were only the tip of the iceberg: they simply confirmed a new set of

²²⁵ “L’immeuble trop haut, composé de logements trop bas et trop exigus, ne permet pas aux famille modestes de s’épanouir librement au point de vue physique et moral. [...] Les mastodontes ne devraient être construits qu’à titre tout à fait exceptionnel, c’est à dire vraiment quand on ne peut absolument faire autrement. [...] Le groupement des immeubles pose des problèmes psycho-sociaux qui sont loin d’être élucidé. Les rapport de voisinage, notamment ceux des enfants, ont certainement des conséquences très graves et très permanentes dans la formation du caractère [...]” See: Robert-Henri Hazemann, *Les implication psychologiques de l’urbanisme*, Entretiens de Bichat, 1960 (CAC 19770775/047).

²²⁶ See: Claude, *Faire la ville: Les métiers de l’urbanisme au XXe siècle*, 168-78.

²²⁷ CAC 19770775/007.

²²⁸ For instance, after the 1958 Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles, Sudreau established the *Centre de recherche sur l’urbanisme* (CRU) and the *Centre d’études des équipements résidentiels* (CEDER). The goal of the latter was to make preliminary studies of urban areas to determine the necessary collective amenities and to plan these, see Chapter 2.

²²⁹ By 1965, this sector was already so well developed and enmeshed with urban planning that it needed to be mapped out by state planners. See: CGP, Commission de l’Equipement urbain, groupe de travail no. 5, “Etudes urbaines”, September 1965 (CAC 19920405/009).

ideas that had been in formation in the course of the 1950s. His Commission for Life in the *grands ensembles* (*Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*) was motivated by a growing concern with the social life of new housing areas and instigated an important moment of dialogue between high-level civil servants, politicians, architects, urbanists, social scientists and representatives of national civil society organizations. But by 1958, this was hardly the first time they were at the same table.

Most importantly, even while he aimed to adjust housing production to increase user satisfaction and smoothen social modernization, Sudreau continued to support the standardization of mass production as it promised to increase repetitiveness and efficiency. In 1958, the same year of his *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*, his working group on industrialization and productivity (*Etude de l'industrialisation et l'accroissement de la productivité dans la construction*) suggested encouraging developers to always work with the same architects and the same construction companies, “promoting the use of the same techniques, that is to say the same materials with the same operations and the use of the same elements.”²³⁰ The report further suggested that “this effort to diminish the necessary variety in small as well as large projects” would be the task of the state, and would only be possible through rigorous regulation of the construction sector and the promotion of “prototype projects (and not prototype plans).”²³¹ That such a radical standardization of housing was not seen as being in blatant conflict with the efforts to satisfy the future inhabitants of these environments, once built, only illustrates the how engrained the idea of a universal user had become in 1950s France.

²³⁰ “en favorisant l’emploi des mêmes techniques, c’est-à-dire des mêmes matériels avec les mêmes gestes et l’emploi des mêmes éléments.” Groupe de travail pour l’étude de l’industrialisation et l’accroissement de la productivité dans la construction, 1958 (CAC 19770816/007).

²³¹ “cet effort de diminution de la variété nécessaire dans les petites comme dans les grandes opération” [...] “projets types (et non des plans-types).” At the same time, the report recognized the inevitability of individualized projects, and thus argued for preliminary studies. These were nevertheless limited to the implantation of the project and the constraints of the site. See: Ibid.

Conclusion

The 1950s marked a paradoxical turn in the production of the built environment in France. On the one hand, the variety of architectural experiments of the Reconstruction period gave way to the imperative of mass collective housing. This conspicuously ignored both the diversity of dwelling culture and the popular desire for the single-family home. On the other hand, and this happened almost simultaneously, the government developed ways to know more about users' demands and desires and to elicit their input in order to improve design. In this sense, the development of a centralized regime of mass housing production both entailed the notion of a universal user and gave rise to a novel domain of "user knowledge." The latter would organize policy and design over the next decades.

The mass housing of the *grands ensembles* that ultimately embodies the *trente glorieuses* was only possible thanks to a streamlining of production in which the state took on a more indirect, yet at once more central role. Housing production moved resolutely away from the realm of social reform to become a generalized good assured - at least in principle - by the welfare state. Like in other Western European nations, mass housing was part of a larger agenda of national modernization in the context of postwar economic growth rendering politics in the language of science, rationality, and progress.

The attempt to accurately determine housing needs, the technical normalization and standardization of mass housing, and the growing concerns with the social repercussions of these environments once built, spurred the incorporation of new forms of expertise in state-led housing and urban planning during the 1950s. Nevertheless, the conviction that the production of housing needed to be better adjusted to what future inhabitants really needed first emerged at the margins of architecture and sociology. As mass housing came to dominate intervention in the realm of the built environment, such convictions transformed to become part of the mindset of state administrators. Thus emerged, during the 1950s, a generally shared understanding that the production of housing needed to be informed directly by investigations into its "consumption", or in other words, how these environments, once built, would be used by their inhabitants.

The emerging epistemologies of the user were shaped by the political project of satisfying users, as citizen-consumers of state services, while continuing to promote *collective* mass housing as only viable solution. As such, the shift from Reconstruction projects to the mass production that would ultimately typify the *trente glorieuses*, was one towards a new, paradoxical focus on the user - treated as an abstracted factor in the calculations of state planning, a generic citizen-consumer which the state was to provide for, and, increasingly, portrayed as an active element in a more "humane" production and management of mass housing areas.

While sociology was increasingly privileged as the legitimate domain of expertise with regards to these questions, the "feedback loops" between production and consumption of mass housing were in fact generated by a diverse field of knowledge, for which the centralized state served as the primary platform. The carriers of what can be called a "humanist technocracy" of mass housing were very diverse, including state administrators like André Trintignac, representatives of civil society organizations like UNAF, and social scientists external but linked to the state, like

Chombart de Lauwe. They were caught in the tension between the imperatives of standardization, and the desire to know the specificity of users' needs.

The narrative of postwar French urbanism is not one from an authoritarian regime of mass production towards an emancipatory one focused on users' needs and aspirations. The epistemological repercussions of mass housing production in 1950s France amount to the advent of the user as a category of design, research, and planning. Rather than setting up a "humanist" view of the user as an active participant of neighborhood life against a statistical notion of the user based on functionalist or quantified need - an opposition that would eventually become dominant with the contestations of 1968 - this chapter has analyzed how the former is in fact part and parcel of the latter. The evolution of the notion of the user - from a generic to a specific, and increasingly unknown, entity - was integral part of the experience of mass housing production over the following decades.

Chapter 2: *Équipement and animation*

“In France, numerous Grands Ensembles have already been or will be inscribed on the land, from the mining and steel region of the Lorraine to the oil-rich Béarn, passing through the important industrial regions, old or new. But, it is not enough to build dwellings adapted to the needs, and to create the necessary facilities according to carefully established plans and norms, if those houses, social centers, schools, kindergartens, and parks do not bring happiness, and do not serve human and social progress. Even if the project is technically successful, inhabitants can be dissatisfied, the social atmosphere generate protest, families dissolve, and youth gangs emerge. It is not enough that the Urbanist and the Architect thought about the sociological problems and avoided errors in conception. What still needs to be done is to create a human Community in the sphere of individual freedom.”²³²

Appearing to dismiss an urbanism of numbers and norms, this statement served to introduce a pivotal - and highly consequential - study that did in fact detail quantitative and technical guidelines for what were called *équipements collectifs* or “collective facilities” in mass housing estates. A mix of basic public services like post offices, community and welfare institutions like community and youth centers, and private amenities like shops, these were meant to transform housing estates into thriving new neighborhoods. The result of intensive research by a state-led commission of experts - including architects, sociologists, and leaders of civil society organizations - the study was published in the influential journal *Urbanisme* in 1959 and presented itself as a model for France’s *grands ensembles* (figure 2.1). By this time, these mass housing estates had become the quintessential product of state-led urbanism. Yet, despite being promoted as a “feature of social and human progress” in the rapidly expanding economy of postwar France, there was no blueprint for what a *grand ensemble* was, or what kind of everyday life it should facilitate.²³³

²³² Gérard Dupont, “Le grand ensemble, facteur de progrès social et de progrès humain,” *Urbanisme* 62-63(1959): 6-7, 6.

²³³ This kind of universalist humanist ambition was widespread in the late 1950s. François Parfait, technical director of SCET, a large state developer contended: “Concevoir un Ensemble, ce n’est pas acheter des terrains, dessiner les plans ou couler du béton, c’est aider l’homme à atteindre sa plénitude, par le vaste domaine de l’Urbanisme. En 1933, la Charte d’Athènes proclamait que, pour y parvenir, il fallait l’aider à mieux habiter, mieux circuler, mieux travailler, mieux se recréer. Vingt-cinq ans après, nous pensons être au cœur de cette action si féconde lorsque nous voyons s’élever ces Ensembles d’Habitation auxquels nous venons de consacrer ces lignes et qui seront vraisemblablement les témoins les plus significatifs de notre époque.” François Parfait, “Conception, organisation, réalisation des ensembles d’habitation,” *Urbanisme* 65(1959), 39.

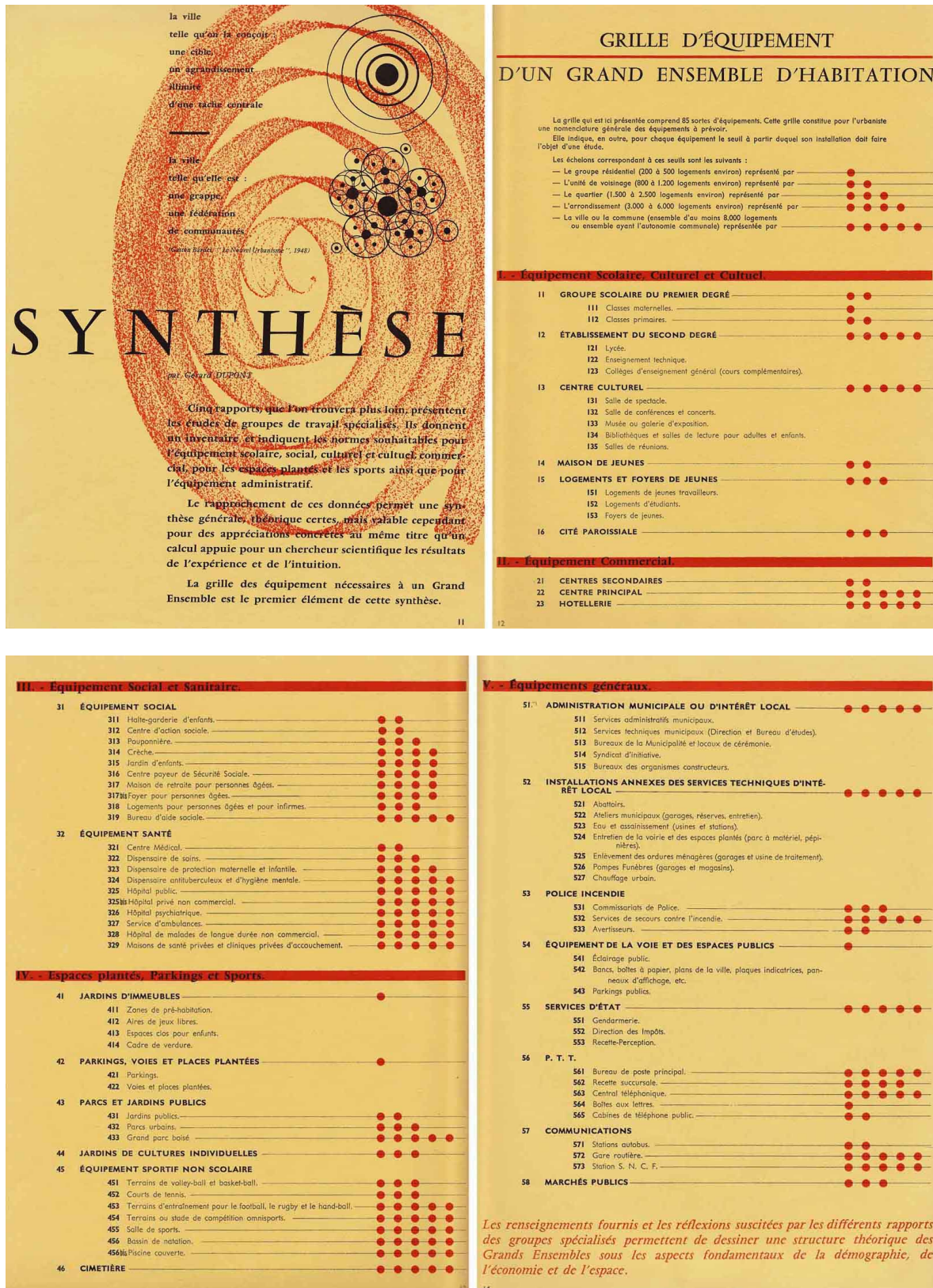


Figure 2.1: The *Grille Dupont* as it was published in the journal *Urbanisme* in 1959. (Source: *Urbanisme* 62-63 "Équipement des grands ensembles" (1959): 11-14).

And that was exactly the premise of the publication: to offer a synthesis of the physical and social composition of an ideal *grand ensemble*, one that would inculcate a “healthy and balanced social life.” With its “general nomenclature” of collective facilities - 85 types including schools, shops, cultural centers, hospitals, churches, retirement homes, playgrounds, dispensaries, social centers, youth centers, kindergartens, sports centers, police headquarters, fire departments, post offices, and many more - the study offered a veritable planner’s shopping list for social life.²³⁴ Entitled *Grille d’équipement d’un grand ensemble d’habitation* but soon known as the “*grille Dupont*” after the state administrator in charge, the publication set the parameters for intensive reflection on the *grands ensembles* during the following decade, and would remain its principal log. Sponsored by the *Caisse des Dépôts* and co-founded by the *Société française des Urbanistes*, it was as much a propaganda tool as the self-critical report of an ongoing exploration.²³⁵ Yet it was hardly the only journal that reported on this search for an urbanism of mass housing - a search in which the *grille Dupont* was only the beginning.

This chapter focuses on the role of architecture and urban design in the large-scale production of the *grands ensembles* from the late 1950s until the late 1960s - the period in which their initial policies, techniques and formal examples were already in place and before they became fundamentally questioned. The archives of the Ministry of Construction, architecture journals like *Urbanisme*, *Techniques et Architectures*, and *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, and the accounts of sociologists and consultancy firms show that the urbanism of the *grands ensembles* was not set in stone during this period. Their formal conception was continually transformed in close relationship to changing social and urban policies, shifting ideals of social life in them, and reportage on the problems of their actual inhabitation.

²³⁴ See *Urbanisme* 62-63 (1959):12-14.

²³⁵ On the history of the journal *Urbanisme*, see: Massardier, *Expertise et aménagement du territoire: L’Etat savant*, 15-22.

1. The search for a doctrine

What set off the search for a doctrine for the *grands ensembles* was the pioneering research for the Paris region under direction of Pierre Sudreau.²³⁶ As *Commissaire à la construction et à l'urbanisme pour la région parisienne* - before he became Minister of Construction - his main concern was how to manage Paris' rapid urban growth. In the fall of 1957, faced with the uncontrolled sprawl of suburban housing projects, and concerned about their social repercussions, Sudreau established a special committee, the *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*. This unprecedented initiative brought together architects, urbanists, state administrators like Gérard Dupont, social housing experts, social scientists, representatives of family and women's organizations, medical doctors, school teachers, and landscape architects, to study the urbanism of the *grands ensembles*. The gathering also included Jacques-Henri Labourdette, who was in charge of building Sarcelles at this time, and two rather atypical participants: Hélène Gordon-Lazareff, director of the popular women magazine *Elle*, and Jacques Goddet of the sports magazine *L'Equipe*.²³⁷

The meetings led to the creation of five different working groups, focusing on: social, cultural, and religious facilities, commercial facilities, studies of the urban environment, administrative and financial problems, and finally, recreation and open air sports.²³⁸ Following the basic assumption that collective facilities were crucial to the "social and economic equilibrium of the *Grand Ensemble*," the principal goal was to "first of all define, and subsequently finance and build these facilities."²³⁹ In order to do so, social surveys, urban research, and public consultation were needed. The committee visited housing areas and individual apartments, interviewed inhabitants and compiled lists of what they liked and disliked about their homes and neighborhoods.²⁴⁰ Their reports exposed a variety of concerns from kitchens that were too dark and too small and the ugliness of the new architecture to the exorbitant prices of groceries in the new commercial centers and the need for more social centers. They consulted with social scientific experts and public figures and gathered information through standard questionnaires sent to representatives of civil society organizations from the *Union féminine civique et sociale* to *Scouts de France*. On the basis of these, they compiled a series of "objective" criteria for collective facilities - for instance what a cultural center or a youth center should look like, and what concrete activities it should facilitate - that were inserted into a detailed overview.²⁴¹

²³⁶ On the urban policies of Pierre Sudreau, see: Annie Fourcaut, "L'animation dans le béton: Autogérer les grands ensembles?," in *Autogestion, la dernière utopie?*, ed. Christian Chevandier and Frank Georgi (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne, 2003); Annie Fourcaut, "Les premiers grands ensembles en région parisienne: Ne pas refaire la banlieue?," *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004): 195-218; Fourcaut, "Trois discours, une politique?"; Lengereau, *L'Etat et l'architecture, 1958-1981: Une politique publique?*, 28-37. For a biographical account of Pierre Sudreau, see: Christiane Rimbaud, *Pierre Sudreau: Un homme libre* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 2004).

²³⁷ CAC 19770816/006

²³⁸ Compte rendu 20.09.1957: Les problèmes de la vie dans les grands ensembles d'habitation (CAC 19770816/006).

²³⁹ Letter by Pierre Sudreau directed at the Prime Minister, 1958 (CAC 19770816/004).

²⁴⁰ Constatations faites au cours de visites d'HLM, Groupe sociale et culturelle, Commission Grands ensembles (CAC 19770816/004).

²⁴¹ CAC 19770775/044.

Conspicuously absent from the list were cafés, bars, bistros, and restaurants, and while these could have been subsumed under the generic rubric of “commerce,” it was clear from the accompanying studies that these places were not considered appropriate in the modern mass housing estates.²⁴²

When Sudreau became Minister of Construction in 1958, this work was not forgotten; on the contrary, it was moved up from the regional to the national level, and resulted in the publication of the *grille Dupont* in 1959 (see figure 2.1). With a certain ambiguity, the publication was presented as an important step in the making of an overarching doctrine for the *grands ensembles*. While in his introduction the Minister was careful in calling the *grille* simply a “guide for practical use,” the publication was proof of a belief in a single, guiding doctrine for mass housing development, one defining “what needs to be done for a social and economic equilibrium, a happy individual and collective life.”²⁴³

Around this time, a string of news articles, opinion pieces and journalistic reports in national newspapers, popular magazines, and the specialized press brought the topic of the *grands ensembles* to public attention.²⁴⁴ With titles like “Cities without a past” and “Birth of a new civilization,” many reports were vigorous in their judgements and hyperbolic in style. Television reportage on the *grands ensembles* followed suit. In *40 000 voisins*, an episode from the popular series *Cinq colonnes à la une*, which covered everyday life in Sarcelles extensively, the gaze was biologized. Helicopter views emphasized the inhuman scale of the new development, while interviews with local inhabitants revealed the many problems they faced in their everyday lives, from muddy boots that were the result of living in a giant construction site to the absence of shops and the long commutes to Paris (see figure 2.2).

²⁴² Already in 1961, the importance of the café for informal neighborhood sociability was emphasized by Joffre Dumazedier, who criticized their absence in the *grands ensembles*. See: Equipement des nouveaux ensembles résidentiels, Colloque organisé par le Haut Commissariat à la Jeunesse et aux Sports, INEP de Marly-le-Roi, 1961 (CAC 19780633/001). René Kaës repeated this criticism, calling their prohibition a “sad mix of excessive puritanism and functionalism.” Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 144.

²⁴³ Pierre Sudreau, “Introduction,” *Urbanisme* 62-63(1959): 3.

²⁴⁴ National newspapers like *Figaro* and *France Observateur*, popular science magazines like *Science et Vie*, and specialized press like *Revue Logement*, *Le Castor*, and *Habitation*. See: Study by Ballardur and Prieur analyzing the first public critiques of the *grands ensembles*, Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles, 1959 (CAC 19770816/005).



Figure 2.2: Stills from the television broadcasting “Sarcelles, 40 000 voisins” in the series *Cinq colonnes à la une* (ORTF, 2 December 1960, 14 minutes) (Source: Institut nationale audiovisuelle (INA) archives).

For the first inhabitants, the lack of privacy was often a key concern. Despite the rhetoric of modern living, the reduction of norms for state-aided housing in the early 1950s had led to the construction of small rooms and minimum-sized apartments in the first generation of *grands ensembles*, like at Bron-Parilly and the first phases of Sarcelles (see figures 1.20 and 1.5). Many critics deemed the amount of units serviced by the same hall or staircase too high, as it gave a sense of overcrowding and lack of intimacy. Moreover, the use of pioneering prefabrication techniques at a large scale had led to technical deficiencies: uncontrollable heating systems, windows that did not close, prefabricated staircases that fell apart, and especially, bad sound insulation. Inhabitants constantly knew what their neighbors were up to, even at the most inappropriate times. This ecology of sound had an enormous impact on the perception of privacy: “From ten o’clock on, even in spring, the *grand ensemble* sleeps. Each and every sound is then unseemly, insolent; you have to apologize for being there, for having a friend over, for shaking the ashes from your pipe, for having the habit to brush your teeth long before going to bed.”²⁴⁵

Other complaints centered on the geographic isolation of many housing estates: cut off from the rest of the city, they left residents socially isolated and with strenuously long commutes to work. Inhabitants of housing projects in the suburbs often took more than one hour to get into the center of Paris, which was the necessary passing point for any other regional destination in the heavily centralized capital. In extreme cases, like that of the Floréal housing area near Saint-Denis, two buses were needed just to go to the old center of Saint-Denis, and because the planned commercial center was not yet finished, the estate did not have a single shop: “Yes, really, we are here like on an island,” the inhabitants concluded.²⁴⁶ The lack of nearby amenities

²⁴⁵ “A partir de 22 heures, même au printemps, le grand ensemble sommeille. Chaque bruit est alors incongru, insolent; il faut s’excuser d’être là, de recevoir un ami, de secouer les cendres de sa pipe, d’avoir l’habitude de se laver les dents avant d’aller se coucher.” Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 70-71.

²⁴⁶ “Oui, vraiment, nous sommes ici comme dans une île.” Henri Théry and M Garrigou-Lagrange, *Equiper et animer la vie sociale* (Paris: Centurion, 1966), 34-35.

in such peripheral locations - schools and shops in the first place - only aggravated this sense of isolation.²⁴⁷

Public critiques were also focused on the architecture and urbanism of the new developments: their “gigantism,” an explicit search for grandness and monumental scale, the uniformity of their buildings and dwelling types, and the absence of trees, streets and other traditional socializing spaces were recurring themes. Journalists were amongst the first to relate such characteristics to the spread of social and psychological disorders - depression and suicide amongst housewives being mentioned most often. According to the popular science magazine *Science et Vie* the world of the *grands ensembles* was “the evil of numbers, half-light, and noise; the evil of calculated space, of impossible solitude and overriding silence; the evil of the *Grands Ensembles*. [...] In one word, the world of isolation and promiscuity, of boredom and clamor: in the language of tenants as well as experts, it is hell.”²⁴⁸

The government was attentive to these critiques, if only to subsequently rebut them. In a brief study commissioned in 1959 by the Ministry of Construction, Ballardur and Prieur analyzed the various critiques emanating from recent news articles. Interested in who the public blamed for the perceived errors, they found that the centralized state administration was number one on the list, the architects second, and then the engineers, construction and management companies. Their study then dismissed various critiques on the basis of their “weak use of evidence:” the statements made were “often personal” rather than accompanied by “real quantitative evidence.”²⁴⁹

Public critiques only increased in subsequent years, but could not shake the conviction that the *grands ensembles* were the unavoidable face of contemporary urbanism and the logical expression of Western economic development. Pierre Randet, then in charge of the *Direction d'Aménagement du Territoire* but with a life-long career in state-led urban planning, contended that, rather than the diabolical invention of architects or technocrats, the formula of the *grands ensembles* was simply “imposed by the economic and social conditions of our era. Whether a factory for two thousand workers is installed, or a city of eight or ten thousand inhabitants needs to be built, it is necessary to do in two or three years what used to take decades or centuries; we need to rationally find the secrets of a harmony that used to emerge by itself thanks to the unison of people with their territory. [...] We need to make an effort to insert more diversity in the

²⁴⁷ This was the principal conclusion of the report: *La vie des ménages de quatre nouveaux ensembles de la région parisienne* (1962-63), *Resumé general de l'étude*, CINAM, Ministère de la Construction (CAC 19771152/002).

²⁴⁸ “C’est le mal du nombre, de la pénombre et du bruit; le mal de l’espace mesuré, de la solitude impossible et du silence bafoué; le mal des Grands Ensembles. [...] En un mot, c’est le monde de l’isolement et de la promiscuité, de l’ennui et du vacarme: dans le langage des locataires comme dans celui des experts, c’est l’enfer.” Louis Caro, “Psychiatres et sociologues dénoncent la folie des Grands Ensembles,” *Science et Vie* 504(1959): 30-37.

²⁴⁹ Study by Ballardur and Prieur analyzing the first public critiques of the *grands ensembles*, *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*, 1959.

recruitment of new inhabitants of the *grands ensembles*, just like in the composition of volumes and forms.”²⁵⁰

The *grands ensembles* were crucial in the French view of the national economy and the organization of labor. To facilitate the movement of workers to new industrial development, often located in regions lacking sufficient supply of labor, mass housing was indispensable. The new town of Mourenx, built at the end of the 1950s to house the workers of the nearby industrial complex of Lacq in the Pyrenees became a well-known example, as would the housing estates built around the industrial zones of Dunkerque. Later on, neo-marxist scholars of the 1970s would interpret such developments as the product of a state-capitalist exploitation of labor.²⁵¹ At the time however, even the studies of Henri Lefebvre - who would later earn the status of being one of the primary critics of state-led urbanism - confirmed the dominant logic of the *grands ensembles*. In his 1960 sociological study of Mourenx and his critique of a Swiss new town proposal published the following year, he was critical of their rigid functionalism, but nevertheless accepted the basic framework of mass collective housing and state-led urban planning. His critique did not (yet) open up to a different kind of urbanism: the premise was to improve the *grands ensembles* by combatting their atmosphere of boredom.²⁵²

Other voices outside of the realm of government further legitimized such convictions. Even from angles where alternatives to state-led collective mass housing could be most expected - like the *Castors* communities of self-builders - the *grands ensembles* were regarded as simply inevitable.²⁵³ Within the cultural worldview of France, there was no real alternative to them. The question was therefore not *if*, but *how* to build them. This state of affairs afforded policy makers and architects the space to proffer up critique without questioning the larger framework that legitimized the production of *grands ensembles*. Soon after the publication of the *grille*, *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, another leading professional journal, joined in the critiques when it decried in a 1960 overview the “mediocrity and dispersion” of recent mass housing projects around Paris (figure 2.3). The same issue, however, contained an “alternative” proposal for a *grand ensemble* that was based on very similar urban conceptions (figure 2.4).

²⁵⁰ “En fait le grand ensemble n’est pas une invention diabolique d’esthète ou de technocrate; la formule est imposée par la dimension même des phénomènes économiques et sociaux de notre époque. Que l’on installe une usine de 2.000 ouvriers, c’est une ville de 8 ou 10.000 habitants qu’il faut construire; il faut alors faire en 2 ou 3 ans ce qui jadis s’élaborait en décades ou en siècles; il faut retrouver par le raisonnement les secrets d’une harmonie qui jadis allait d’elle-même grâce à l’accord des générations avec leur terroir. (...) Un effort doit être fait pour mettre plus de diversité dans le recrutement des occupants des grands ensembles comme dans le jeu des volumes et des formes.” Record of speech by Pierre Randet, 11ème jour mondial de l’urbanisme, Mulhouse 08.11.1960 (CAC 19770775/047).

²⁵¹ See for instance: Edmond Preteceille, *La production des grands ensembles: Essai d'analyse des déterminants de l'environnement urbain* (Paris: Mouton, 1973); Susanna Magri, *Le logement et reproduction de l'exploitation: Les politiques étatiques du logement en France, 1947–1972* (Paris: CSU, 1977). The *Centre de sociologie urbaine* (CSU) would become the center for this kind of Marxist approach, see following chapters.

²⁵² Lefebvre, "Les nouveaux ensembles urbains, un cas concret: Lacq-Mourenx et les problèmes urbains de la nouvelle classe ouvrière," 201; Henri Lefebvre, "Utopie expérimentale: pour un nouvel urbanisme," *Revue française de sociologie* 2, no. 2-3 (1961): 191-98.

²⁵³ See: Jacques Loew, "Les grands ensembles, mal inévitable mais mal tout de même," *L'habitation* 72(April 1959). On the Castor movement, see Chapter 1.

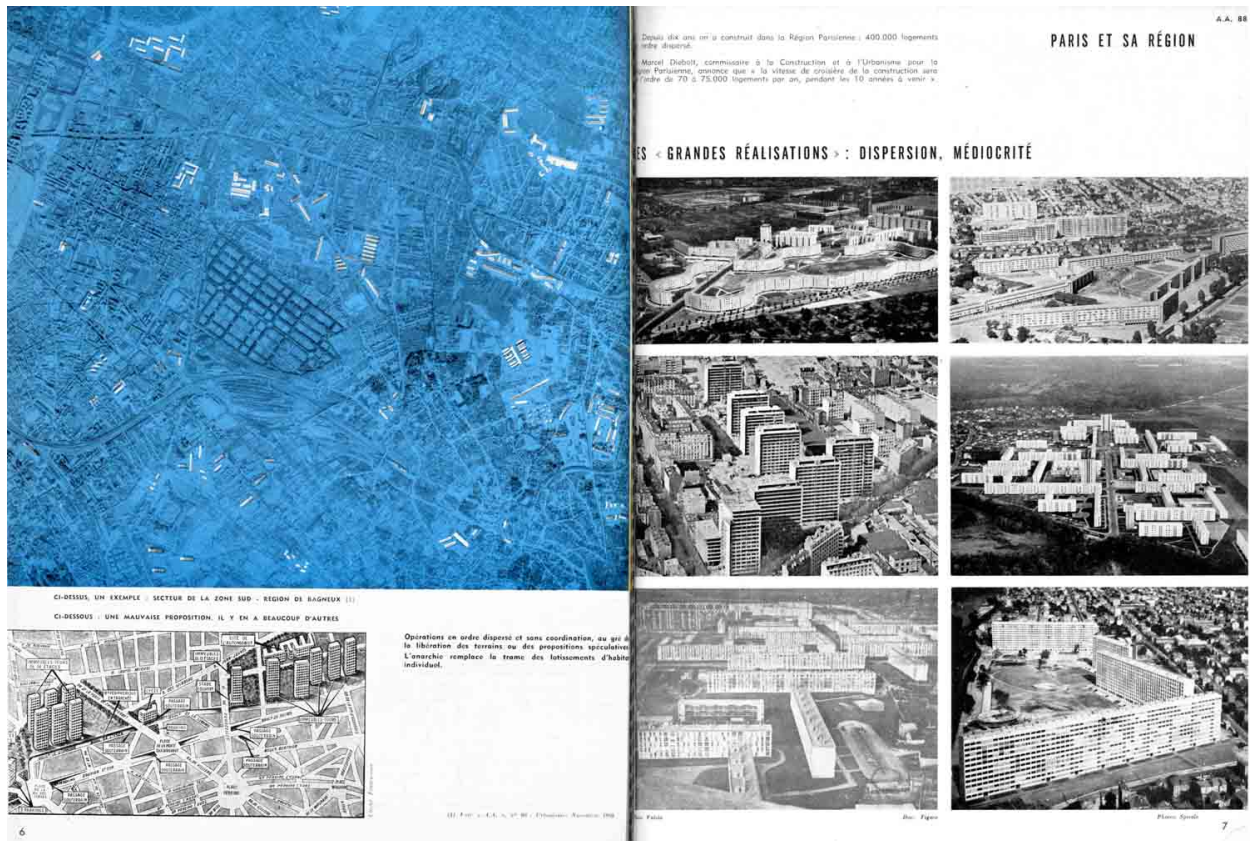


Figure 2.3: The editors of *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* based their critique of the *grands ensembles* in 1960 on their chaotic insertion in the Parisian suburbs (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 88 “Proposition pour Paris” (1960): 6-7).

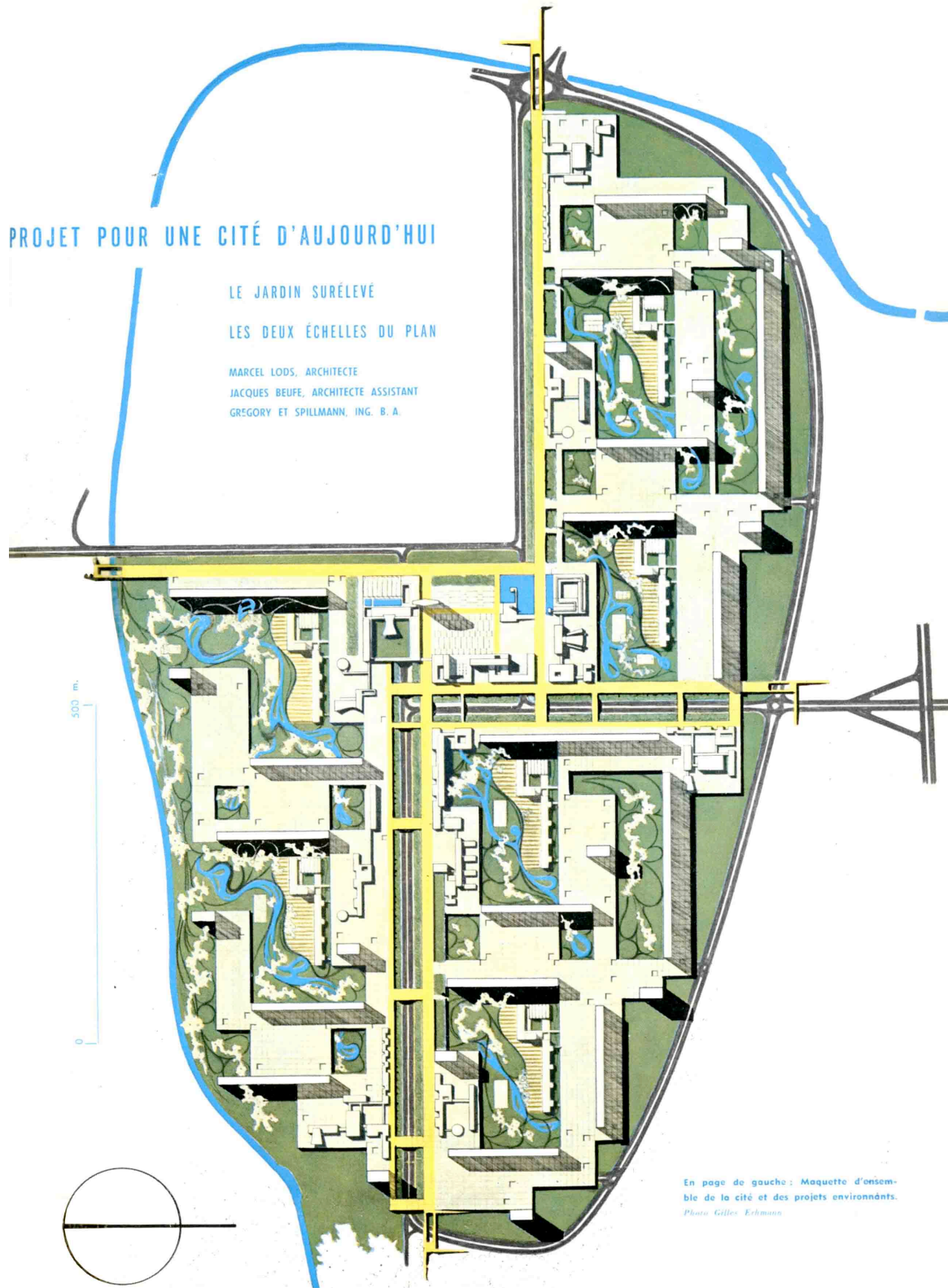


Figure 2.4: “Project for a city of today: the elevated garden, the two scales of the plan” by Marcel Lods with Jacques Beufe, assistant architect, and Gregory & Spillmann, engineers (Source: *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 88 “Proposition pour Paris” (1960): 15).

Pierre Sudreau, throughout his tenure as Minister of Construction from 1958 until 1962, embodied this situation - in which critique confirmed rather than debilitated the reigning paradigm.²⁵⁴ In 1960, he issued a long statement about his visions for architecture and urbanism, in which he condemned some errors of the *grands ensembles*: their disregard for the site in which they were implanted and their lack of architectural imagination.²⁵⁵ Yet, despite the gravity of mistakes already committed, he continued to proclaim that “the *grands ensembles* emerge from a logical prediction of needs; a healthy conception of Urbanism imposes them.”²⁵⁶ To avoid such mistakes in the future, he then issued guidelines focused on the aesthetics of the landscape, the conservation of its beauty by a “harmony of forms” and the careful integration of the project in the landscape.²⁵⁷

Yet, architectural aesthetics and landscape preservation were not everybody’s main concern. From the mid-1950s, civil society organizations, state administrators, and sociologists had addressed the problems in the *grands ensembles* by pointing at the lack of *équipement*, or facilities. With this they meant the collection of local amenities that facilitate everyday life: basically anything from post offices and grocery shops to community centers. This harnessed the conviction that the ideal solution to social problems in mass housing areas was to equip them.

In France, Chombart de Lauwe had been one of the first to emphasize the relation between the social life of a neighborhood and its collective facilities; he was convinced that better provision of these would help prevent social problems and encourage the development of a more socially successful neighborhood where people feel “at home.”²⁵⁸ He acknowledged the importance of expert studies to determine the appropriate program of facilities. By the end of the decade, a variety of expert advocated for providing - and preceding this, studying - collective facilities in new housing estates.²⁵⁹ While they did not always link this explicitly to an ideal of community building as Chombart de Lauwe did, they entrenched the idea that the provision of such facilities, in concert with sociological study of user needs that would allow to define them, was the solution to social problems in mass housing. Studying and equipping thus went hand in hand.

²⁵⁴ Rather than schizophrenic, as Fourcaut has called it (See: Fourcaut, "Trois discours, une politique?."), his discourse is better described as demonstrating the paradigmatic nature of this kind of urbanism: at this time, the *grands ensembles* were understood as the only solution for urban development.

²⁵⁵ “A mesure que l’effort de construction et d’équipement s’amplifie, les risques d’erreur d’urbanisme et d’architecture se multiplient. A côté de très belles réalisations qui font honneur à notre Pays, d’autres au contraire témoignent d’un manque total d’imagination et de recherche, quelques autres enfin défigurent irrémédiablement le site dans lequel elles se sont installées. Ces erreurs sont d’autant plus graves qu’une fois commises, elles ne peuvent plus être corrigées et subsisteront pendant plusieurs générations.” Pierre Sudreau, cited in: Ibid.

²⁵⁶ “Les Grands Ensembles sont issus d’une saine prévision des besoins. Une saine conception de l’Urbanisme les impose.” Speech by Pierre Sudreau at UNESCO Conference “Comment réussir la construction et l’équipement des ensembles immobiliers” 21-23 January 1960 (CAC 19770816/004).

²⁵⁷ “l’harmonisation des constructions avec le paysage urbain et rural.” Sudreau also instituted what were called “*zones sensibles*” for historic preservation, CAC: 19770816 /006.

²⁵⁸ For example, in his study of housing projects in Bordeaux, Chombart de Lauwe analyzed “social life and neighborhood relations” not only in function of geographic location, but also as a function of what he called “social facilities.” Chombart de Lauwe, Jenny, and Couvreur, "Logement et comportement des ménages dans trois cités nouvelles de l’agglomération bordelaise."

²⁵⁹ See for instance: Conference proceedings of the Congrès mondial de la famille, Paris 1958.

Consequently, the Ministry of Construction made it a central policy for the *grands ensembles*. The Center for Studies of Residential Facilities (*Centre d'études des équipements résidentiels* or CEDER), a research cell established by Sudreau during the making of the *grille* in 1959, set the framework for studying and planning collective facilities. Its 1962 report relegated the study of inhabitants' "residential needs" entirely to a detailed specification of collective facilities. These were thought to directly address "tensions or deficiencies in social relations, maladjustment to collective life, the roving of children tending to certain forms of mental exasperation or pre-delinquency, and so on."²⁶⁰ René Kaës' *Vivre dans les grands ensembles* of 1963, a sociological study based very much on Chombart de Lauwe's work, only galvanized these convictions when he emphasized the importance of facilities in particular.²⁶¹

While the call for facilities had emerged in response to critiques of mass collective housing, it actually helped to further legitimize that very policy. In order to do the *grands ensembles* well, they had to be done *bigger*: as such, they could be more efficiently organized, more comprehensively planned, and better equipped. Faced with intense land speculation and the problems of finding appropriate pieces of land, state planners became increasingly aware that the surge in mass housing production had not been accompanied with the necessary planning strategies.²⁶² This had led to the 1957 *loi-cadre*, which meant to counter speculation and allow larger swaths of land to be designated for development.²⁶³ Under Sudreau, subsequent legislation further instituted the ZUP (*zones à urbaniser par priorité*), a planning tool for large-scale urban development. While they affirmed the impetus of mass production through standardization and rationalization, these new laws were meant to institute the provision of collective facilities as an integral part of housing development.²⁶⁴ The basic idea, shared by state administrators, urbanists and many civil society leaders alike, was that a larger development would be more efficient and not only encourage industrialized production techniques, but also a better equipped living environment. As such, *équipement* - the actual content of which was unstable and evolving - became the common denominator of a range of corrective measures for that one decision that would remain untouched: the state-led production of mass collective housing in large estates.

²⁶⁰ "tensions ou carences dans la vie de relations, inadaptation à la vie en collectif, errance des enfants tendant parfois à certaines formes d'exaspération psychique ou de prédélinquance, etc..." In: Les équipements résidentiels: Techniques d'étude des besoins dans les ensembles d'habitation, Bloch-Lemoine, INEP Malry-le-Roi, Octobre 1962 (CAC 19780633/001).

²⁶¹ Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*.

²⁶² The ill-planned location of *grands ensembles*, sometimes even in "zones non-affectées," areas considered off-limits for construction like at Sarcelles, Le Luth in Gennevilliers, and Les Courtilières in Pantin, was seen as proof of this. The creation in 1955 of the mandate of *Commissaire à la Construction et à l'Urbanisme pour la région Parisienne* (a position first occupied by Pierre Sudreau before he became minister in 1958), was a way to resolve this contradiction. See: Fourcaut, "Les premiers grands ensembles en région parisienne: Ne pas refaire la banlieue?."

²⁶³ "Loi du 7 août 1957 tendant à favoriser la construction de logements et les équipements collectifs," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 10 August 1957. For urbanists, this law was the hopeful sign of a much-needed shift in mentality, an "affirmation by the Parlement of the will to conduct an active policy of urban and regional planning." In: "Loi-cadre," *Urbanisme* 56(1957): 229.

²⁶⁴ The ZUP law obliged the developer in theory to provide all necessary facilities and simplified expropriation procedures. This made it easier for the centralized government to guide large-scale urban developments and to avoid heightened speculation. See: "Décrets relatifs aux plans d'urbanisme directeurs et de détail, aux lotissements, aux zones à urbaniser par priorité, à la rénovation urbaine, aux associations syndicales de propriétaires en vue de la réalisation d'opérations d'urbanisme," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 31 December 1958.

While the *grille* linked notion of *équipement* directly to the new urban developments of the *grands ensembles*, it was not entirely defined by it. The increasingly elaborate requirements for collective facilities in new housing estates was also part of a larger trajectory, that of the welfare state. During the postwar boom, when economic growth expressed itself most symbolically in a thriving consumer culture, the role of the French government came to be increasingly defined in terms of collective consumption. From child allowance to highway infrastructure, the state was understood as a provider of (politically neutral) public services and benefits. Some of these were taken over from civil society organizations and traditional institutions like the church; others were meant to satisfy entirely new needs.

The massive adoption of social welfare programs and organizations by the postwar state was accompanied by a changing definition of *équipement*. This notion began to gradually encompass the multitude of sanitary, social and cultural facilities the state would assume the responsibility to provide in housing areas. During the late 1940s, the Plan Monnet still used the notion of *équipement* to refer to basic infrastructure like ports, roads and utilities. The term soon began to incorporate an increasingly comprehensive list of building and amenities, first including public administrative buildings like fire stations and then modern collective facilities like social and cultural centers. This shift surfaced in planning debates during the mid-1950s, and became explicit in the preparations for the Fourth Plan and its *Commission de l'équipement urbain*, where the notion of *équipement* became now directly linked to urban development. Part and parcel of this shift was the conviction that the provision of collective facilities was an a-political matter. One of the planners, Jean Lemoine, best summarized this idea when he contended: “The morals and ideas have evolved bit by bit, charity imbued with paternalism was first replaced by the idea of social justice, and then simply by that of rational organization, whether it concerns the economy, social services, or culture.”²⁶⁵ That these collective facilities were focused first and foremost on the newly urbanized areas of the *grands ensembles* only underscores the importance of postwar urbanization - and thus, modern urbanism - in the historical development of the French welfare state.

The *grille Dupont* was pioneering in that it brought a diversity of institutions within the purview of a single, systematic approach, one that aimed to translate all possible needs and types of facilities directly into an urbanistic program. It normalized the assemblage, under the single term of “*équipement collectif*,” of a variety of collective institutions - from theaters to churches - each of which had its own distinct tradition and historical development. The fact that all these different types of places could now be understood as “facilitating entities” was a sign less of an all-encompassing functionalism, than of the prominence of the welfare state as a new form of oversight and source of provision in social life.

The term *grille* was a rather generic French management term at this time, a sign of the *grille Dupont*'s ambition to render the design of the *grands ensembles* into “business as usual,” a clear and efficient operation with guaranteed success. Yet while the term was not particularly tied to urban planning, the approach of the *grille Dupont* was indebted to specific methods of urban

²⁶⁵ “Les mœurs et les idées ont évolué et peu à peu, à la bienfaisance empreinte de paternalisme s’est substituée d’abord l’idée de justice sociale, puis tout simplement celle d’une organisation rationnelle, qu’il s’agisse de l’économie, des services sociaux ou de la culture.” In: *Les équipements résidentiels: Techniques d’étude des besoins dans les ensembles d’habitation*, Bloch-Lemoine, INEP Malry-le-Roi, Octobre 1962.

planning. Its research on commercial facilities followed up previous studies of the *Commission Générale du Plan* (CGP). In response to the neglect - by both private and public sectors - of the development of commerce in the fast-growing suburbs, this planning think tank had been involved with the making of a *grille d'équipement commercial* that allowed to calculate the necessary commercial facilities to be provided in a given area.²⁶⁶ This implied both a market study about the purchasing power of the local and future population and a planning study about the concrete program to provide. The *grille Dupont* followed this approach, which was indebted to one of the fundamental convictions underlying French national modernization: the superiority of the state vis-à-vis the market in the rational management of economic affairs. Concomitant with this conviction was the assumption - also adopted by the authors of the *grille* - that centralized planning of commerce would be more efficient than spontaneous development: "The solution to absolutely avoid is to realize the commercial facilities in the *grands ensembles* in the form of an assemblage of different shops, the nature and size of which would be defined only empirically or by the random application of merchants. This would lead to commercial amenities corresponding neither to inhabitants' needs nor to those of the merchants. Instead, commercial facilities need to be conceived in general, in their totality, and adopted in each *grand ensemble*."²⁶⁷ The direct spatial translation of this idea was the concentration of commerce in planned commercial centers rather than on traditional streets, a practice that remained unquestioned until the second half of the 1960s, when economic failure and the criticism of bored consumers began to contest it. Until then, the method of the *grille* continued to be used inside the state apparatus, not only by the Ministry of Construction but also by the CGP.²⁶⁸

The *grille* was not only part and parcel of these state-led urban planning methods; it was an equally important feature in architectural modernism. Proposed by Le Corbusier and first used at the CIAM conference of 1949, the grid was first and foremost "a system for graphically organizing information" by means of coded panels that could be assembled into larger screens (figure 2.5).²⁶⁹ The grid allowed systematic comparison of the projects presented at the meetings, by classifying their objective characteristics, horizontally according to the four functions and vertically according to particular themes - environment, land use, constructed volume and so on. Initially, the grid functioned as a tool for rationalizing, understanding and conceiving urbanism. Yet, its form was altered as soon as the following CIAM meeting of 1951, where the MARS group proposed a simplified grid. Under the influence of Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, whose ideas were

²⁶⁶ Neither the national Code of Urbanism and Housing nor the official urban plans for Paris gave an indication about the provision of commerce in new urban development. Two sub-committees of the CGP, the *Commission de la Modernisation du Commerce* and the *Sous-Commission de l'urbanisme commercial* were responsible for the making of this *grille*, which was based on previous studies by the *Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse des Dépôts*. See: Rapport du groupe équipement commercial (CAC 19770775/044).

²⁶⁷ See: "Équipement commercial des grands ensembles," *Urbanisme* 62-63(1959): 58-69, 58-59. The same view was espoused in: *L'équipement commercial des ensembles résidentiels: Réalisation des centres commerciaux*, M. Le Besnerais, INEP Marly-le-Roi, 1961 (CAC 19780633/001).

²⁶⁸ For instance, see: Note sur les bases devant servir à l'établissement d'un programme des équipements, CGP, Équipements sociaux, sportifs et culturels (CAC 19920405/006).

²⁶⁹ The grid had been proposed by Le Corbusier at CIAM 6 (1947, Bridgewater), and was further developed that year by a team including Le Corbusier and members of ASCORAL. See: Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, 180-81, 203-08; Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-war Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, 58-70; Annie Pedret, "Dismantling the CIAM Grid: New Values for Modern Architecture," in *Team 10: 1953-81, In Search of a Utopia of the Present*, ed. Team 10, Max Risselada, and Dirk van den Heuvel (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005).

based on Joseph Lluís Sert’s contributions, the presentations now came to be organized according to socio-spatial scales of settlement: the village or primary housing group, the neighborhood, the town or city sector, the city itself, and finally, the metropolis or multiple city.²⁷⁰

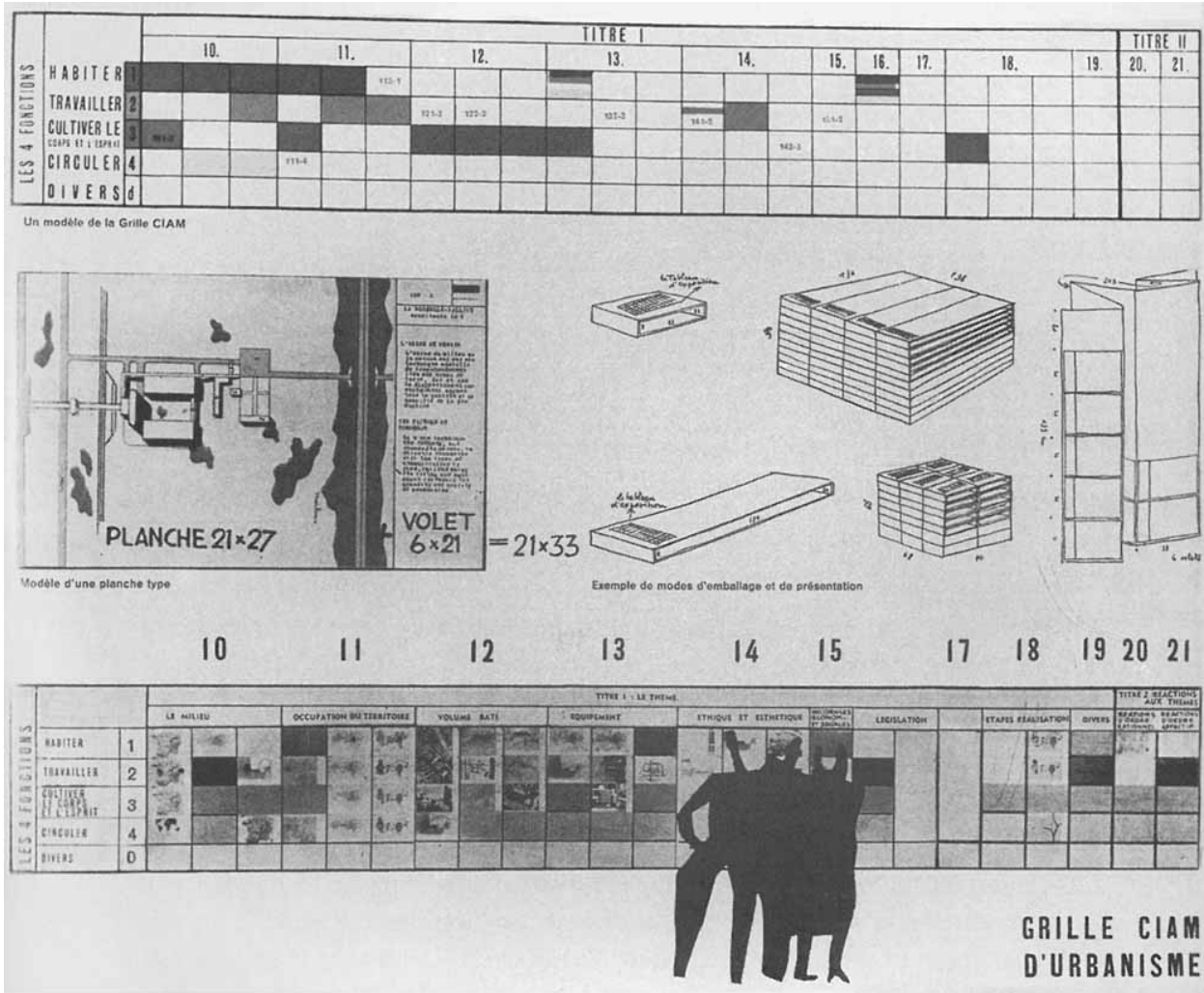


Figure 2.5: CIAM grille, by ASCORAL (Le Corbusier et. al.), 1947 (Source: Eric Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000): 181).

Sudreau’s committee developed its own quantified version of this idea by organizing its list of collective facilities according to five nested socio-spatial scales: the “residential group” (200-500 dwelling units), the “neighborhood unit” (800-1200 units or 3000-4500 inhabitants), the “quartier” (1500-2500 units), the “arrondissement” (3000-6000 units), and ultimately the city at

²⁷⁰ Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Joseph Lluís Sert, and Ernesto Rogers, *CIAM 8: The Heart of the City* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1952).

large (see figure 2.1).²⁷¹ The residential group would have a minimal amount of facilities: parking spaces, green space, a children's playground, and street furniture. At the neighborhood unit level, a preschool and primary school should be provided, as well as social amenities like a day care center, a small medical center, a social center, a youth community center, and fifteen to twenty shops for everyday necessities. At the level of the *quartier* - comprised of two neighborhood units - inhabitants would find a "religious center", a day nursery, additional social facilities for youth, other shops, a public market and so on. Finally, a secondary school, more playgrounds, a dispensary, and a principal commercial center with larger and more specialized stores should be located at the level of the *arrondissement*.

These hierarchical scales were based on the assumption that individual user needs could be satisfied within strictly defined spatial bounds. The concept of the commercial and community center was part of this: local facilities would be concentrated in smaller, secondary centers for everyday necessities at the center of each unit, while the principal commercial center would serve a larger area's more specialized needs. This urbanism of "hermetic boxes" made it possible to specify for each of type of facility an average square footage, and for each of the spatial units, an ideal proportion of surfaces allocated to housing, collective facilities, parking space and circulation, and finally, green space.

Of course, the ideal scenario was rarely built as planned. In reality, many contingencies crossed planners' paths. A crucial limitation was the availability of land, which, together with fragmented ownership structures, land speculation, lengthy expropriation procedures, and physical restrictions - topography, infrastructure or existing buildings - left architects and planners with less-than-ideal options for their schemes.²⁷² Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s the *grands ensembles* continued to be thought of in terms of the neighborhood unit. Many plans were based less on actual sociological observation, than on ideal spatial configurations and sociological or theoretical ideas about social life. For François Parfait, director of SCET, a large public developer responsible for the construction of many *grands ensembles*, it was "a coordinated planning operation of an entire or a part of one or more Neighborhood Units, conceived to satisfy the needs of the different categories of inhabitants that need to live together in it."²⁷³

The formal conception of many *grands ensembles* embodied such idealizations. In typical projects like Sarcelles, Epinay-sur-Seine or Massy-Antony, the housing blocks were arranged in a grid delineating the different neighborhood units, not unlike the figure of an electronic chip. The dictum of light, air and openness created a spatial framework in which collective facilities could be plugged in as independent entities, simple add-ons to the basic program of mass

²⁷¹ "Grille d'équipement d'un grand ensemble d'habitation," *Urbanisme* 62-63(1959): 12-28.

²⁷² This was already reported in the early 1970s, see for instance: Robert Durand, "Réflexion sur les quartiers nouveaux et leur équipement," *Recherche sociale* 46(1973), 51.

²⁷³ "[...] une opération coordonnée d'aménagement de tout ou partie d'une ou plusieurs Unités de Voisinage, conçue en vue de satisfaire les besoins des différentes catégories de population qui doivent y cohabiter. " Parfait, "Conception, organisation, réalisation des ensembles d'habitation," 22.

housing (figure 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8).²⁷⁴ This formal and functional independence coincided with the particular financing structure of the *grands ensembles*. Whereas funding was readily available for housing construction, through state loans and subsidies, funding for the diverse array of collective facilities was problematic and dispersed over different state institutions like the Social and Economic Development Fund,²⁷⁵ Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of the Interior, local municipalities, public credit organizations, social security organizations, and so on. This was an important reason why so many projects contained only housing, and lacked collective facilities - at least initially.²⁷⁶

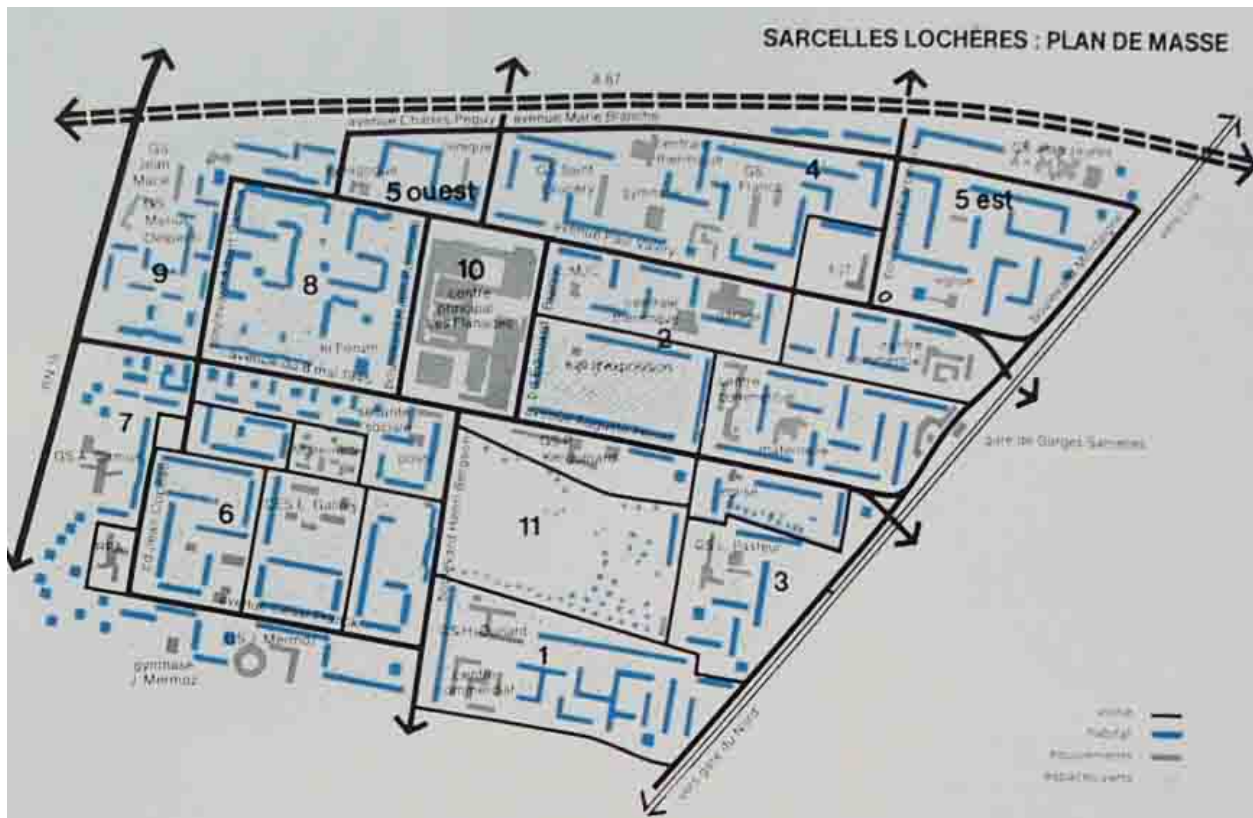


Figure 2.6: The *grand ensemble* of Sarcelles, by Jacques Henri-Labourdette and Roger Boileau, 1955-1974: diagram by the developer SCIC distinguishing housing (in blue) from collective amenities (in grey) (Source: ADVO BIB 623 SCIC promotion brochure for Sarcelles, 1976).

²⁷⁴ For a formal analysis of *grands ensembles* projects, see: Jean-Patrick Fortin, *Grands ensembles: L'espace et ses raisons* (Paris: Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture, 2000); Mario Bonilla, "Le grand ensemble comme forme urbaine," in *Les grands ensembles: Une histoire qui continue*, ed. François Tomas, Jean-Noël Blanc, and Mario Bonilla (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2003).

²⁷⁵ *Fonds de développement économique et social* (FDES), an institution established particularly for this purpose.

²⁷⁶ See for instance: *Les équipements résidentiels: Techniques d'étude des besoins dans les ensembles d'habitation*, Bloch-Lemoine, INEP Malry-le-Roi, Octobre 1962.

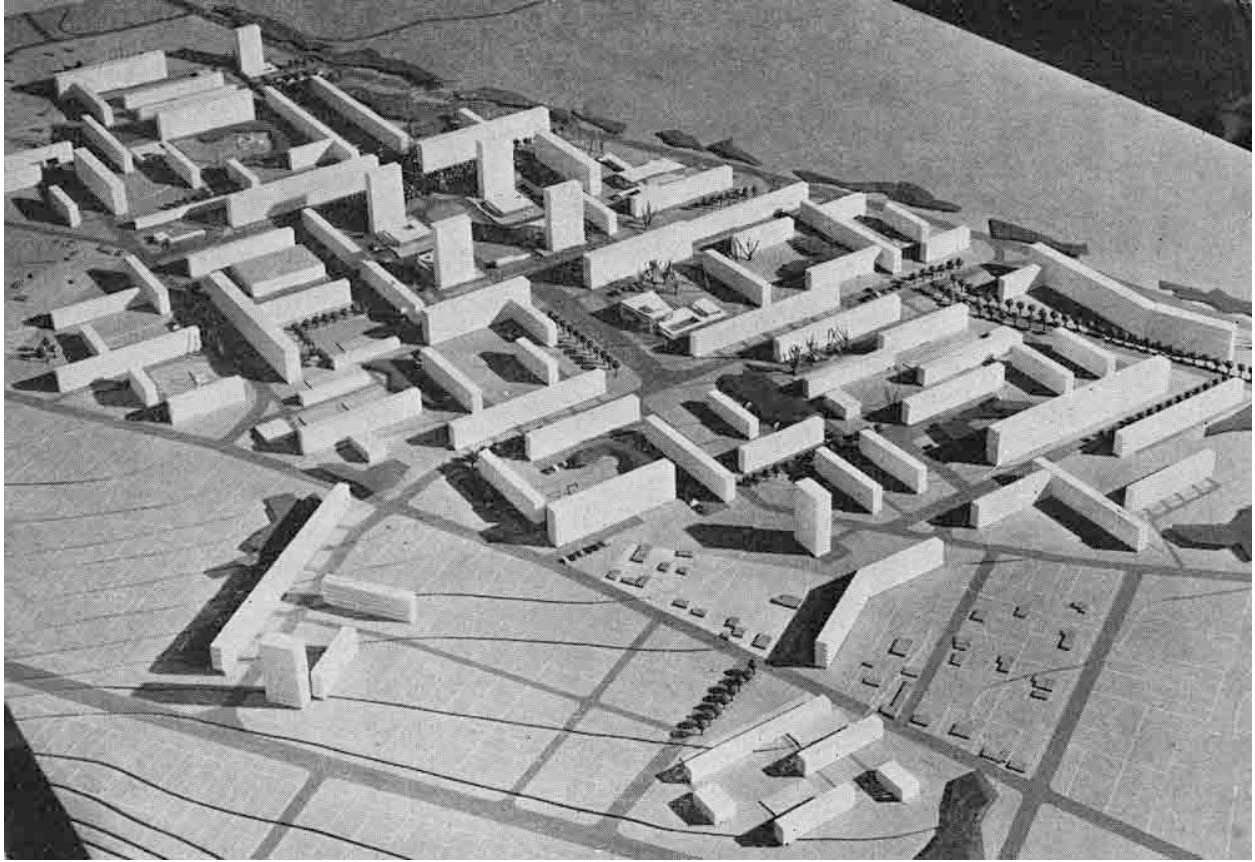


Figure 2.7: The *grand ensemble* of Le Mont-Mesly (Créteil, near Paris) by the architect Charles-Gustave Stoskopf, 1955-1960 (Source: *Urbanisme* 62-63 "Equiptement des grands ensembles" (1959): 99).

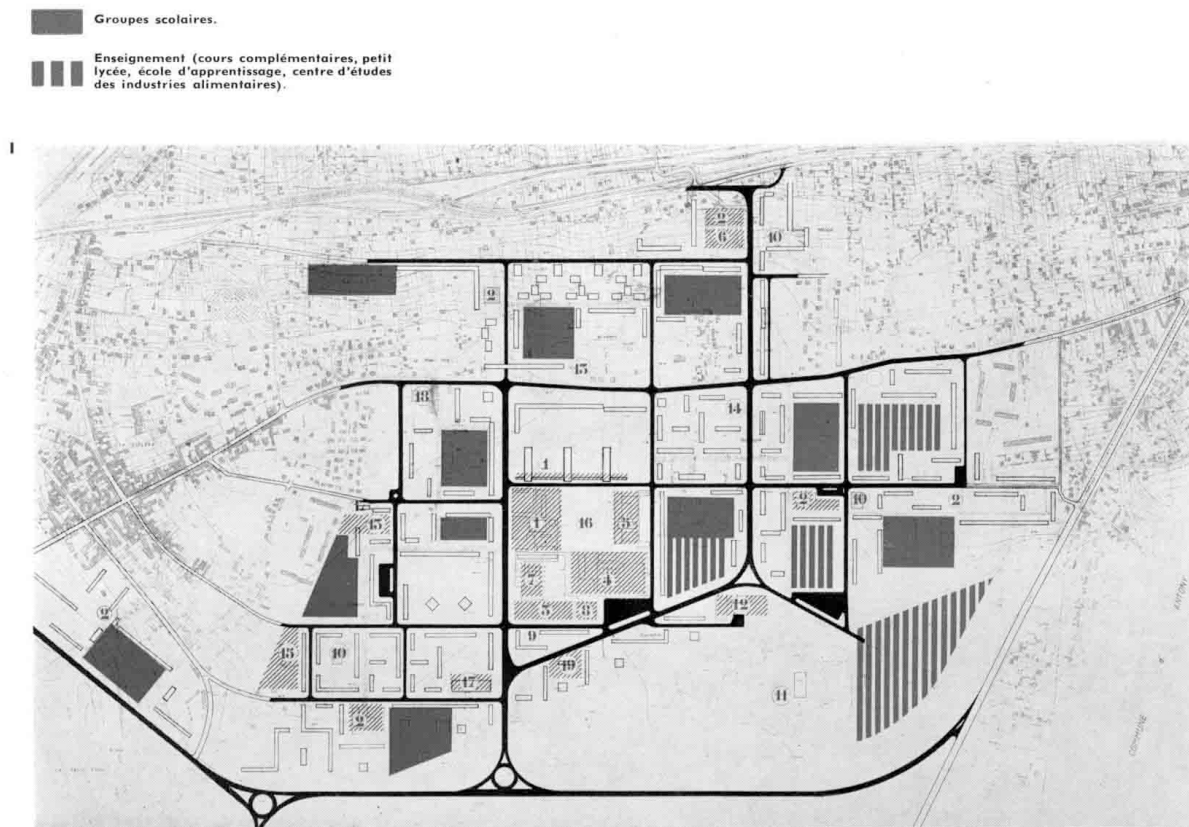


Figure 2.8: Diagram of the *grand ensemble* of Massy-Antony by the architect Pierre-Edouard Lambert, 1954-1961 (Source: *Urbanisme* 75-76 “Équipement” (1962): 132).

What linked the *grille* to earlier concepts of the neighborhood unit - from Ebenezer Howard to Clarence Perry - was the assumption that to a certain spatially bounded area corresponded a certain form of sociability. The modernist neighborhood concept idea - with its global reach from the American Greenbelt to the German *Siedlung* and the Soviet *micro-rayon* - was reinforced in postwar France by a specific vision of community solidarity. While occasionally derived from socialism, it was more often inspired by a sociological idealization of the inner city *quartier*.²⁷⁷ The ideal of a closely-knit local community bore remarkable resemblances to the descriptions of inner city neighborhoods that the *grands ensembles* were meant to replace. As Christian Topalov has shown in his comparative analysis of urban sociologists in the face of urban renewal, working-class neighborhoods were “discovered” at the very time they were about to vanish. Sociologists like Henri Coing no longer portrayed them as chaotic spaces of promiscuity and moral degeneracy, but understood them as a socially structured space, in which the density of

²⁷⁷ For some architects, inspiration lay elsewhere. As Jean-Louis Cohen has shown, for André Lurçat the neighborhood unit idea was linked to his Communist leanings, and indebted to the Soviet notion of the *Kvartal*. See: Cohen, *André Lurçat, 1894-1970: Autocritique d'un moderne*.

human interrelations created an intimate atmosphere of community.²⁷⁸ Preceding the work of Coing were the social surveys of such neighborhoods by associations like *Economie et Humanisme*: between the early 1940s and the mid-1950s these are made working-class neighborhoods first visible as such.²⁷⁹

The notion of community that runs through these kinds of analyses was both an ideal to work towards and an analysis of the world as is. Despite the inspiration of many French urbanists in the British New Towns, this notion was thus clearly distinct from that in the Anglo-Saxon planning tradition: at the intermediary between centralized state and individual citizen, the French ideal of community was essentially inspired by social Catholicism. This is what would become instrumental in the urbanism of the *grands ensembles*, when urbanists like Gaston Bardet and Robert Auzelle translated the ideal of community into urban design.²⁸⁰ Their basic assumption was that to a certain spatial configuration corresponded a specific social morphology. This was a well-founded idea in the social sciences at the time, based on the pioneering work of Maurice Halbwachs and Marcel Mauss and subsequently developed by the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule, who had used aerial photography to explain the community life of Dogon villages in West-Africa.²⁸¹ Bardet, who was closely linked to the movement of *Economie et Humanisme*²⁸² and had positioned himself explicitly against the modernism of Le Corbusier, harnessed the basic propositions of social morphology for his call to create an urbanism built around what he called “community neighborhood units” (*unités communautaires de voisinage*).

The publication of the *grille Dupont* included one of Bardet’s more famous citations, from his book *Le nouvel urbanisme*: “The city as it is conceived: a spot, an endless expansion of a central point; the city as it is: a cluster, a federation of communities.”²⁸³ Concepts like “cluster” were used both to describe the socio-spatial structure of existing cities, and to project a novel “natural” structure for new urban developments. By emphasizing the importance of local neighborhood life in housing estates, and by organizing their own research in clear spatial hierarchies, sociologists like Chombart de Lauwe subsequently reinforced the idea of the neighborhood unit as a basis for planning.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁸ Christian Topalov, "Traditional Working-Class Neighborhoods: An Inquiry into the Emergence of a Sociological Model in the 1950s and 1960s," *Osiris* 18(2003).

²⁷⁹ Isabelle Astié and Jean-François Laé, "La notion de communauté dans les enquêtes sociales en France: Le groupe d'Economie et Humanisme, 1940-1955," *Genèse* 5(1991): 81-106.

²⁸⁰ See: Gaston Bardet, *Le nouvel urbanisme* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal & Compagnie, 1948); Auzelle, *Technique de l'Urbanisme: l'aménagement des agglomérations urbaines*.

²⁸¹ See Chapter 1 in: Haffner, "Social Space Revolution: Aerial Photography, Social Science, and Urban Politics in Postwar France".

²⁸² Denis Pelletier, *Economie et Humanisme: De l'utopie communautaire au combat pour le Tiers-monde, 1941-1966* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996), 107.

²⁸³ *Urbanisme* 62-63 (1959):11.

²⁸⁴ See for instance: Chombart de Lauwe, "Sociologie de l'habitation."

The conception of the *grands ensembles* that was presented in the *grille* thus entailed as a “sociologization” and “structuralization” of an earlier modernism.²⁸⁵ As Maurice-François Rouge contended in his “synthesizing essay,” soon after the publication of the *grille Dupont*: “The goals [of the Athens Charter] were too general and not accompanied by structural principles, which are needed to provide the vision for attaining them. [...] The Athens Charter does not give any indication in terms of structure; one could say it is a-structural. And yet, to propose structure is the *raison d’être* of any science.”²⁸⁶ He conceived of the *grand ensemble* as the result of four structural layers - functional, physical, socio-professional and aesthetic. The physical structure was made up of basic elements: service facilities, production facilities, dwelling facilities, and so on (figure 2.9). Such schemes were widespread, and contributed to the conviction that the urbanism of the *grands ensembles* was a scientific “completion” of the Athens Charter.



²⁸⁵ This mirrored in some respects the evolution within Team X, see: Jean-Louis Violeau, "Team 10 and Structuralism: Analogies and Discrepancies," in *Team 10: 1953-81, In Search of a Utopia of the Present*, ed. Team 10, Max Risselada, and Dirk van den Heuvel (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005).

²⁸⁶ Maurice-François Rouge, "D'une doctrine des structures à l'esquisse d'une charte: Essai de synthèse," *Urbanisme* 66(1960).

Figure 2.9: “From a doctrine of structures to the outline of a charter” by Maurice-François Rouge, 1960 (Source: *Urbanisme* 66 “Positions” (1960): 12).

Despite such bold assertions to comprehensiveness, some quite straightforward aspects mentioned in the publication were conspicuously ignored: employment was one of them. The *grille* offered some reflections on the relation between living and working, or what it called the “economic structure of the *grand ensemble*”. Its authors calculated that the amount of jobs generated inside a *grand ensemble* would be only 18% of the total jobs required for its population. While claiming to be against a strict separation of housing and employment zones, they nevertheless neglected to offer specific suggestions on how these zones could be integrated. Unsurprisingly, by the end of the 1960s, the *grands ensembles* were criticized for being *banlieues dormitoires* just like the interwar suburbs to which they were supposed to offer the solution.

The idea that science, structuralism and sociology would complement the doctrines of interwar modernism did not lead to the creation of an ultimate doctrine. On the contrary, it set in motion a gradual questioning of some of the Charter’s basic stipulations - the separation of functions and the abolishing of the street being only the most obvious ones. In the years following the publication of the *grille Dupont*, the CGP had continued to revise it, and the results were published in 1962 as an official update, again under direction of Gérard Dupont in the journal *Urbanisme*.²⁸⁷ In the introduction, Jacques Maziol, Sudreau’s successor, reaffirmed the policy of the *grands ensembles*, as “they effectively assure the indispensable coordination of housing with collective facilities.”²⁸⁸ Fueled by repatriation from former colonies, the intensifying migration from the countryside to French cities, and the French baby boom, the urgent need for mass housing remained undiminished during the 1960s. Large-scale mass housing estates remained the only policy and the provision of facilities would serve as its corrective measure.

Many of the *grille* revisions were minor, and theoretical rather than of practical importance. The hierarchical urban scales, for instance, were tweaked: compared to the five original ones, the *arrondissement* level disappeared, and the size of the *quartier* level was doubled. In reality however, these entities rarely corresponded to the actual program of many *grands ensembles*. Slightly more significant was the addition of a distinction between “small and medium-sized ensembles” and “large ensembles,” the latter when number of inhabitants was over 25 % of the population of the surrounding urban agglomeration. The idea that the size of a *grand ensemble* was relative to its surroundings was a first - albeit modest - acknowledgement of the importance of urban context.

In his article on the evolution of recent French urbanism, published soon after in the same journal, Gérard Dupont alluded to a more fundamental change in mindset, when he emphasized “the respect for measure, the concern with the landscape, the importance of intimate spaces encouraging social contact, shopping boulevards, and lively centers” as crucial concerns for future urbanism. He continued: “Against strict zoning has now emerged the desire to situate

²⁸⁷ More specifically, its *Commission de l’habitation* did so in preparation for the Fourth Plan (1962-1965). The revision was published as another journal issue of *Urbanisme*, 75-76(1962).

²⁸⁸ Jacques Maziol, “Introduction,” *Urbanisme* 75-76(1962): 4-5.

places of activity in the middle of residential zones, in order to facilitate human contacts, to create liveliness, and to bring employment closer to the home.”²⁸⁹ These novel ideas would not have a concrete impact until the later part of the 1960s, after the publication of another - and final - adjustment of the *grille*.

This second official adjustment, again published in *Urbanisme*, was based on extensive research by several committees inside the Ministry of Construction between October 1963 and February 1965. Basically, four kinds of spatial levels were now envisaged, divided into two types: the *unité d'habitations* (itself divided into the *résidence* of 50-150 units and the *groupe* of 200-500 units) and the *unité d'organisation urbaine* (itself divided into the *voisinage* of 800-1200 units and the *quartier* of 2500-5000 units). This reorganization gave more weight to cultural facilities and exterior spaces, which were more finely distributed over the *grand ensemble*. The level of the city at large was eliminated because it was now understood as “incontrollable.”²⁹⁰

Yet, the real shift was clarified in the accompanying study: planners now set themselves the goal to rethink the *grand ensemble* in its totality, “from the individual home to the city.” They would do so by addressing “the absence of certain socio-cultural facilities directly linked to the housing” and by focusing on “the whole of the non-built space available to inhabitants.”²⁹¹ This revision of the *grille* was shaped by the ambition to bring into the realm of design a number of previously ignored aspects of the built environment, like the sensuous perception of the natural site, its colors, light and microclimate, but also the urban and local context. The researchers involved attempted to infer socio-psychological data from the physical qualities of the built environment: “These phenomena - because they are unconsciously experienced and thus simply undergone - leave individuals without defense and play a role depending on the temperaments, a role that, in the sociological surveys, is revealed in banal sayings (“we don’t like it,” “we’re bored”) or false reasons (“the elevator doesn’t work properly,” “the school is too far”), while the real grievances can be entirely different: the apartment building is too high, the road that leads to the school is boring, complicated and interrupted by roads.”²⁹²

This implied a larger role for the social sciences, and for urban sociology in particular. For the urbanists behind the *grille*, this emerging discipline promised to transcend the “functionalist division of human activity” and to encourage local community life and better design. Space, so they argued, should be designed according to the complexity of users’ needs. Playground design for example, should be based on a detailed analysis of sociologically defined age groups, giving particular attention to “sensorial and mental development” (figure 2.10). Such an attention to children was particularly pertinent to the *grands ensembles*, whose inhabitants were

²⁸⁹ Dupont, “Evolution de la construction et de l’urbanisme depuis 1950,” 38.

²⁹⁰ See: *Urbanisme* 90-91(1965): 75. See also: Joffre Dumazedier and Maurice Imbert, *Espace et loisir dans la société française d’hier et de demain* (vol 2) (Paris: CRU, 1967), 65-66.

²⁹¹ Yves Aubert, “Espaces extérieurs et domaine socio-culturel,” *Urbanisme* 90-91(1965), 5.

²⁹² “Ces phénomènes – parce qu’ils sont inconsciemment ressentis et par conséquent subis – laissent les individus sans défense et jouent un rôle plus ou moins important selon les tempéraments, rôle qui, dans les enquêtes sociologiques, transparaît sous des formules banales (“on ne se plaît pas”, “on s’ennuie”) ou sous de fausses raisons (“l’ascenseur fonctionne mal”, “l’école est trop loin”), alors que les griefs peuvent être tout autres: l’immeuble est trop élevé, le chemin qui mène à l’école est ennuyeux, compliqué et entrecoupé de passages de voitures.” *Ibid.*, 9.

predominantly young families with children. Another priority for such a sociology-enriched urbanism - which designers would take at heart over the next years - was to transpose the architectural and social qualities of the traditional urban street into new urban design (figure 2.11).

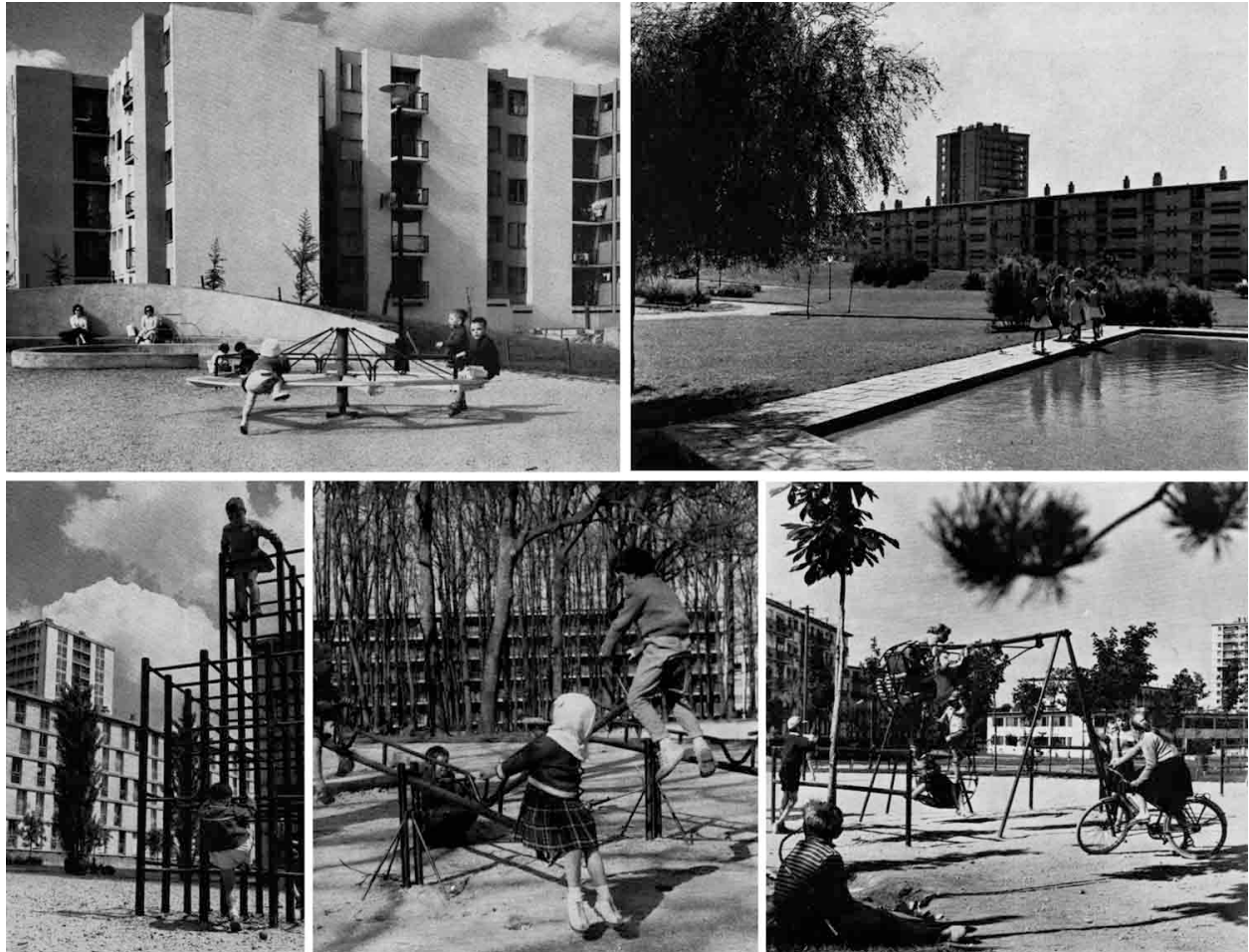


Figure 2.10: Playground design as published in the second *grille* revision (Source: *Urbanisme 90-91* "Equipelement pour l'homme" (1965): 30-31).

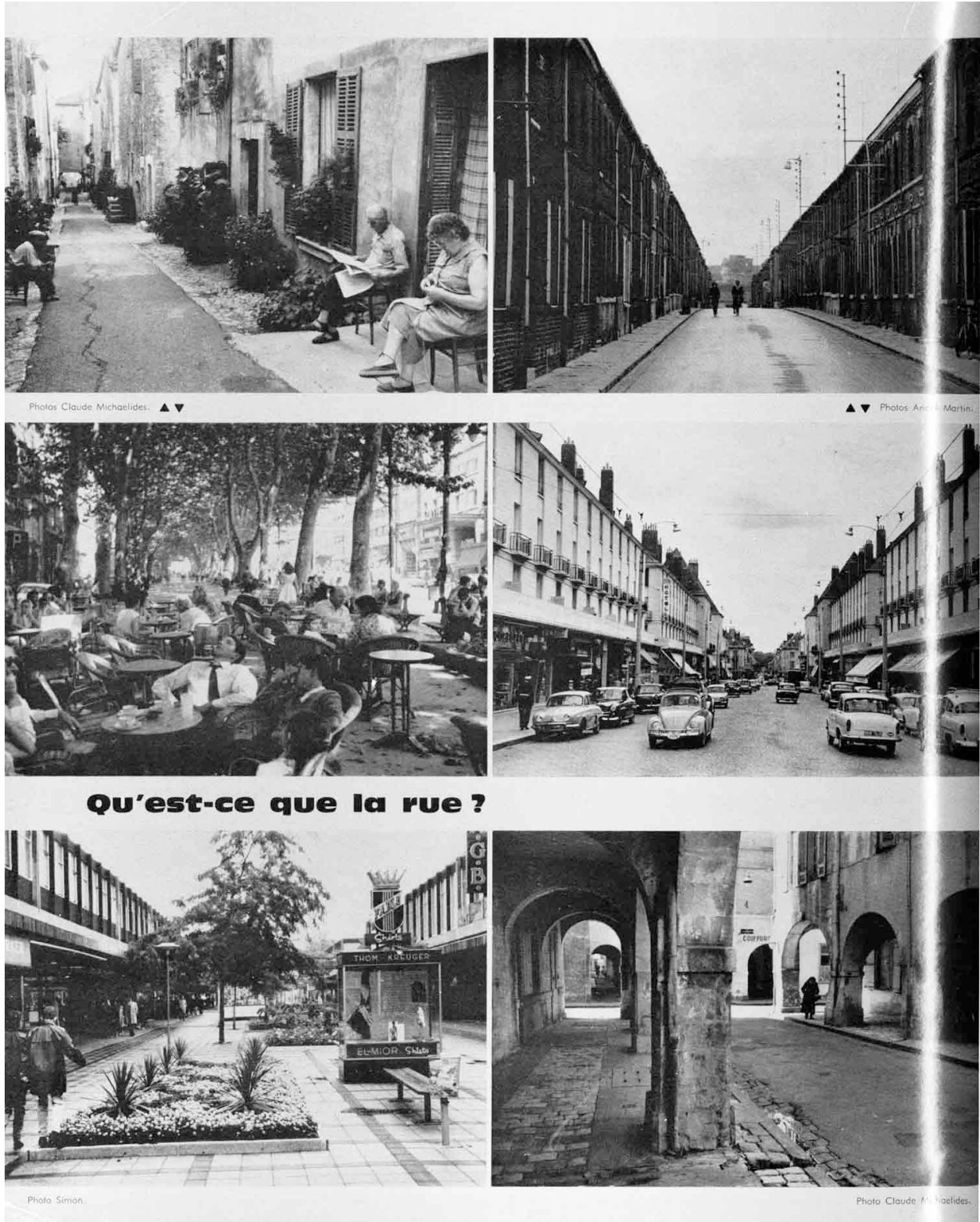


Figure 2.11: A renewed interest in the varied aspects of the traditional urban street (Source: *Urbanisme 90-91* “*Équipement pour l’homme*” (1965): 18).

In his introduction to the second *grille* revision, Yves Aubert suggested sociological expertise be used in the very conception of new projects: “The clients, urbanists, architects, landscape architects, engineers and administrators will learn, if they do not already know, that their work is not finished with the final reception of the project. On the contrary, even if the sociologists, community leaders and social workers are already involved to make the new environment acceptable to inhabitants and to address unexpected needs, they are often forced to regret not having been involved in the project from the start.”²⁹³ During the first half of the 1960s, calls for the inclusion of sociology in urbanism had begun to enter the mainstream of French urbanism. In 1962, Pierre Randet contended in this vein that “the introduction of economic and social sciences in the antechamber of urban plan-making has transformed bit by bit the job of the urban planner [*aménageur*]. The urbanist can no longer make his plans by himself; he needs to participate in a team in which, the part of the architect - who has been the pioneer in urbanism - remains nevertheless important because it is him who is ultimately responsible for the creation of form.”²⁹⁴ Two years later, during a national colloquium on urbanism characterized by a certain professional anxiety, commentators observed that “it is an idea now communally accepted that urbanism requires the work of a multidisciplinary team.”²⁹⁵ The CEDER had been exemplary in this evolution. Its primary goal was to deliver the necessary preliminary studies for the programming and management of collective facilities in the *grands ensembles*.²⁹⁶ These entailed not only an economic, demographic and sociological understanding of the local context, but also a study of user needs as expressed by local inhabitants. By the time the center was dismantled in 1970, its researchers had realized more than two hundred studies for *grands ensembles* across the country.²⁹⁷

Most importantly, the publication did not propose a ready-made formula for the *grands ensembles*: while the *grille* itself was reduced to a practical tool for administrative and financial planning, its accompanying studies implied the need for in-depth sociological study and insisted on the development of local urban research. The conception of the *grands ensembles* thus moved away from the dogmas of the Athens Charter under the influence of sociological expertise focused on the user. The *grille* did not constitute a static doctrine or unquestioned recipe for an automated production of *grands ensembles*. Rather, it instigated a decade-long search pointing not only to a different knowledge base for design, but also to new formal concepts that embodied this shift in mindset.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹⁴ “L’introduction des sciences économiques et sociales dans l’antichambre des plans d’urbanisme a transformé peu à peu le métier d’aménageur. L’urbaniste ne peut plus faire seul ses plans; il doit participer à une équipe où, cependant, la part de l’architecte qui a été le pionnier de l’urbanisme, reste importante puisque c’est lui qui, en définitive, est responsable de la mise en forme.” Pierre Randet, “L’évolution de la doctrine,” *Urbanisme* 77(1962).

²⁹⁵ “C’est une idée maintenant communément reçue que l’étude d’urbanisme est nécessairement le travail d’une équipe pluridisciplinaire.” Roger Macé, “L’administration et les urbanistes,” *Urbanisme* 82-83(1964), 37. Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 239.

²⁹⁶ Durand, “Réflexion sur les quartiers nouveaux et leur équipement.”

²⁹⁷ More than fifty studies for programming collective facilities, around fifty studies for the management of such facilities, and more than a hundred studies of social life in existing *grands ensembles*, see: CAC 19770775/044.

3. From socio-cultural facilities to urban design

While the first *grille* listed urban functions from shops to fire departments and sewer installations, its 1965 revision focused specifically on socio-cultural facilities - a mix of social, youth, community, and cultural centers. In its section on urban sociology, Guy Houist, a key representative of familial organizations and member of the Economic and Social Council (*Conseil économique et social*), explained that the socio-cultural sector entailed both the physical framework and the organization of activities - known as *animation* - the goal of which was to create local community life. He contended this sector was the French counterpart of the “British notion of community building.”²⁹⁸ Other observers explained more generally that the appearance of the socio-cultural sector in France was a direct consequence of the growing awareness that social work was necessarily cultural in its contents, and that culture inevitably had a social basis.²⁹⁹

The ground for this new affinity had been laid during the interwar period by social reform and popular education movements. Their programs, which provided leisure for the working classes while educating them, had found an architectural expression in the *maison du peuple*.³⁰⁰ This type of building expressed new social and cultural principles, whether through the language of the palace and the monumental, or through metaphor of the machine - most famously at Clichy by Jean Prouvé.³⁰¹ When the postwar period introduced fundamental changes in both the form and contents of welfare provision, the *maison du peuple* was rethought as a modern facility, the social center. A key report in 1952 by the United Nations defined the social center as “an organization that, with the collaboration of users, endeavors to resolve the problems of the population of a neighborhood or geographic sector, by putting at its disposal, in an appropriate space, a set of services and collective realizations of an educational, social, or sanitary character, animated by a social worker who is responsible for the general working of the Center, needs to assure a permanent presence, and if possible reside there.”³⁰² In coordination with a multitude of

²⁹⁸ Guy Houist, "Domaine socio-culturel," *Urbanisme* 90-91(1965): 67-68.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68. An important expert in this novel domain was J.P. Imhof. See: Contribution by J.P. Imhof, Journée d'études sur les problèmes posés par l'animation des nouveaux ensembles d'habitation, 1965 (19771142/020).

³⁰⁰ This type can be brought back to the 19th century settlement houses like Toynbee Hall and Jane Addam's Hull House in Chicago.

³⁰¹ See: Alexis Korganow, "L'équipement socio-culturel, trajectoire architecturale d'un type contrarié d'édifice public à l'ère des loisirs, 1936-1975" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Université de Paris 8 / Institut français d'urbanisme, 2003); Richard Klein, "Des maisons du peuple aux maisons de la culture," in *André Malraux et l'architecture*, ed. Dominique Hervier (Paris: Moniteur, 2008).

³⁰² “une organisation qui, avec la collaboration des usagers, s'efforce de résoudre les problèmes propres à la population d'un quartier ou d'un secteur géographique, en mettant à sa libre disposition, dans un local approprié, un ensemble de services et de réalisations collectives, de caractère éducatif, social ou sanitaire, animés par une assistante sociale responsable de la marche générale du Centre, qui doit y assurer des permanences régulières et, si possible, y résider.” Le centre social, brochure, FCSF, 1965 (CAC 19771142/022).

institutions - familial associations, employers' organizations, social security organizations - the state began to take an increasingly central role in financing and planning such new facilities.³⁰³

Spurred by rapid urbanization, social centers proliferated over the national territory but were particularly pertinent to the *grands ensembles*.³⁰⁴ The *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles* prescribed the location of social centers in each neighborhood unit, on the ground floor of a housing block, with a flexible interior layout.³⁰⁵ The committee members followed the United Nations definition in the making of their *grille*. Yet, for them the social center did more than just "facilitate users' initiatives, contribute to the coordination of diverse social services, and evaluate the needs of its beneficiaries." It assumed an additional function they considered crucial, namely to "create social life, which is initially absent in the *grands ensembles*."³⁰⁶

The social center was sign of a larger shift in French state welfare, from a model based on guardianship to the democratized consumption of modern goods and services aimed at personal development. And just like social center would no longer reform the socially "unadapted," so would the modern cultural facility no longer uplift the masses, but provide "the general public" with access to a new cultural production. In France, the creation in 1959 of a new Ministry of Cultural Affairs, led by a charismatic André Malraux, signified not only the birth of a veritable "cultural policy," but also formalized this new welfare project in cultural terms.³⁰⁷

Its mission was "to make the most important works of humanities, and first of all of France, accessible to the largest possible number of Frenchmen."³⁰⁸ In order to democratize culture, it had to be decentralized and diffused over the French territory. With this in mind, Malraux made the construction of cultural centers or *maisons de la culture* the centerpiece of his politics. Shaped by earlier concerns with national heritage as well as by a Gaullist project of national modernization, the project had affinities with popular education movements like *Peuple et Culture*, for whom the cultural center was first and foremost an instrument of social development. Yet, while, the cultural centers built by Malraux during the 1960s were architecturally innovative - taking cues from the popular *salle de spectacle* in order to break with the bourgeois character of theater, and translating concepts of "polyvalence" or flexibility into

³⁰³ Organizations like the *Caisses des allocations familiales* and the *Fédération des centres sociaux de France*. See: Robert Durand, *Histoire des centres sociaux: Du voisinage à la citoyenneté* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005); Jacques Eloy, Dominique Dessertine, Robert Durand et al., *Les centres sociaux 1880-1980: Une résolution locale de la question sociale?* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004). The FCSF was created in 1922 and was funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Fourth plan (1962-66) contained an explicit program for the creation of social centers.

³⁰⁴ A large majority of social centers was located in large-scale housing estates, see: *Ibid.*, 162. By 1969, 80% of all social centers created since 1962 were located in *grands ensembles*, see: Ileme Congrès national des centres sociaux et socio-culturels, 2-4 mai 1969, Lyon (CAC 19771142/022).

³⁰⁵ see "Équipement social, culturel, culturel," *Urbanisme* 62-63(1959): 36-56, 45.

³⁰⁶ "Le centre d'action sociale facilite les démarches des usagers, contribue à la coordination des divers services sociaux, évalue les besoins des bénéficiaires. Dans les grands ensembles, il s'efforce de créer la vie de groupe, initialement absente." In: *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁰⁷ Vincent Dubois and Philippe Poirrier, *La Politique culturelle: Genèse d'une catégorie d'intervention publique* (Paris: Belin, 1999); Philippe Urfalino, *L'invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris: La Documentation française / Comité d'histoire du ministère de la culture 1996).

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

architectural form³⁰⁹ - they remained traditional institutions focused on artistic excellence. They were soon regarded as ineffective; only six such cultural centers were finished by 1965.³¹⁰

Another type, initially confused with Malraux's initiative, was the *maison des jeunes et de la culture* (MJC) or "youth and cultural center."³¹¹ Youth centers had been around since the interwar period, but became crucial in response to the emergence of youth as a novel social problem. In the summer of 1959, a couple of highly mediatized incidents involving *blousons noirs* - groups of young delinquents held together by a new subculture of pop music, cars and fashion - instigated moral panic about this new social category.³¹² When soon after Michel de Saint-Pierre contended that "the *grands ensembles* are the factories of the *blousons noirs*," the problem of youth, initially without spatial connotation, became linked specifically to the *grands ensembles* and remained so during the 1960s.³¹³ Because their first inhabitants in the 1950s were predominantly young families with small children, adolescents soon made up an increasingly important social group - less so because of sheer quantity than as a result of a lively urban imaginary. Movies like Marcel Carné's *Terrain vague* of 1960 added to the popular image of youth gangs hanging out and being bored in the hallways, outdoor spaces and construction sites of suburban housing estates (figure 2.12). How to keep adolescents busy became a key question to those concerned with social life in the *grands ensembles*. A growing number of sociologists - like Jacques Jenny, a close collaborator of Chombart de Lauwe - became preoccupied with the "problem" of youth, and their analyses suggested a clear solution: the creation of youth centers appropriate to the needs and aspirations of these adolescents and their parents.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Korganow, "L'équipement socio-culturel, trajectoire architecturale d'un type contrarié d'édifice public à l'ère des loisirs, 1936-1975", 125-216. Polyvalence would become one of the main themes of urban centers and new housing types in the early 1970s, see chapters 5 and 6.

³¹⁰ For the architecture of the *maisons de la culture*, see: Klein, "Des maisons du peuple aux maisons de la culture." Twenty such cultural centers were planned for the period 1962-1965, but only six of them were built by 1965 (Le Havre, Bourges, Caen, le Théâtre de l'Est parisien, Amiens and Thonon-les-Bains). They were vigorously criticized by Bourdieu at the end of the 1960s for not being able to veritably democratize culture because they were not in fact attended by the lower classes. In 1971, the report for the Sixth Plan registered this failure of the democratization of culture. Ultimately, a more anthropological understanding of culture won from the universalist one that legitimized high culture, see: Dubois and Poirrier, *La Politique culturelle: Genèse d'une catégorie d'intervention publique*; Equipement culturel et patrimoine artistique (CAC 19771152/001).

³¹¹ The initial ambiguity between *maisons de la culture* and *maisons des jeunes et de la culture* did not last. André Malraux, Gaetan Picon and Emile-Jean Biasini steered a course that deviated from that of the popular education movements, as well as the academy and the discipline of Beaux-Arts. Architecturally as well, the *maisons de la culture* built during the 1960s were clearly distinguished from the *maisons des jeunes et de la culture*, which aimed at more local forms of cultural diffusion and the active participation of the population.

³¹² Françoise Tétard, "Le phénomène blousons noirs en France fin années 50-début années 1960," *Révoltes et sociétés, Histoire au Présent* 2(1989): 205-14; Anne-Marie Sohn, *Age tendre et tête de bois: Histoire des jeunes des années 1960* (Paris: Hachette, 2001), 266-72.

³¹³ Michel de Saint-Pierre, *L'école de la violence* (Paris: Table Ronde, 1962).

³¹⁴ "La nécessité de prévoir des équipements socio-culturels dans les nouveaux ensembles d'habitation [...] n'est plus mise en doute par personne, surtout depuis que certaines manifestations pathologiques jointes à la perspective de l'arrivée massive de la "nouvelle vague" ont sensibilisé l'opinion sur les problèmes de la jeunesse." Jacques Jenny, *Les équipements socio-culturels pour les jeunes dans les nouveaux groupes d'habitation, problèmes psycho-sociologiques* (Paris / Montrouge: Groupe d'ethnologie sociale / Centre d'études des groupes sociaux, 1961), 1. See also the chapter by Jacques Jenny in: Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, Jacques Jenny, and Louis Couvreur, *Famille et habitation II: Un essai d'observation expérimentale* (Paris: CNRS, 1960), 197-220.



Figure 2.12: Film stills of the movie *Terrain vague* by Marcel Carné, 1960 (Source: INA).

In 1958, less than 200 MJC existed, and the majority of them was located in rural communities. By the end of the 1960s, there were more than a thousand of them, primarily installed in *grands ensembles*.³¹⁵ While older youth centers continued to operate, the new generation was conceptually rethought. Hardly the only type of youth center, but certainly the most important one, the MJC embodied the changing ideology of national popular education and movements.³¹⁶ Facilitating activities from table tennis to theater performance, from judo to photography, and from poetry club to esperanto course, the new centers contained meeting rooms, conference rooms, offices, and at times an auditorium.³¹⁷ When they were not incorporated in the housing slabs or the commercial centers, they were articulated as isolated pavilions amongst the housing slabs. Whether following the horizontal lines of the housing slabs to vaguely express the social signs of openness and equality, or performing their own sculptural identity, they avoided the hierarchy, monumentality and sense of closure of traditional institutional architecture (see figure 2.13).

³¹⁵ Laurent Besse, *Les MJC de l'été des blousons noirs à l'été des Minguettes 1959-1981* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 45, 361.

³¹⁶ See Ibid.

³¹⁷ See the 1959 definition of this type of facility by the *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*: "Equipement social, culturel, culturel," 36.



Figure 2.13: The youth center of Sarcelles: photo by Jacques Windenberger (Source: AM Sarcelles)

Despite the diverse traditions and publics of social, youth, and other centers, planners increasingly emphasized their similarities in terms of activities, funding, management, and especially, goals - namely the incitement of neighborhood life.³¹⁸ This lent force to the idea of a generalized notion of socio-cultural facilities and to the argument for concerted planning. Despite these general ambitions, the projects were often linked specifically to the program of mass housing estates and were shaped more particularly by the government's attempts at improving everyday life in them.³¹⁹ During the 1960s, socio-cultural facilities were understood less as facilities for the provision of services and increasingly as a "centers of participation"³²⁰ or *pôles*

³¹⁸ This despite markedly different publics. The social center was mainly attended by women and children, while the youth center gathered male adolescents. See: *Problèmes posés par les structures communes des centres sociaux, maisons de jeunes et locaux collectifs résidentiels*, Commission animation socio-culturelle, 1964 (CAC 19771142/020); *Etude des problèmes posés par la coordination des équipements socio-culturels*, CINAM, 1965 (CAC 19771152/001). See also: Besse, *Les MJC de l'été des blousons noirs à l'été des Minguettes 1959-1981*, 177.

³¹⁹ Some reports even went as far as to argue that the notion of the socio-cultural itself came directly out of the *grille Dupont*. See: *Bilan sommaire des études et des expériences concernant les problèmes posés par l'animation socio-culturelle dans les nouveaux ensembles d'habitation*, Jean-Paul Imhof, 1967 (CAC 19771142/020).

³²⁰ *Le centre social et le quartier: Le directeur de Centre social, ses méthodes de travail, analyse d'expériences*, UNCAF, 1968 (CAC 19771142/024).

d'animation. While the term user remained predominant in descriptions of their working, it was increasingly contested: people could no longer just be passive users or beneficiaries, they needed to assert themselves as active participants.³²¹ To many of those in charge, the socio-cultural sector was based on the principles of “self-help” (the English term was often used) and active participation.³²² A 1964 committee on *équipement* and *animation* summarized it as follows: “The specific character of the socio-cultural domain lies in the active participation of users. This is what distinguishes it from commercial leisure and certain forms of recreation in which the user remains simply a passive user.”³²³ Jean-Paul Imhof, a key expert of this newly emerging field, defined the socio-cultural sector in similar terms, as “comprised of a variety of activities that take place principally during free time and that are consequently based on voluntary participation, the object of which is the development of the participant’s physical, affective and intellectual skills in a collective environment that stimulates the development of social relations, and eventually, the assumption of responsibility.”³²⁴

The notion of *animation* translated this mindset. Henri Théry, one of its main proponents, went so far as to call it a new paradigm for French society.³²⁵ Until recently, he claimed, “emphasis was only on the creation and administration of things”, but postwar consumerism, mass production, and state welfare had prompted the imperative of *animation*. “To animate” he continued, “is to give life, to create or activate a vital process through which individuals and groups affirm themselves and get going; it is to generate a dynamism that is at once biological and spiritual, individual and social.” For Théry and others, this was a matter of distinguishing between active, participating citizens and passive consumers - and, consequently, between neighborhoods with and without a “soul.”³²⁶

In the context of the *grands ensembles*, the meaning of *animation* was fundamentally ambivalent: it referred both to the spontaneous liveliness of a neighborhood, and to the artificial means of instilling community life in new housing areas through organized activities. *Animation*, state administrators and urban planners explained, used to be assured *spontaneously* by the local communities and municipalities. Now, due to large-scale migration to the city, and the construction of entirely new urban areas, new inhabitants were having problems settling into the housing projects built for them. To integrate them, they contended, *organized* social and cultural activities and community events, in other words *animation*, was what was needed.³²⁷

³²¹ Durand, *Histoire des centres sociaux: Du voisinage à la citoyenneté*, 128-30.

³²² See: Houist, "Domaine socio-culturel."; Bilan sommaire des études et des expériences concernant les problèmes posés par l'animation socio-culturelle dans les nouveaux ensembles d'habitation, Jean-Paul Imhof, 1967.

³²³ Established around 1964, this committee was charged to prepare the socio-cultural programs for the Fifth Plan (1966-1970). See: Rapport de la commission nationale équipement animation, Haut Comité de la Jeunesse (CAC 19771142/021).

³²⁴ Etude des problèmes posés par la coordination des équipements socio-culturels, CINAM, 1965.

³²⁵ Henry Théry was *délégué général* of the *Union nationale des Centres d'études et d'action sociale*, and *secrétaire général des Semaines sociales de France*. See: Théry and Garrigou-Lagrange, *Equiper et animer la vie sociale*.

³²⁶ Henri Théry, "L'animation des collectivités urbaines," *Recherche sociale* 1(1965), 44.

³²⁷ See: Financement, gestion et animation des espaces collectifs, M. Le Roux, réunion du 29.06.1964 (CAC 19771152/001).

Since the mid-1950s, experts had been preoccupied with the question of how to transform mass housing into successful neighborhoods. As their construction continued at an unprecedented pace during the 1960s, the impetus to “give life” to the *grands ensembles*, to “humanize the concrete,”³²⁸ manifested itself increasingly. At least for some, the ultimate reason was to counter potential social unrest: “Technically, *animation* appears as a specific response to new needs, born from the transformations of collective life, and consequently, it has a function of adapting people to new forms of collective life. In particular, its goal is to make very complex social organisms work, like the new housing estates that are threatened by paralysis as a result of malfunctioning communications, dissenting attitudes, friction and protest.”³²⁹ To others it was a means to address the growing dangers of human alienation, which had expanded from the realm of work to that of consumption and everyday life more broadly, and for which the *grands ensembles* were the exemplar.

What experts and community leaders increasingly agreed on however, was that the development of community life in new housing areas required *new* kinds of spaces, which would facilitate activities in which inhabitants could freely participate. A first attempt to translate this idea into an urbanistic program was the experiment with what were called *locaux collectifs résidentiels* or residential meeting places. These were thought of as spaces in between the privacy of the home and the publicity of the park or the commercial center. Distributed inside the housing projects, primarily on the ground floor of the housing blocks, they would be used by local residents for a range of recreational activities - family parties, block meetings, creative workshops, youth meetings, children games, and so on. This was an idea already tested in Soviet modernism and in the architecture of municipal socialism.³³⁰ It had also been conceptualized by architects like Le Corbusier, more particularly through his concept of the *prolongements du logis* or “extensions of the dwelling” that were the essential commodities for everyday life. And it had been proposed by sociologists like Chombart, who had argued on multiple occasions for the importance of intimate spaces for inhabitants to socialize.³³¹

The idea of building such spaces was first instituted in 1960, when the Ministry of Construction recommended developers to provide 0.30 m² of collective meeting space per dwelling unit they would build.³³² Not many were actually built: the lack of enforcement, absence of funding, lack of experience of how to manage them, and difficulties of implementation disincentivized developers. Those spaces that did get built, mostly on ground floors of residential buildings, were

³²⁸ Fourcaut, “L’animation dans le béton: Autogérer les grands ensembles?.”; Tellier, *Le temps des HLM 1945-1975: La saga urbaine des Trente Glorieuses*, 132.

³²⁹ Bilan sommaire des études et des expériences concernant les problèmes posés par l’animation socio-culturelle dans les nouveaux ensembles d’habitation, Jean-Paul Imhof, 1967.

³³⁰ For instance the housing projects of Red Vienna. See: Eve Blau, *The architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

³³¹ See: Le Corbusier, *Manière de penser l’urbanisme* (Paris: Editions de l’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, 1946), 60. The idea of is also developed in: Corbusier, “L’habitation moderne.” For Chombart, see: Chombart de Lauwe, Jenny, and Couvreur, “Logement et comportement des ménages dans trois cités nouvelles de l’agglomération bordelaise.”

³³² Circulaire no. 60-36 of 02.06.1960, see: Letter of the Director of Construction to the Minister, 8 June 1967 (CAC 19771142/020).

often poorly managed and underused.³³³ In subsequent years however, planners and state administrators continued to emphasize the need for such collective spaces. Pushed for by Yves Aubert at the Ministry of Construction, a new law in 1965 raised the bar for such collective spaces to 1 m² per dwelling unit and suggested concrete options for their management.³³⁴ Despite these efforts and the relative success of singular experiments,³³⁵ they would never become a standard feature of the *grands ensembles*: a new law in April 1969 gave developers the choice - instead of obligation - to build them, hereby de facto abandoning the initiative.³³⁶

Another initiative was described by Henri Lefebvre in a brief 1962 article entitled “Bistrot-club: Noyeau de la vie sociale.” The subject of his review was a proposal by the Syndicat des Architectes de la Seine (SAS) for a small pavilion - cast as the modern version of the traditional café for the *grands ensembles* - that would provide opportunity for informal gathering, play, and distraction (figure 2.14).³³⁷ In his analysis of Mourenx, Lefebvre had already pointed out the importance of local cafés and bars as catalysts for neighborhood life, and their absence - often due to state prohibition - was an important reason for the boredom and lack of liveliness in the *grands ensembles*, so he argued.³³⁸ For Lefebvre, heavily influenced by Situationism at the time,³³⁹ the project was “the first effort to overcome the analytical functionalism which separates, projects on the ground and parcels out the functions of urban life.”³⁴⁰ It remained a proposition.

³³³ A working group derived from the *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles* was ordered to follow up on the development of these LCR. The group reported that developers were not inclined to provide them, funding was absent, and there was a lack of experience of how to manage them (CAC 19771142/020).

³³⁴ Circulaire no. 65-29 of 09.06.1965, see: Ibid.

³³⁵ An important case of experimentation was Rennes. One central organization was charged with the management of the LCR, the *Office socio-Culturel de Rennes*. The construction of a large ZUP of 12000 housing units allowed for the first time to envisage the LCR at the conception phase. The organization proposed to locate 50% of such spaces at the ground floor of the housing blocks, 40 % in separate buildings, and 10 % as part of the larger socio-cultural facilities. The organization managed a total of 28 of those collective spaces, which existed in the majority of *grands ensembles* in Rennes. In an internal note, the organization nevertheless pointed out some problems, due to the conception and placement of these spaces. It considered them ill-suited for creative workshops for instance, and reported that they often constituted a nuisance for the tenants living close to them. Most importantly, many of these spaces were built well after the arrival of the new inhabitants. See: Note sur la programmation des locaux collectifs résidentiels et les moyens de sa mise en oeuvre à Rennes, Office social et culturel de Rennes (CAC 19771142/025). Other examples were Garges-les-Gonesses and Le Mans, analyzed in: Dumazedier and Imbert, *Espace et loisir dans la société française d'hier et de demain* (vol 2), 87-90.

³³⁶ A bill in April 1969 gave developers the choice to build LCR, thus in fact abandoning the idea. In 1971, another bill encouraged developers again to build LCR at a ratio of 0.75 m² per dwelling unit. In 1975 then, they were made obligatory again for housing groups larger than 200 units. By that time however, the *grands ensembles* had been officially abandoned, and the scale of residential developments drastically reduced. See: Fourcaut, "L'animation dans le béton: Autogérer les grands ensembles?."

³³⁷ "Un 'Café-Club' au prochain Salon des Arts et Métiers," *Techniques et Architecture* 22, no. 1 (1961): 39.

³³⁸ See: Lukasz Stanek, "Henri Lefebvre and the Concret Research of Space: Urban Theory, Empirical Studies, Architecture Practice" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Delft University of Technology, 2008), 29-30, 133-34.

³³⁹ Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 44-46.

³⁴⁰ Quote of Henri Lefebvre in: Stanek, "Henri Lefebvre and the Concret Research of Space: Urban Theory, Empirical Studies, Architecture Practice", 134.



Figure 2.14: “Bistrot-Club” proposal by the Syndicat des Architectes de la Seine (SAS) in 1961 presented that year at the *Salon des arts ménagers*, France’ popular household fair (Source: *Techniques et Architecture*, 22 no. 1 (1961): 39).

Nevertheless, the revisions of the *grille* between 1959 and 1965 indicated a slow but fundamental change in urbanism, that went beyond the inclusion of discrete facilities in an otherwise repetitive housing scheme. The idea of *animating* the *grands ensembles* began to have implications for their general urban conception. The combination in focus on socio-cultural facilities and exterior spaces in the 1965 *grille* revision was not a coincidence in this respect: architects and planners realized that bringing the built environment to life was not only a matter of sociology or social work; architecture and urbanism needed to play its part as well.

In fact, the notion of animation had an architectural contents at least since the establishment of the original *grille*. Already in 1958, the *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles* contained a working group entitled Study of the Urban Environment, which was envisaged as a synthesis of the others because of the central notion of *animation*. This was understood first of all as an issue of architecture and urban design: “an important task of this [group] is to study the rules that can give life and animation to the street or to public spaces, by assuring their equipment (taxi phones, mailboxes, vending machines, public lighting, ...), by drawing conclusions from studies about the density of passers-by each hour of the day, and by studying the rules of typical construction that can assure the harmony of architectural lines and avoid the

monotony of facades [...].”³⁴¹ Around the mid-1960s, such architectural understandings of *animation* began to inform novel concepts for the urban form of the *grands ensembles*.

Under the influence of a young generation of international modernist architects - in particular the group of Team X that had emerged out of the postwar CIAM meetings - the creation of everyday sociability and urban liveliness had become one of the major themes in postwar modernism.³⁴² The modernist re-imagining of traditional urbanity, like that of the mediterranean townscape and the traditional street, were a crucial means to address this. The work of Alison and Peter Smithson was exemplary of this turn in focus: their famous “Urban Re-Identification Grid,” presented at one of the last CIAM meetings in 1953, radically abolished the four functions of the Athens Charter - dwelling, work, transportation and recreation - in favor of a celebration of the traditional street. Illustrated with Nigel Henderson’s photographic reportage of playing children in a working-class London street, this at once poetic and ethnographic sensibility went hand in hand with a modernist architectural re-imagining: alongside the grid, the architects presented urban designs in which housing blocks were multiplied to create a megastructure connected by what they called “streets-in-the-air,” spacious, publicly accessible galleries giving access to the apartments.³⁴³ This interest in the everyday was accompanied - and reinforced - by a structuralism inspired by contemporaneous anthropology - Lévi-Strauss first and foremost.³⁴⁴ This kind of inspiration led to the popularity of new formal concepts like cluster, stem, and web, which informed the designs of large housing and urban projects by the group.

The work of Candilis-Josic-Woods - basically the only proponent of Team X in France - functioned as the main conduit for the translation of these new ideas into French mass housing projects. By the late 1960s, the firm had designed about 40,000 dwelling units in France.³⁴⁵ The most iconic project for their experimentation with French mass housing was that of Toulouse-le-Mirail. Begun in 1961, the project further developed the concepts of “stem” (*trame*) and “cluster” (*grappe*) that were meant to recreate the much-needed liveliness of the traditional street and were largely derived from the theories of the Smithsons (figure 2.15 and 2.16).³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ “Cependant une importante tâche propre lui appartient en étudiant les règles qui peuvent donner vie et animation à la rue ou aux espaces publics: en assurant leur équipement (taxiphones, boîtes aux lettres, distributeurs automatiques, éclairage public...) en tirant les conclusions d’études sur la densité des passages à chaque heure de la journée, en étudiant les règlements de construction type qui doivent assurer l’harmonie des lignes architecturales et éviter la monotonie des façades...” Projet concernant les activités, Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles (CAC 19770816/006).

³⁴² See Chapter 1.

³⁴³ Team 10, Risselada, and Heuvel, *Team 10: 1953-81, In Search of a Utopia of the Present*.

³⁴⁴ The first anthropological analyses of Lévi-Strauss had been published in the journal *Forum*, edited by Aldo van Eyck, between 1956 and 1962.

³⁴⁵ Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-war Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, 43.

³⁴⁶ Dominique Rouillard, “La théorie du cluster: généalogie d’une métaphore,” in *Le Team X et le logement collectif à grande échelle en Europe: Un retour critique des pratiques vers la théorie. Actes du séminaire européen, Toulouse 27-28 mai 2004*, ed. Bruno Fayolle Lussac and Rémi Papillault (Pessac: Maison des sciences de l’homme d’Aquitaine, 2008); Dominique Rouillard, “Dix-neuf-cent-soixante [1960]: Candilis, Josic, Woods,” *Le moniteur architecture AMC* 103(1999): 126-37.

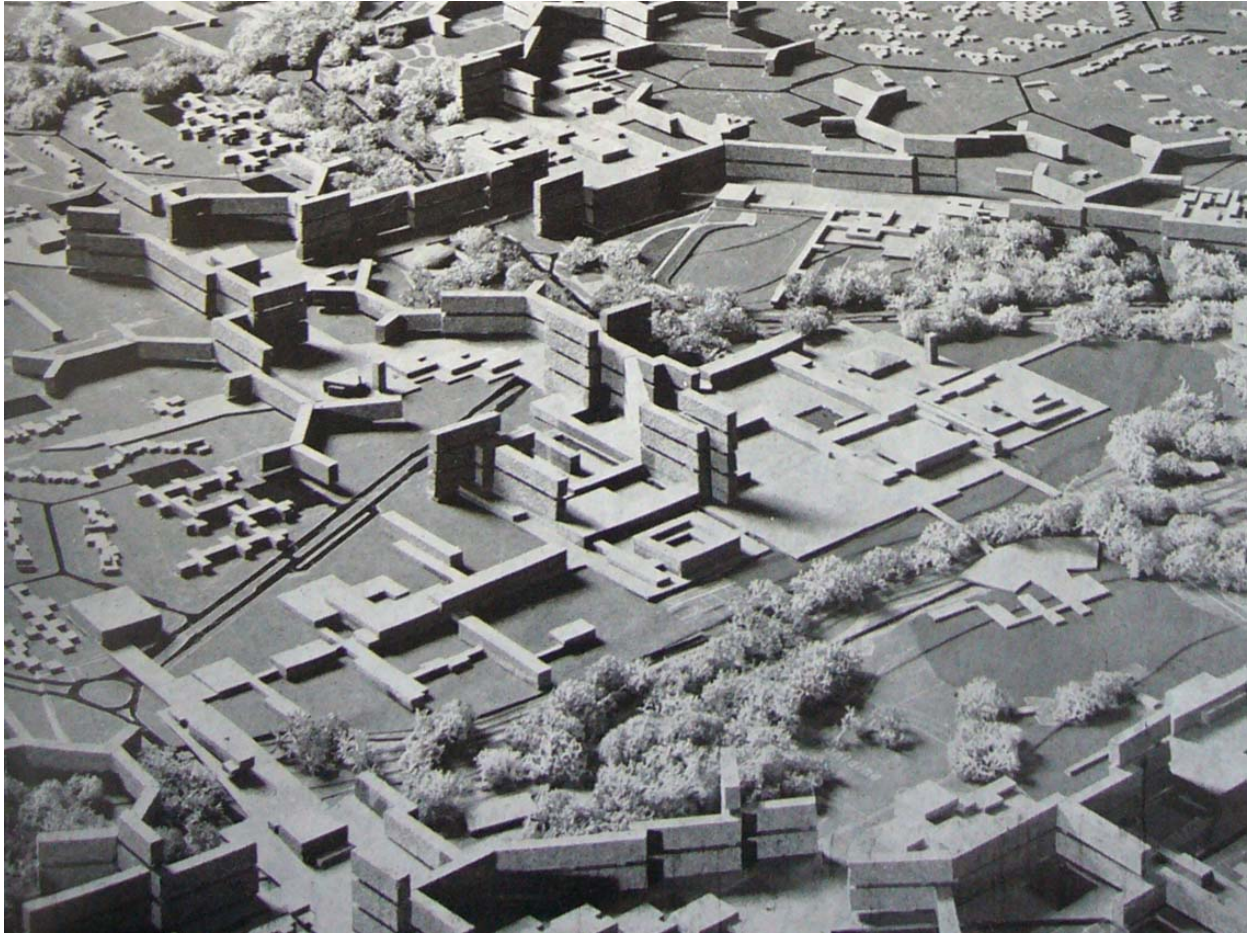


Figure 2.15: Model of Toulouse-le-Mirail by the architects Candilis-Josic-Woods, around 1961 (Source: *Urbanisme* 75-76 “Équipement” (1962): 103).

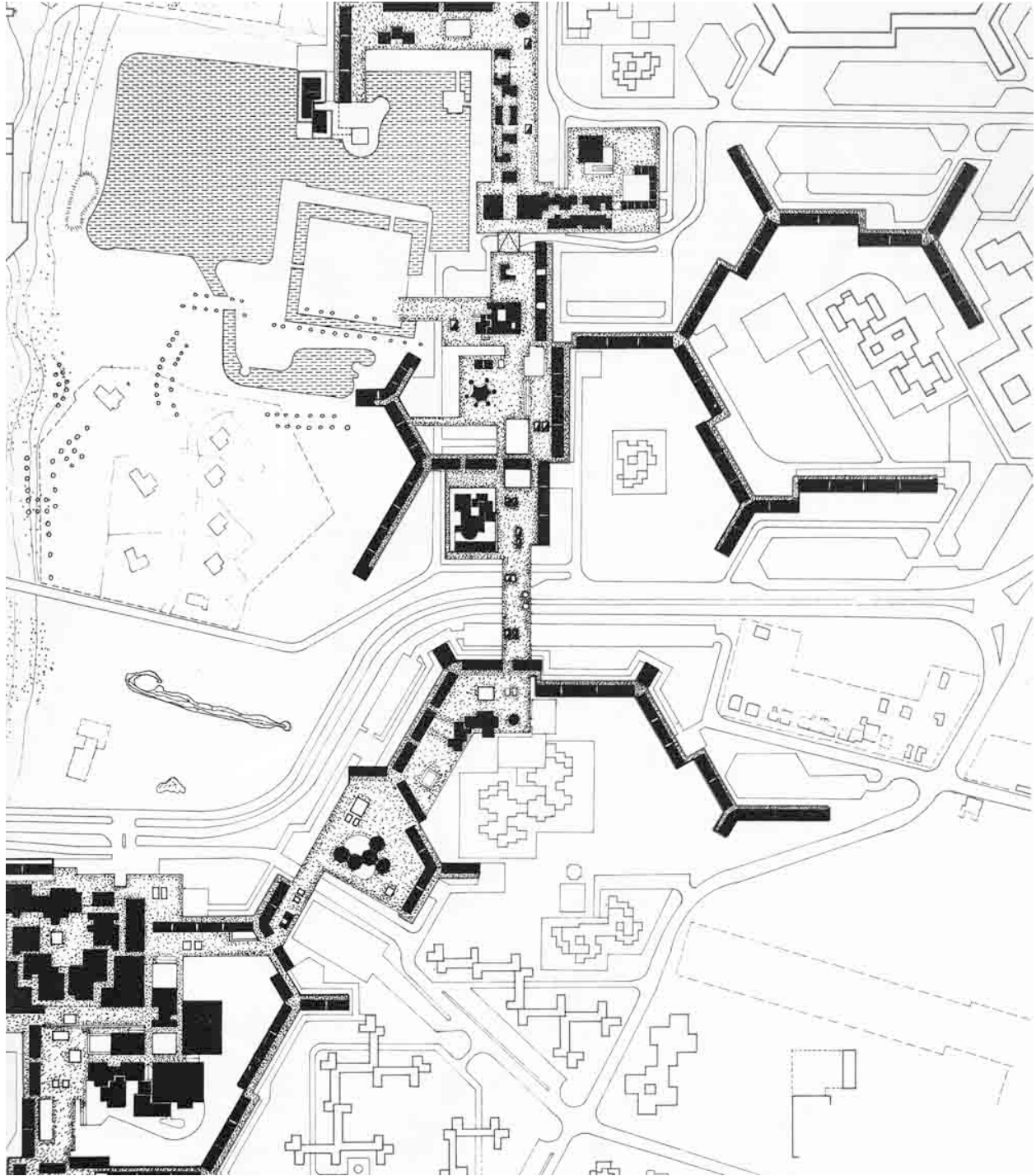


Figure 2.16: Detail of the street / raised platform by Candilis-Josic-Woods for Toulouse-le-Mirail (Source: Candilis-Josic-Woods, *Toulouse le Mirail - El nacimiento de una ciudad nueva* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1976): 29).

The street, which the architects understood at once as a morphological structure and a social space of everyday life, functioned as the structuring device for the urban plan of the whole development, a massive new town for 100.000 inhabitants. The project was a primary case study

in the 1962 *grille* revision. Referring to Georges Candilis's 1962 article "A la recherche d'une structure urbaine,"³⁴⁷ the research accompanying its second revision acknowledged the pertinence of his ideas, often formulated as an implicit critique of the monotony of an older generation of *grands ensembles*: "For Georges Candilis, it is necessary to re-establish the notion of the "street", which has disappeared in current projects [...] The street becomes an active center through the diversity of its components; it reintegrates the spontaneous character of everyday life, in opposition with the sphere of repetition, uniformity, and banality."³⁴⁸ Urban spontaneity, liveliness, and diversity were the conceptual ingredients of this new vision of an animated urban space, which found application - be it in often watered-down, fragmentary ways - in new projects during the later part of the 1960s.

One of these was the *grand ensemble* of Bures-Orsay, designed by Robert Camelot and François Prieur.³⁴⁹ The project renounced the idea of zoning in favor a formal complexity that was thought to evoke an animated sense of space: "we cannot add the unexpected, it needs to be provoked: the basic scheme needs to engender fortunate coincidence, that of volumes or spaces, as much as that of spontaneous activities."³⁵⁰ Concretely, the plan consisted of two separated networks of circulation: a basic layout of roads and a network of pedestrian pathways. The housing blocks were placed alongside these paths so as to create an enclosed streetscape.

The project's 1967 publication in the journal *Urbanisme* featured a series of diagrams that aimed to represent the future "density of animation" of one of its neighborhoods by visualizing the everyday movements of future inhabitants (figure 2.17). According to the architects, calculations were based on the estimated power of attraction of the individual amenities at different times of the day. The image they depicted was an idyll of street life, one in which cars were absent, children would play freely, adults would stroll and meet spontaneously, and the elderly would sit in the sun to distract themselves with the pleasure of seeing others. This kind of *animation urbaine*, they argued, was inscribed in the plan itself. Embracing spatial and formal complexity was part of their strategy to assure that the project would have "an organic life in which the different organs are imbricated and live in symbiosis."³⁵¹

The layout however reiterated the strategy developed by Candilis-Josic-Woods for their 1961 competition entry of Caen-Hérouville and subsequently used in Toulouse-Le Mirail: while the architectural form differed substantially by leaving behind the hexagonal pattern of collective housing slabs, the basic diagrams were followed in a remarkably faithful way (figure 2.18). Prieur and Camelot also added a "principal urban center" in the middle of the new development

³⁴⁷ Georges Candilis, "A la recherche d'une structure urbaine," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 101(1962).

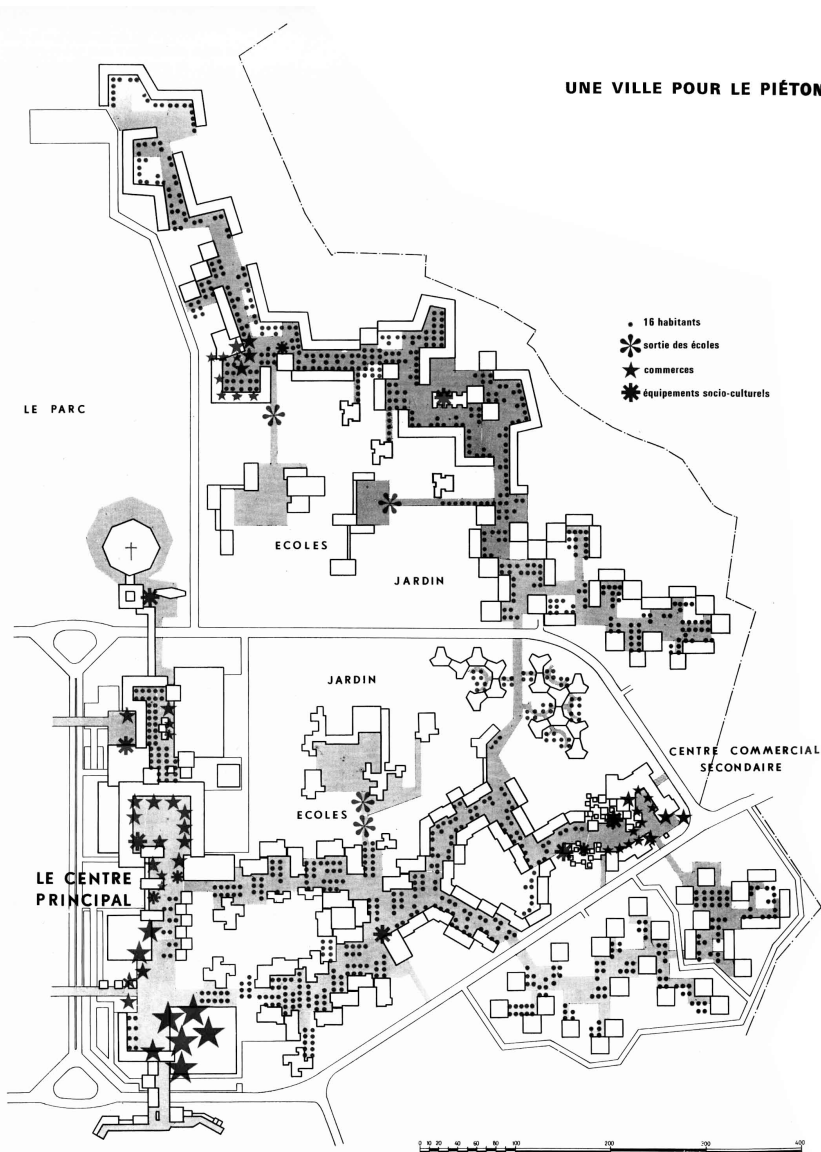
³⁴⁸ "Pour Georges Candilis, il faut rétablir la notion "rue" disparue des réalisations nouvelles [...] La rue devient centre actif par la diversité de ses composants; elle réintègre le caractère spontané de la vie quotidienne, en opposition avec l'esprit de répétition, d'uniformité et de platitude" In: "Paysage urbain," *Urbanisme* 90-91(1965), 19.

³⁴⁹ The *grand ensemble* was situated on the boundary of two existing municipalities, Bures and Orsay. This would lead to the creation of a new municipality, Les Ulis, in 1976. See: Sandra Parvu, "Du territoire à la ville, histoire d'une limite," *Urbanisme* 358(2008): 33-36; "Bures-Orsay ZUP des Ulis," *Techniques et Architecture* 31, no. 3-4 (1969): 51-53.

³⁵⁰ "ZUP de Bures-Orsay," *Urbanisme* 102-103(1967): 64-69, 64.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

(at the western side of the first phase) that connected to surrounding neighborhoods via overpasses. Schools, shops and other collective amenities were no longer morphologically detached from this structure as they were in older *grands ensembles*. They were inserted in the pedestrianized areas in order to assure a “natural” liveliness, and their entrances, as well as those of the residential units, gave out onto this space for the same reason.



LA VIE SOCIALE - Quartiers Les Ulis-La Dimancherie

En dessinant les rues-piétons, il faut s'assurer de les faire vivre...

Ayant observé la vie des ensembles récents, on a délibérément implanté toutes les entrées d'immeubles, et les accès aux points d'attraction le long de ces rues.

Puis, des représentations graphiques superposées ont visualisé les mouvements quotidiens.

Ces graphiques indiquent le nombre de personnes sortant ou marchant dans la rue dans un temps donné.

Ce nombre a été calculé suivant la composition familiale, établie à partir de la répartition des logements (étudiants, familles, personnes âgées).

Le dessin ci-contre — extrêmement schématisé — indique un point pour 16 personnes.

L'importance des étoiles ou rosaces correspond au pouvoir d'attraction des équipements.

Figure 2.17: Diagram of the *Grand ensemble* of Bures-Orsay by the architect Robert Camelot and François Prieur, around 1967, showing how the pedestrian network organizes the collective facilities and thus social life (Source: *Urbanisme* 102-103 “Créations urbaines” (1967): 68).

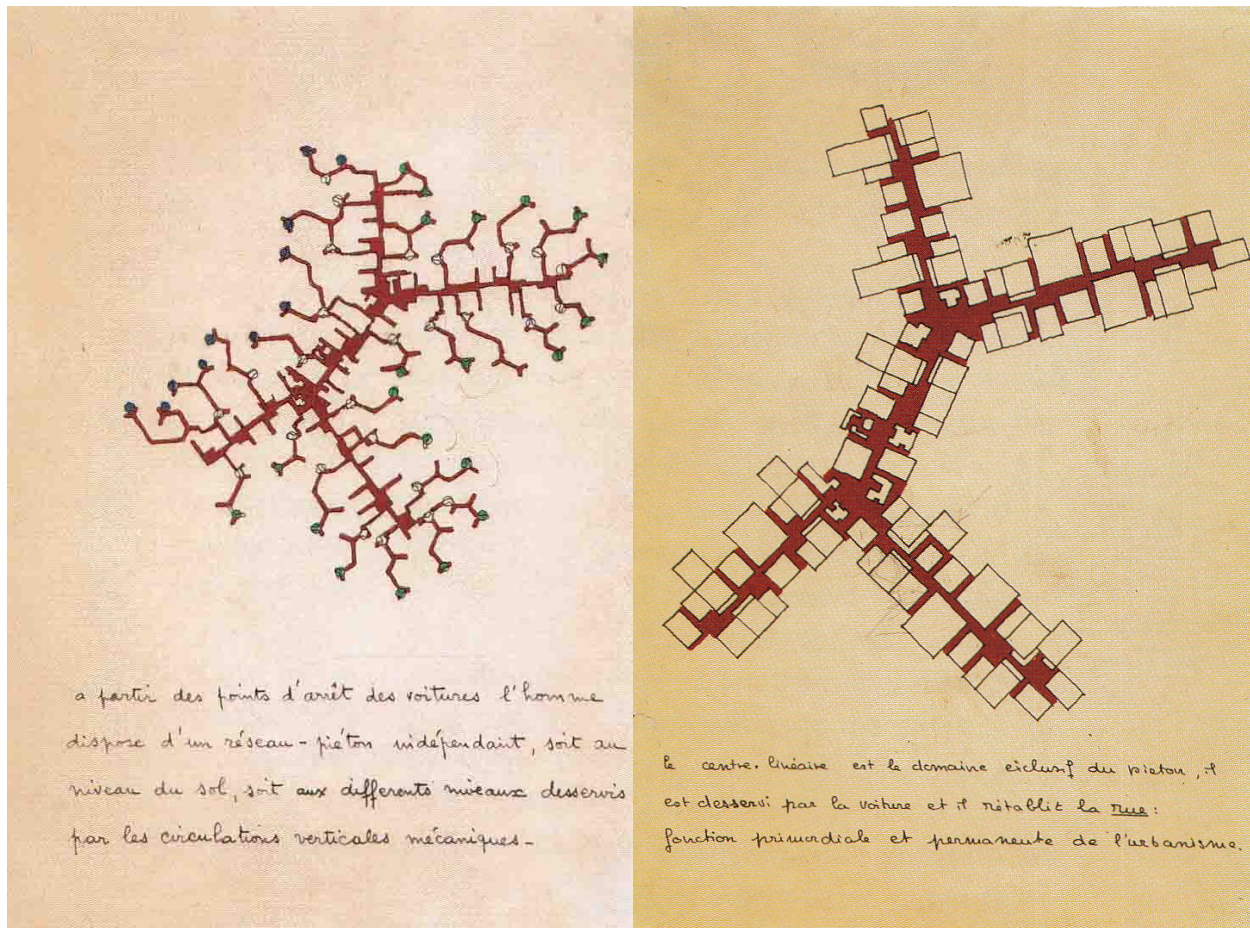


Figure 2.18: Diagrams submitted by Candilis-Josic-Woods for the 1961 competition for Caen-Hérouville (Source: Tom Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-War Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2006): 249).

The neighborhood of Surville in Montereau and that of Nîmes-Ouest, two projects by the brothers Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry, illustrate a further elaboration of *animation* as a design concept. For the architects, it entailed not only spatial complexity, an increased density, and more public amenities, but most importantly, an attention to the temporal atmospheres of the built environment.³⁵² Following the spatial trajectory of the inhabitant - the gradual transition from the intimacy of the dwelling to the publicity of the urban center - they proposed a corresponding increase in the intensity of *animation*, represented graphically on a map of “iso-densities” (figure 2.19). For the urban center, the architectural device that was to make this happen was the *dalle*, or raised platform.³⁵³ Channeling the megastructural ambitions of late modernism so vividly

³⁵² Xavier Arsène-Henry, “L’animation urbaine,” *Urbanisme* 98(1967): 32-37.

³⁵³ As analyzed by Virginie Lefebvre, this concept - which Raymond Lopez called “vertical zoning” - was a direct expression of the urban hygienism of interwar CIAM, and was further developed during the postwar period with a specific focus on traffic engineering. See: Virginie Lefebvre, “Les origines de l’architecture sur dalle,” in *Les années ZUP: Architectures de la croissance 1960-1973*, ed. Gérard Monnier and Richard Klein (Paris: Picard, 2002); Virginie Lefebvre, *Paris, ville moderne: Maine-Montparnasse et La Défense, 1950-1970* (Paris: Editions Norma, 2003).

portrayed by Reyner Banham a decade later, French housing projects like these were directly inspired by the new town centers of Vällingby and Cumbernauld, and the Parisian projects of Maine-Montparnasse and La Défense.³⁵⁴

The raised platform, which helped achieve a complete separation of pedestrianized circulation from motorized transportation below, replaced the horizontal zoning of CIAM with a vertical one. This, in turn, facilitated the horizontal integration of urban program - no longer understood as a set of isolated urban functions, but as a total environment that needed to be animated. Such an approach required attention not only to the architectural design of comprehensive pedestrian streetscapes or *paysages urbains*, but also to the built environment's more ephemeral qualities. One of these previously ignored features was advertising. Rather than ignoring or trying to ban it, the architects were aware of the positive value of public advertising, displays, posters and other kinds of urban graphics, which "accompany, underline and valorize the lively, attractive, colored, and changing character of facades, pedestrian passages or urban perspectives" and provide pedestrians and car drivers with focus and event in the urban spaces they traverse.³⁵⁵ Another new aspect to which the architects drew attention was the nocturnal atmosphere of the urban development: public lighting of facades, monuments, and trees, light displays, street signs and shop windows, in their eyes, all contributed to "the wonderful, the unreal and the poetic" elements of the urban landscape, and should be taken into account in the design process.

³⁵⁴ Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (New York: Icon Editions, 1976); Lefebvre, *Paris, ville moderne: Maine-Montparnasse et La Défense, 1950-1970*.

³⁵⁵ Arsène-Henry, "L'animation urbaine," 35.

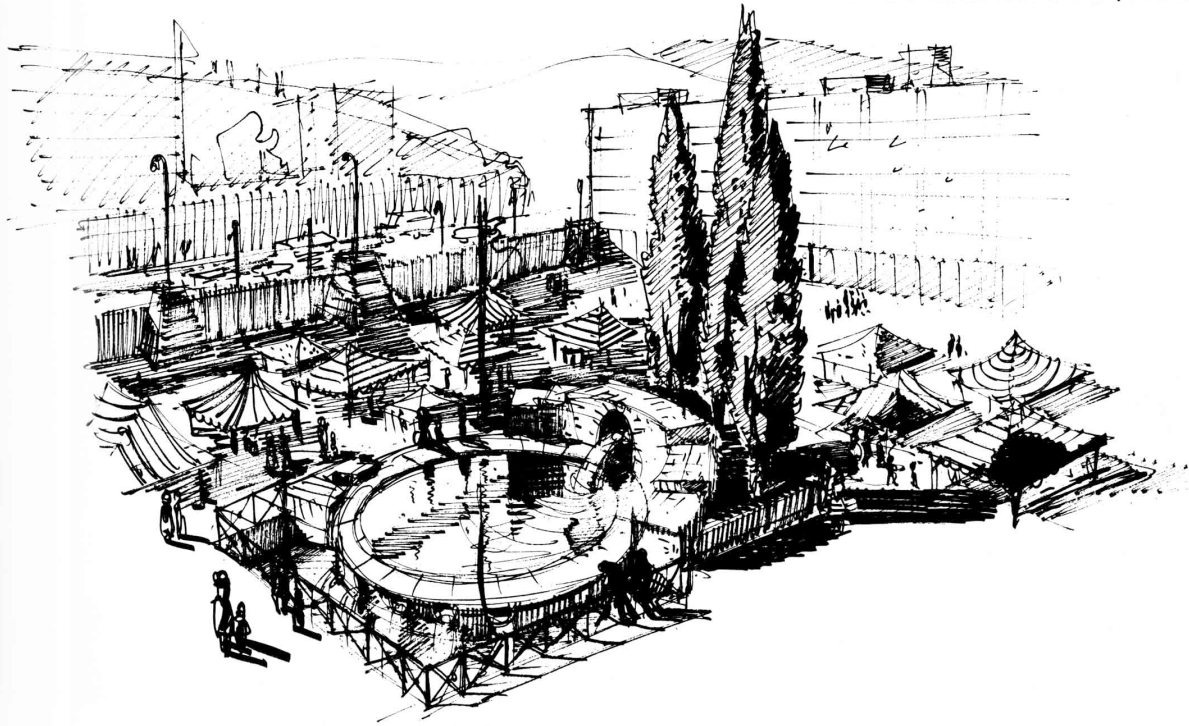
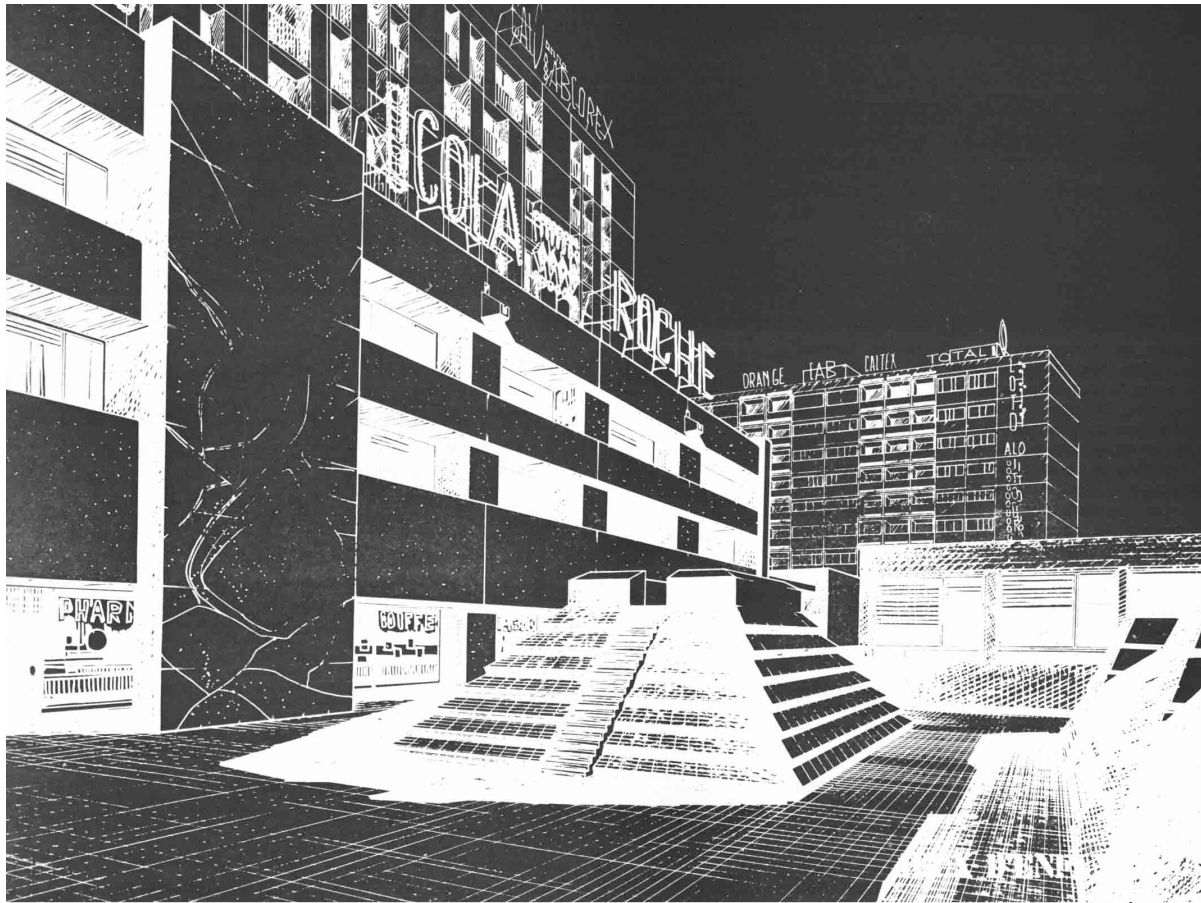


Figure 2.19: Sketches by the architects Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry for the Quartier Sud in Nîmes, 1967 (Source: *Urbanisme* 98 "Méthodes de travail" (1967): 37).

Even in the final phases of Sarcelles - archetype of the heavily criticized first generation of *grands ensembles* - there was a marked revision of urban concepts, the most important one being the - albeit modest - return to the street. With their “Entrance to the City” plan of the late 1960s the architects Jacques Henri-Labourdette and Roger Boileau proposed a central avenue articulated by a series of identical towers and a parallel pedestrianized boulevard at the back of these. The avenue was designed as a traditional commercial axis with galleries on each side that led pedestrians on to the cascading landscape of the parallel strip (figure 2.20).³⁵⁶

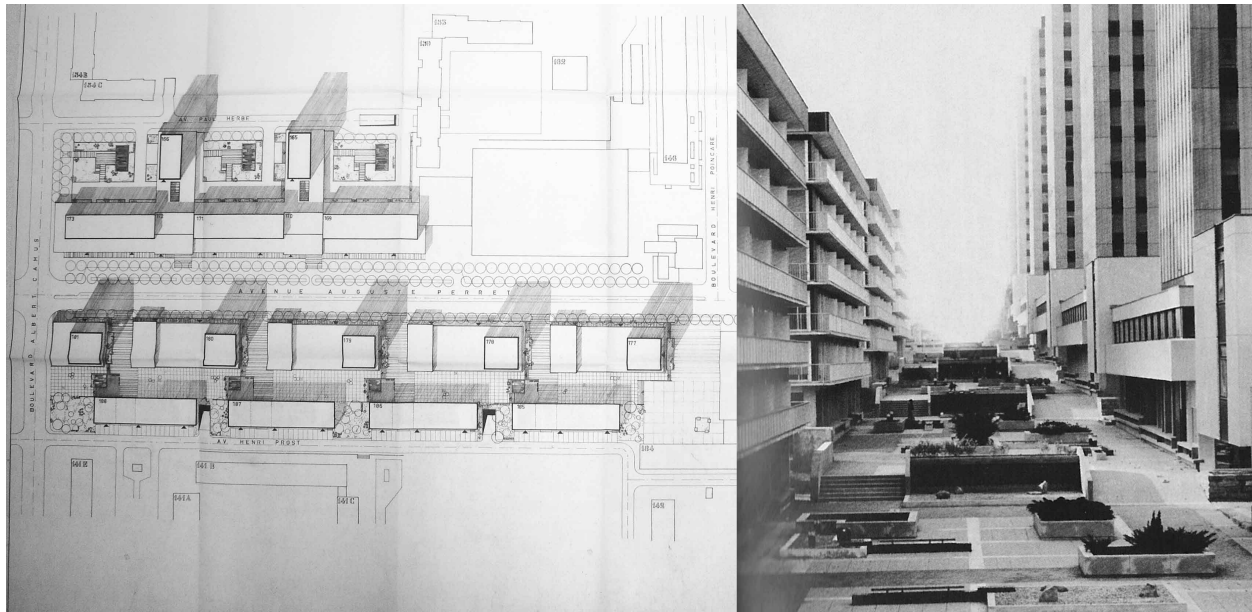


Figure 2.20: Sarcelles' Phase “Entrance to the City” by the architects Henri Labourdette and Roger Boileau. Left: plan of around 1969, right: photo taken in the early 1970s (Source: AM Sarcelles). Located at the Western side of the development, this later phase was conceived of as the grand urban entryway to the *grand ensemble*, leading directly to the new urban center that was being designed at the same time.

Concomitant with this turn to the street was a novel preoccupation with public art: no longer only within its own, separate realm of “high culture,” art was incorporated into *animation* as one of its many tools. Referred to as urban aesthetics in the 1965 *grille* publication, this interest was especially indebted to Xavier Arsène-Henry’s article “L’art dans les villes nouvelles,”³⁵⁷ and to the writings of Emile Aillaud. Planners understood public art as a vehicle to express “the intimacy, mystery and poetry of the city.” An exemplary case of the inclusion of public art in the conception of the *grands ensembles* was Emile Aillaud’s famous project of La Grande Borne in Grigny.³⁵⁸ The project featured the architect’s signature design of playfully curving housing slabs - first built more than a decade before in projects like Les Courtilières and Cité de l’Abreuvoir -

³⁵⁶ See: AM Sarcelles, Dossiers Permis de Construire. See also the interview with Henri-Labourdette published as: Sylvain Zegel, “Non, Sarcelles n’est pas l’enfer,” *Le Figaro Littéraire* 19 May 1966; *Une vie, une oeuvre: Jacques Henri-Labourdette, architecte*, (Nice: Gilletta Nice-Matin, 2002), 62-76; Jacques Henri-Labourdette, *Aventure d’architecte* (Basel: Chiasso, 1975), 70-96.

³⁵⁷ Xavier Arsène-Henry, “L’art dans les villes nouvelles,” *Techniques et Architecture* 4(1961): 82-83.

³⁵⁸ About the architect, see: Jean-François Dhuys, *L’architecture selon Emile Aillaud* (Paris: Dunod, 1983).

as well as a series of small rectilinear housing blocks on a raised platform and a kasbah-style development of single family homes. The master plan consisted of seven architecturally distinct neighborhoods built around public spaces that were connected by pedestrian pathways. The triangular development was delimited by two highways and a busy road, and parking was located at the edges to keep the neighborhoods free of cars (figure 2.21). To Aillaud, “architecture does not need to create juxtaposed buildings, but instead, landscapes.”³⁵⁹

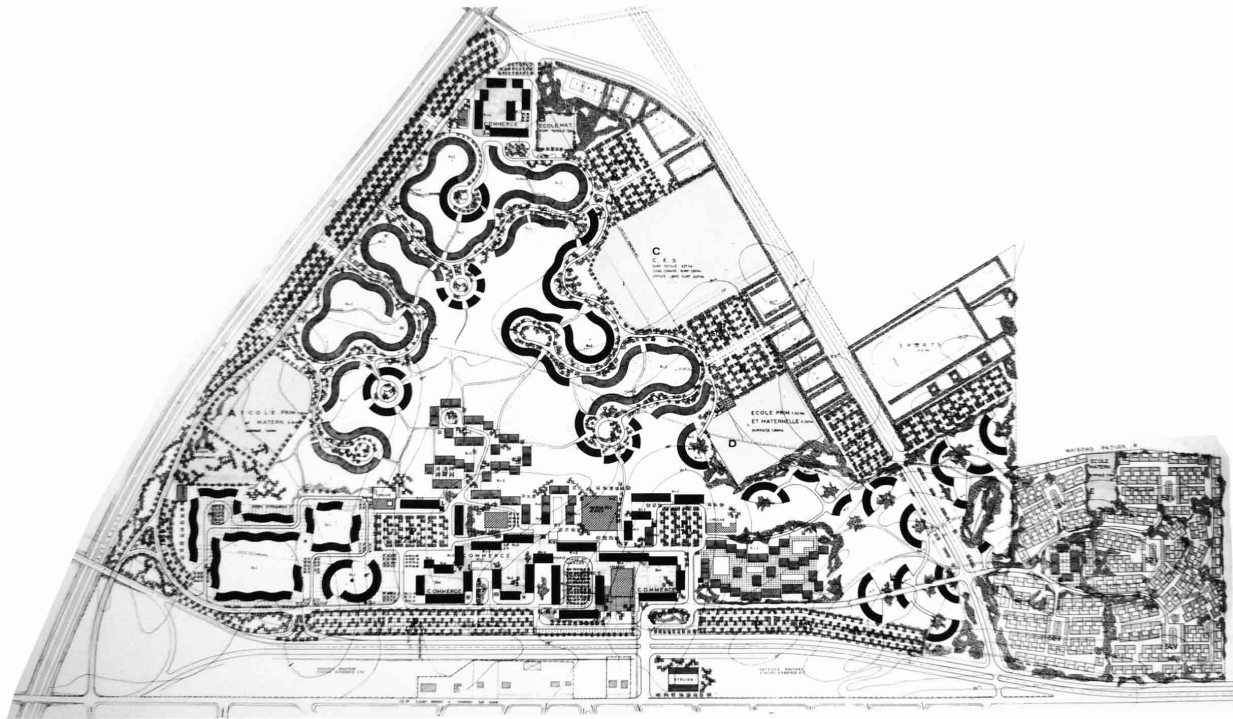


Figure 2.21: Plan of La Grande Borne (Grigny, near Paris) by the architect Emile Aillaud, 1963-1974 (Source: CAA 078 IFA 2003).

While many *grands ensembles* projects as this time began to incorporate public art into their urban programs, for Aillaud’s projects the incorporation of art in the public realm constituted the central achievement. To the architect, it was a way to produce complexity, mystery, and poetry - those crucial characteristics of the traditional city. Many of its squares and open spaces were dotted with gigantic sculptures contributing to particular themes, like “The Astrolabe,” “The Pond of Sand” or “The Ellipse.” Gigantic murals and sculptures of animals and pieces of fruit figuring prominently (figure 2.22). Combined with sand boxes, patterned paving, street furniture and other forms of landscaping, the sculptures functioned as playful devices for children and adults alike. The buildings’ side facades were literally used as gigantic canvases for works of art, executed in colorful mosaics. In fact, all facades were part of a comprehensive color scheme by

³⁵⁹ “L’architecture ne doit pas créer des bâtiments juxtaposés mais des paysages.” Quote from an interview with Emile Aillaud: Guy Habasque, “Émile Aillaud, pour un urbanisme sans monotonie,” *L’Oeil*, no. 102 (June 1963).

the artist Fabio Rieti.³⁶⁰ This scheme did not only give the housing blocks diversity, variety, and playfulness; it also articulated them by cutting facades visually into pieces and decreasing their perceived scale. These artistic interventions, which were to make La Grande Borne “the city of a painter as much as that of an architect,”³⁶¹ ultimately aimed to encourage inhabitants to use public spaces more intensely, and to appropriate them as they pleased. While planners were keen on stimulating users to participate in this sense, the awareness of how they actually did appropriate the spaces provided for them, would only emerge later.

³⁶⁰ Alain Devy and Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, *La Grande Borne* (Paris: Hachette, 1972), 149-50.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 69. The team of artists included Fabio Rieti, Gilles Aillaud, Cremonini, Lucio Fanti, François Lalanne, Eva Lukasiewicz, and Laurence Rieti.



Figure 2.22: La Grande Borne (Grigny, near Paris), by the architect Emile Aillaud: Photographs by Eustachy Kossakowski. The two sculptures of pigeons are by François Lalanne (Source: Alain Devy and Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, eds. *La grande borne* (Paris: Hachette, 1972):12, 31, 136, and 175).

What these *grands ensembles* projects had in common was the strategy of using architecture to evoke user participation. *Animation* was the key concept that allowed architects to do so. It invoked a simple physiological metaphor - “life” - but also expressed human personality - “soul” - and qualities of character, like charm and vibrancy. This naturalism and anthropomorphism in the image of the animated city was the motor behind its success as a socio-technical means to recreate urbanity in the French suburbs. In the context of the *grands ensembles*, *animation* was a fundamentally ambiguous concept, referring to the liveliness of the new neighborhood or the recreational activities organized to integrate new inhabitants in their local community. And while the concept acknowledged the active participation of inhabitants as a crucial agent in the success or failure of mass housing areas, it did not do away with urban design and the authority of the architect. On the contrary, experts’ concerns were translated into spatial interventions and informed architectural experimentation - not only with centers for social and cultural activities but also with the design of urban space at large. These initiatives brought forwards alternative urban models, often cast as a clear revision or critique of the earlier *grands ensembles*. These models which would be further developed in the *villes nouvelles*, France’s official new towns.

Conclusion

The urbanism of the *grands ensembles* during the 1960s revolved around the myriad ways *equip* and *animate* them - first by means of collective facilities and then through urban design. Meant to overcome the perceived ills of mass housing, this approach channelled the growing reach of French welfare as much as the ambitions of modern urbanism to influence social life.

By researching and planning in this vein, state administrators and urban planners assumed a responsibility not only in the efficient production of mass housing, but also its happy consumption. The mirror side of this broadening of state responsibility was the - inevitably negotiated and often contested - transformation of what it meant to be a user: no longer only a beneficiary of the “right to housing”, but now the inhabitant of a neighborhood supported by the state. This particular conception of community however - whether or not it conformed to the parameters set by urban planners - was as dependent on centralized state administrations as it was defined locally, and this constituted the ambiguity in which the inhabitants of many *grands ensembles* were caught.

The organizing principle to translate these ambitions into concrete programs and urban interventions was a “grid of facilities.” While the grid transformed the institutions of community life into a bureaucratic series of requirements, the research accompanying it translated notions of social life into matters of architectural and urban design. From the provision of new types of collective facilities to novel urban forms, these measures were to bring newly built neighborhoods to life. At a relative distance from a younger generation of international architects, many of whom assembled under Team X, the urbanism of the *grands ensembles* nevertheless entailed a gradual change of mindset: under the banner of animation, users were increasingly conceptualized not only as passive consumers of dwelling units, but as active constituents of the urban environments provided for them. This mindset was neither the sign of a decidedly emancipatory transfer of power to the user, nor the disingenuous mirage of a user who was in reality an alienated automaton of state capitalism: instead, it was part of a complex power dynamic in which the individual freedom of users and their state-led orchestration were not necessarily antithetical, but in fact part and parcel of the same project - the production and consumption of successful urban environments. This new perspective assumed not only the incorporation of sociological expertise in urban planning, but also the importance of more diverse approaches to architectural designs, and thus, the gradual erosion of modernist doctrine as it was embodied by the first generation of *grands ensembles*.

Rather than being set in stone by the interwar CIAM or invented during Reconstruction, blueprinted by Marcel Lods and Eugène Beaudouin in the Cité de la Muette or by Le Corbusier in the Unité d’habitation, the *grands ensembles* constituted a gradually evolving urbanism and an experiment *during the time they were constructed*: not only on a social or sociological level, but also in architectural and urban design. The expansion of state welfare and the growing awareness that inhabitants’ active participation was a key factor in the success of mass housing engaged architects, urbanists, state administrators, social scientists and civil society representatives in collaborative research at the intersections of architectural modernism and social and urban policy-making. Contrary to the assumption that a single and fixed model was simply repeated, the urbanism of the *grands ensembles* evolved continually during the time of their proliferation

over the national territory in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. Planners' continual adaptations, essentially meant to make mass collective housing work, not only justified the *grands ensembles* as a solution for urban development, but also led to a changing urban production, be it still within the purview of mass collective housing in large estates - a paradigm that would eventually break down during the early 1970s.

Chapter 3: The Expertise of Participation

Inhabitants' everyday lives in the *grands ensembles* are part of an unknown universe, transmitted to us today only through the lens of what little remains: photos, written testimonies, surveys, and here and there, local periodicals (figure 3.1). This chapter does not lay bare the rich history of everyday life in the *grands ensembles*. Instead, it examines social life in these mass housing estates as it was expressed in inhabitants' activism and associational life during the 1960s, and the way it influenced the course of French urbanism.



Figure 3.1: A sunny day at one of Sarcelles' commercial centers in the early 1960s (Source: Sarcelles Maison du Patrimoine).

Social life in this context refers to belonging, local activism and public engagement in community life. How did first inhabitants, often coming from rural settings and foreign cultures, deal with their new urban environment and how, if so, did they become part of a local community? How did social life take shape in these novel conditions? How did men, women, and children transform from a collection of migrants into new citizens of this mini-society that

was taking shape at the same time? These are not only questions for historians today; they were crucial to the inhabitants themselves, as well as to the planners, developers and those managing these housing developments. Consequently, “social life” in this chapter also refers to the way it was perceived, understood, and turned into a mayor concern for experts at this time.

Psycho-sociologist René Kaës, in the introduction to his popular study *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, explained this concern as a logical consequence of the large-scale planning projects taking place all over France: “How to conceive what will be the life in a *grand ensemble* built for twenty thousand metal workers transplanted to the Moselle, massively and suddenly, with their families, coming from dozens of departments, the majority of which are agricultural, with their own way of life, customs, and culture. Even if the question is not everywhere dressed in these terms, it begs for a novel response, which supposes acquired and familiar notions of urbanism, regional planning, and social and cultural animation, and a lot of other things, of which at the least a humble attention to everyday life.”³⁶² Consequently, he concluded that “the construction of the *grands ensembles* is the construction of new relationships between the individual and the public, between technique and artistic creation, and between citizen groups and the government,” or in other words, that the *grands ensembles* were “the hearth of a new way of life.”³⁶³

The architecture of many *grands ensembles* hardly strikes the contemporary observer as a nurturing site for the development of a participatory urbanism or an intimate neighborhood life. And yet, not only was their proliferation on the French territory, as discussed in the previous chapter, accompanied with the development of a theory of *animation* that transformed - at least conceptually - inhabitants into active participants. Also “on the ground,” the *grands ensembles* engendered a particular kind of activism and associational life that would help shape the development of participatory forms of urbanism in the 1960s and 1970s.

³⁶² “Comment concevoir ce que sera la vie dans un grand ensemble construit pour 20 000 travailleurs métallurgistes transplantés en Moselle, massivement et subitement, avec leurs familles, venant de quelques dizaines de départements, la plupart agricoles, avec leur style de vie, leurs coutumes, leur culture. Même si la question ne fut pas posée partout dans ces termes, elle demeure et invite à fournir une réponse inédite, qui suppose acquises et familières des notions d’urbanisme, d’aménagement du territoire, d’animation sociale et culturelle et bien d’autres choses au nombre desquelles, au moins, une humble attention à la vie quotidienne.” Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 13.

³⁶³ “La construction des grands ensembles, c’est donc la construction de nouveaux rapports entre le particulier et le public, entre les techniques et la création artistique, entre les groupes représentatifs des citoyens et le Pouvoir.” and “creuset d’un nouveau style de vie” Ibid., 202, 46.

1. Tenants, Users, Consumers, and Citizens Unite?

Despite the impression that the rapid postwar urbanization of France amounted to a steam-rolling of the national territory with standardized, monotonous forms of architecture, mass housing production did not go unchallenged nor unchanged. Apart from negative press reactions, doubts from experts, and the efforts of the Ministry of Construction to address emerging problems, as described in the previous chapter, the implementation of *grands ensembles* gave rise to a complex of *local* reactions that would soon turn out to shape national policy-making.

What explains the vibrancy of inhabitants' reactions to the mass urbanism of the *grands ensembles* was what some called their "Frontier" atmosphere. The first inhabitants, "this 'bastard race' - not urbanites, nor suburbanites, and villagers even less"³⁶⁴ were forced to organize their everyday lives in an environment that was often neither finished, nor accommodating to their way of life. Whether they arrived from poor housing in Paris' 13th arrondissement, from a small village in rural Bretagne, or were "repatriated" from Algeria after its independence in 1962, the first generation of inhabitants had to "make do" with what they found in their new environment, often located on the very borders of the existing city. Surrounded by the mud of the construction site that was their new home, they had to insert themselves in a society still largely in the making.

This condition was shared by a new generation of Frenchmen, from the outskirts of Lille to the suburbs of Marseille, and from Rennes to Strasbourg. More than any other place, it was Sarcelles that came to epitomize the rewards and especially the challenges of this novel kind of environment. Sarcelles was an exemplary case, not in the least because of its notoriety. While it was not the first *grand ensemble* to appear on the outskirts of Paris, it was soon proclaimed as "Europe's largest construction site" (figure 3.2). From the late 1950s onwards, Sarcelles became the national staple for popular criticism and public opinion about the *grands ensembles* generally: when newspapers wrote about them as "a concentration camp universe," "silos for people," "rabbit cages," or "dormitory suburbs,"³⁶⁵ they often made explicit reference to Sarcelles. The neologism *sarcellite*, which was coined in the early 1960s to describe the various psychological and social ills the *grands ensembles* were believed to cause, channeled the moral panic about the enormous building boom through the urban image of Sarcelles - not unlike what the term *brasilitis* did for Brasilia.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ "Au sein de cette "race bâtarde" - ni citadine, ni banlieusarde, encore moins villageoise -, qui peuple les "Grands Ensembles", se dégage petit à petit une élite qui fait souffler ça et là un nouvel esprit, s'attache à semer le bon grain d'une société moins matérialiste." Gérard Marin, "Vivre dans les cités nouvelles," *Le Figaro* 12 February 1963.

³⁶⁵ "univers concentrationnaire," "silos à homme," "cages à lapins," and "cité-dortoir." See: "Un univers concentrationnaire," *Le Figaro* 14 January 1965; "Un silo à hommes," *Le Figaro* 15 January 1965; "Les raisons de la sarcellite," *L'Humanité* 5 November 1963.

³⁶⁶ Most likely used for the first time in the press in 1962 in an article in *L'Echo Régional* on 22 mars 1962, see: Catherine Roth and Gilbert Morin, eds., *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954-1976*, Collection Les Publications du Patrimoine en Val de France, no. 10 (Villiers-le-Bel: Editions de la Mission Mémoires et Identités en Val de France, 2007); Alain Vulbeau, "De la sarcellite au malaise des banlieues: trente ans de pathologie des grands ensembles," *Lumières de la ville*, no. 5 (June 1992): 31-37, 31-37. For Brasilia, see: Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*.



Figure 3.2: Aerial photo of the *grand ensemble* of Sarcelles, 1960 (Source: AM Sarcelles).

Sarcelles was built incrementally between 1955 and 1975 and not according to a comprehensive plan drawn up at the outset. In his 1966 book *Vivre à Sarcelles*, Jean Duquesne, a civil servant at the Ministry of Finance and a locally active inhabitant of Sarcelles since he moved there in 1958, sketched the making of Sarcelles as follows: “Historically, the construction of Sarcelles was decided piece by piece and the result suffers from it. [...] Proof of this partial conception is plentiful. The inhabitants have seen the tracing of certain streets been changes multiple times. [...] Neighborhoods that everybody considered finished witnessed the construction of additional buildings in their open spaces.”³⁶⁷

Sarcelles’ developer and landlord was the *Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse des dépôts* (SCIC), established in 1954 by the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* to aid in the construction

³⁶⁷ “Historiquement, la construction de Sarcelles fut décidé par morceaux et le résultat s’en ressent. S’il en était besoin, les preuves de cette conception partielle abondent. Les habitants ont vu modifier plusieurs fois le tracé de certaines rues. (...) Des quartiers que tout le monde considérait comme terminés ont vu s’implanter des bâtiments supplémentaires dans les espaces libres.” Jean Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?* (Paris: Editions Cujas, 1966), 31.

of mass housing (figure 3.3).³⁶⁸ SCIC had obtained the initial plot of land almost by chance. In 1954, an association of self-builders that was part of the Castor movement contacted the CDC for financing after it had bought a piece of land for the construction of single-family homes.³⁶⁹ The terrain, just large enough for an allotment of around 30 new homes, was located at Bois de Lochères, an open area of largely agricultural land in between three old villages, now suburban communities of Paris - Sarcelles, Stains and Pierrefitte (figure 3.4). When SCIC got involved, it immediately saw the opportunity for a much larger development. A year later, the developer had obtained enough land for a first phase of about 440 housing units in four four-storey slabs placed rectilinearly around a large green space (figure 3.5 a).³⁷⁰ It was designed by Beaux-Arts architects Jacques Henri-Labourdette and Roger Boileau, who remained in charge of future phases as well.³⁷¹ A second phase of 1180 units was constructed in 1956. Unlike the first, the plan included an impressive collection of collective amenities - including a market, a commercial center and several schools. Some of those would never be built, and others only much later (figure 3.5 b).³⁷² As the developer hurriedly purchased additional land, subsequent phases followed at a rapid pace. The Castor allotment, located just north of the first phase, was quickly surrounded by collective housing blocks. Only around 1960, when SCIC had assured land purchase an overall master plan was drawn. The plan indicated subsequent phases of development and set out a grid of roads dividing it into neighborhood units of around 400m square (figure 3.5 c). The plan was meant to be a direct translation of the principles set out in the *grille Dupont*, to which Labourdette had contributed in the preceding years as a consultant for Sudreau.³⁷³ According to the architects, the absence of a detailed master plan for Sarcelles was intentional: by keeping the actual massing of the future development vague they would “avoid a sclerosis and premature aging of the urbanistic conception.”³⁷⁴ Housing construction only halted

³⁶⁸ SCIC was created by CDC in June 1954. François Bloch-Lainé, who was also at the head of CDC, became its president. SCIC would borrow money from CDC, usually for periods of 18 months to two years, in order to pay architects, companies, and technical study firms (*bureaux d'études techniques*) for the construction of housing units. Other big projects of SCIC included Epinay, Saint-Gratien, Créteil, Bagneux, Fontenay, and so on (all around Paris). Later SCIC expanded its domain of operation in the provinces. By 1974, SCIC had built a total of 250,000 housing units. See: René Pares, *La SCIC au service du pays* (Paris: SCIC, 1992); François Bloch-Lainé and Françoise Carrière, *Profession fonctionnaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 136-42.

³⁶⁹ See: Roth and Morin, eds., *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954-1976*, 2; Claude Mezrahi, *Regards et témoignages sur Sarcelles* (Paris: Idéographic Editions, 1991), 159. For the Castor movement, see Chapter 1. On 25.09.1954 the municipality bought the land in order to hand it over to SCIC and the Castors, see: délibération municipal, 25.09.1954 (AM Sarcelles).

³⁷⁰ See: Dossiers permis de construire (AM Sarcelles).

³⁷¹ Between 1932 and 1945, Jacques Henri-Labourdette (also called Jacques-Henri Labourdette) studied architecture at the *Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, first in the atelier of Roger Expert, then with Eugène Beaudouin and Charles Lemaesquier. He did not win a Prix de Rome. In 1945, he created an office with Roger Boileau, the son of Louis-Hippolyte Boileau, the architect of hotel Lutétia and the Trocadéro in Paris. The office Boileau-Labourdette was reorganized in 1961 into a partnership of SUABLA and SETHIA, an architecture office and a *bureau d'études techniques*. They built more than 65000 housing units over their career, but received relatively few publications in professional reviews.

³⁷² The initial plan for Sarcelles II (drawn in January 1956) contained three schools, individual garages, a restaurant, a gas station, a market, an administrative center and a commercial center. The plan contained a greater diversity in buildings than what would effectively be constructed. See: Ibid.

³⁷³ Henri-Labourdette was part of Pierre Sudreau's *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*, which resulted in the grille Dupont of 1959 (see Chapter 2). Sarcelles figures as a key example in this research.

³⁷⁴ See: François Chaslin, "Hommage Jacques Henri-Labourdette (1915-2003)," *Urbanisme*, no. 331 (2003).

in 1975 when SCIC had built a total of more than 12,000 housing units in eleven phases, all designed by the architects Boileau and Labourdette.

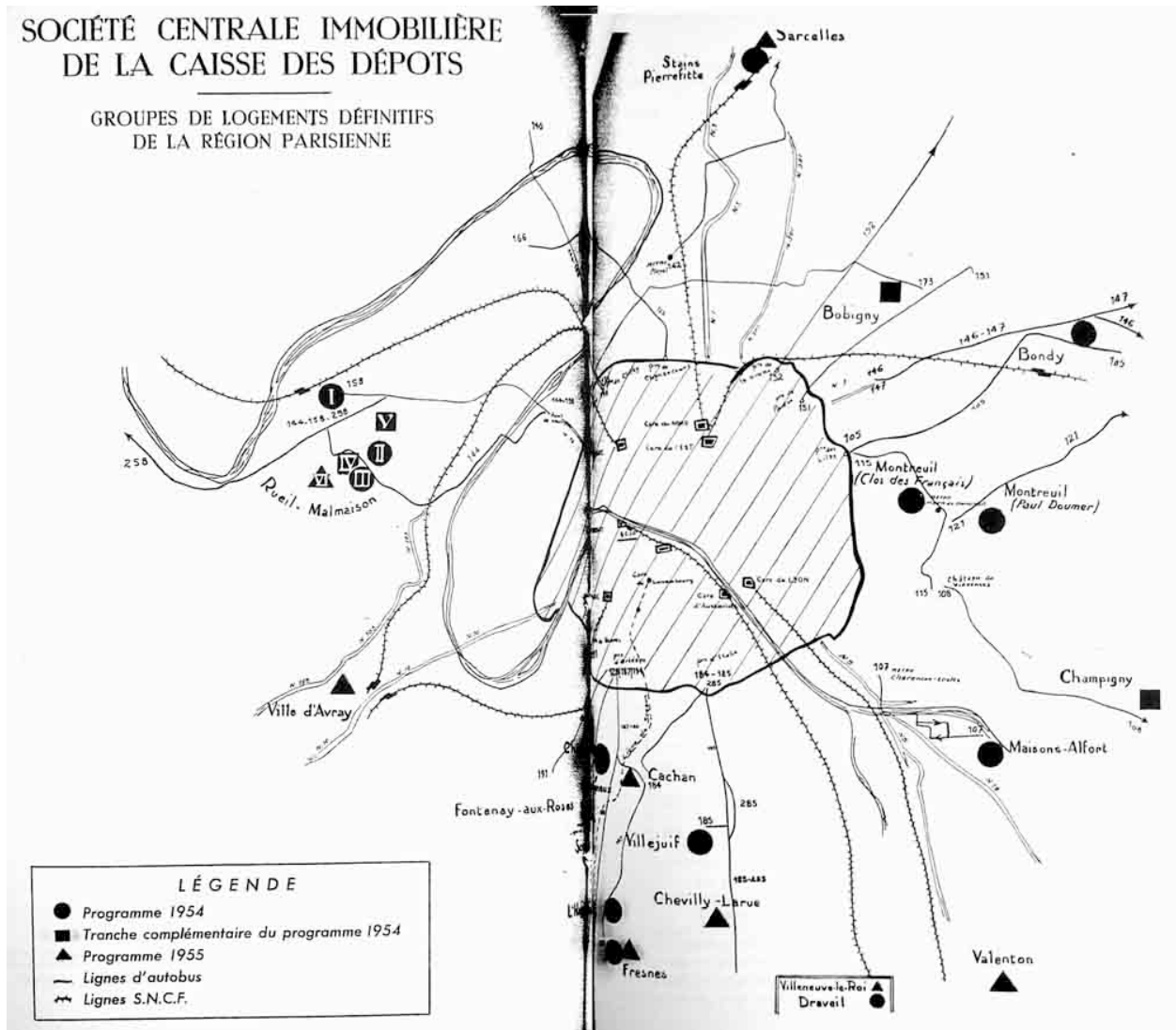


Figure 3.3. Map of SCIC's first operations in the Paris region, 1954-55 (Source: AM Sarcelles).

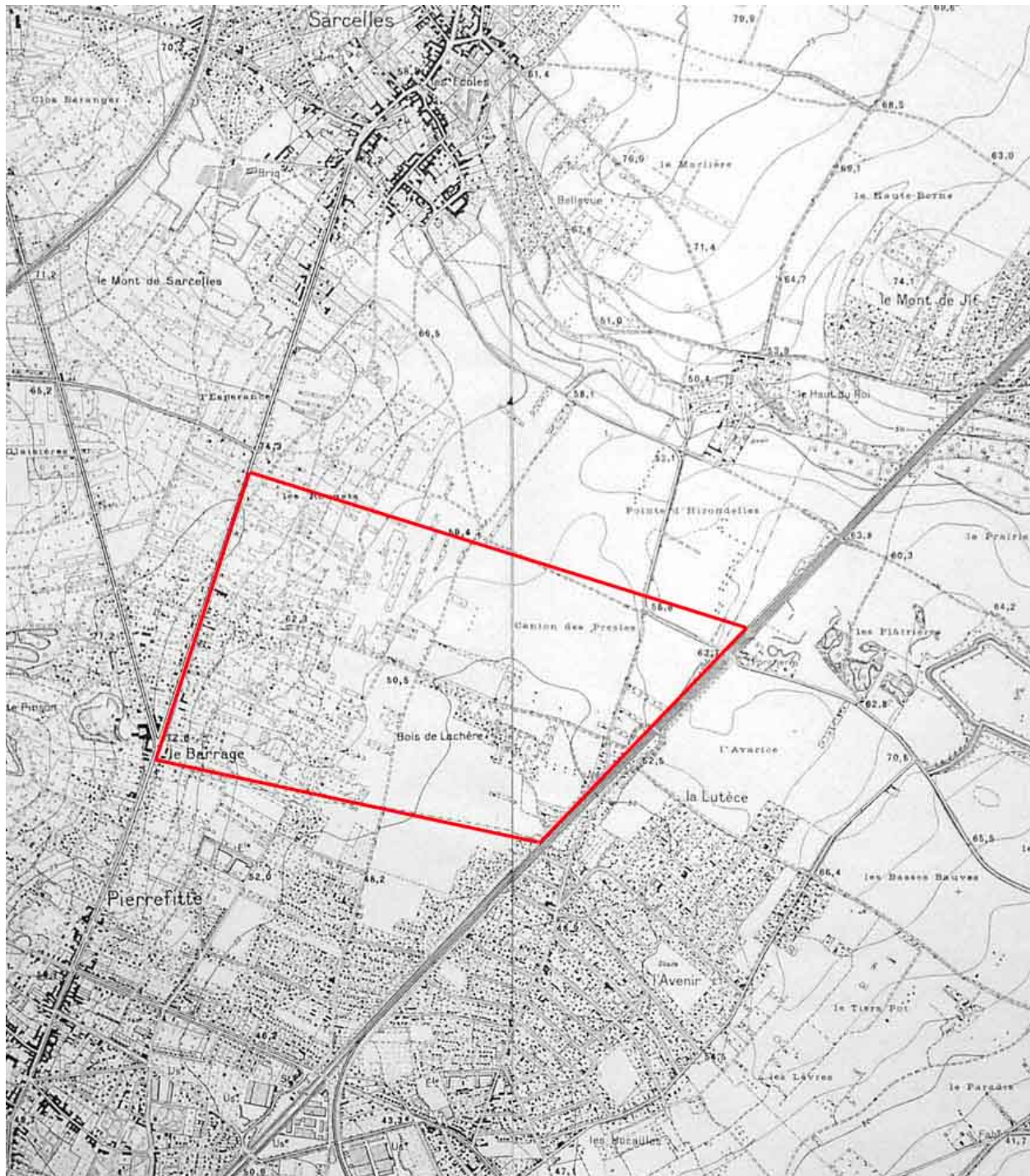


Figure 3.4: Topographic map of 1937 (Source: AN / Institut de géographie nationale, Paris). Before 1954, the situation would change little compared to that of 1937: urbanization was limited to the construction of some small single-family home allotments. The area of the future *grand ensemble* (indicated in red), known as Bois de Lochères, is located in between the villages of Sarcelles in the north, and Pierrefitte and Stains in the south.

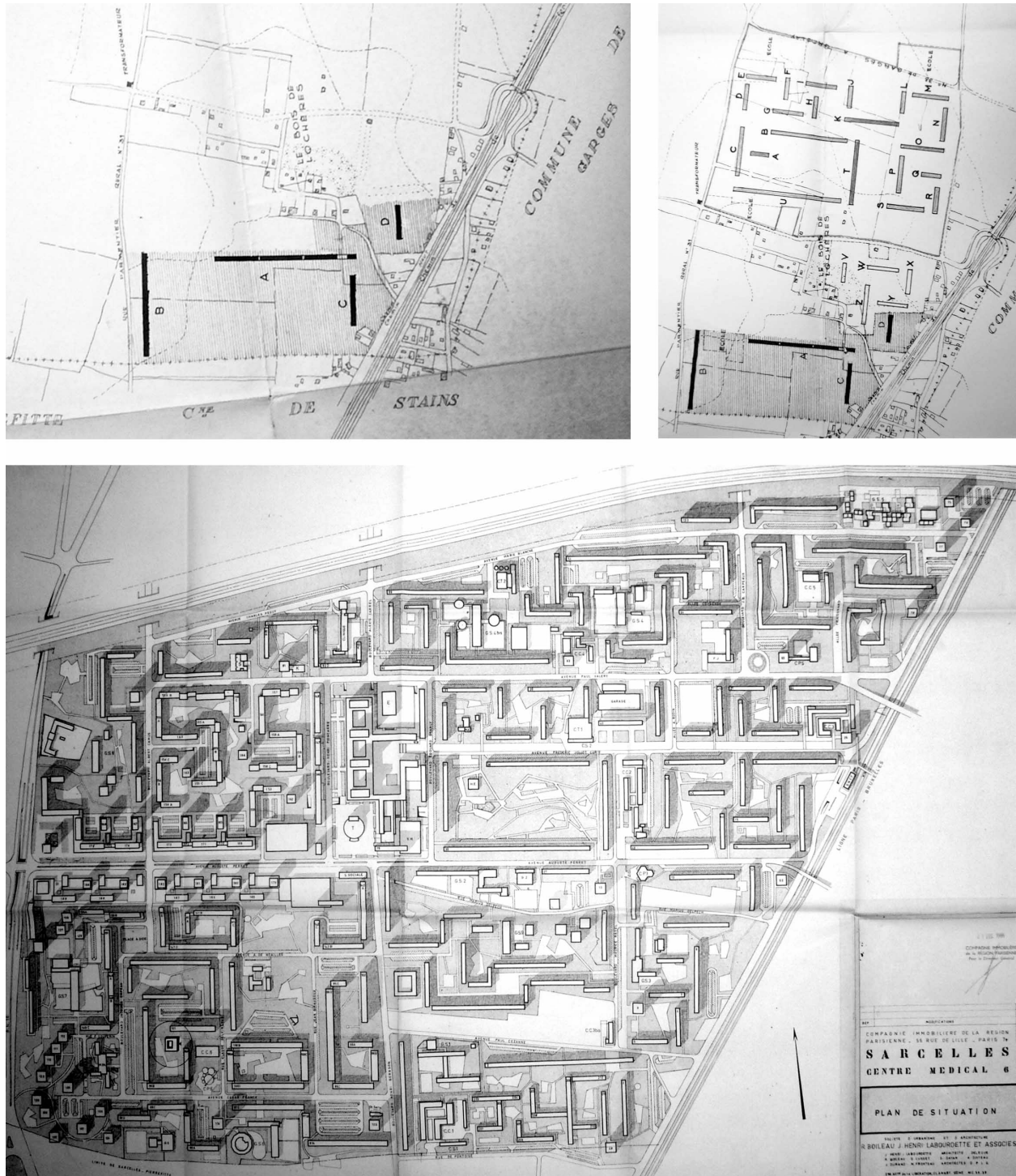


Figure 3.5: The *grand ensemble* of Sarcelles by Jacques Henri-Labourdette and Roger Boileau. a) Top left: The first phase, built between 1955 and 1957 (plan of 1955) in urgency after land was coincidentally obtained, did not contain any collective facilities. The Castor allotment is located immediately north of this first phase. b) Top right: A second phase (plan of around 1958) followed soon after. c) Bottom: Subsequent plans (plan of around 1964) corresponded roughly to a 400m by 400m grid, with secondary commercial centers dotted inside the neighborhood units and the principal center in the middle of the development (Source: AM Sarcelles).

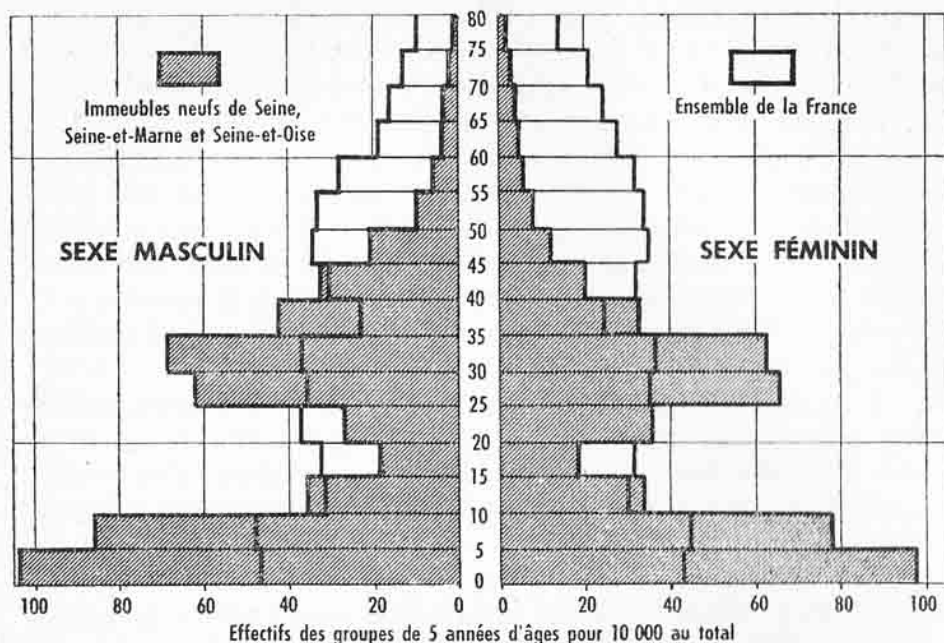
The social make-up of Sarcelles was the direct result of national policies that prioritized young working families. According to Duquesne, the “right to housing” in Sarcelles was the result of two criteria: “employment, and thus it is the employer who disposes of dwelling units for those who work for him, and the number of children. In an situation of shortage, the units go first to the largest families. [...] These origins of Sarcelles’ population shape its physiognomy: the families are young, the adults fully employed, the children plenty.”³⁷⁵ Sarcelles’ population was indeed very young: a 1962 survey showed that only 8 percent was older than 45. Its first inhabitants were predominantly workers and employees, with only a small minority of upper-middle class people - business owners, a group of upper management level employees (*cadres supérieurs*), and those with liberal professions like doctors and lawyers.

The first inhabitants were thus remarkably homogeneous in terms of both age and class, a social make-up was typical for the *grands ensembles* nationally: predominantly white French nuclear families with young children, a mix of blue- and white-collar workers, with a significant number of civil servants amongst them (figure 3.6). There were almost no poor, adolescents, or elderly and little non-French people among them, and many came from the same factories and companies. While sociologist Alain Touraine went as far as to label these new neighborhoods as quintessentially *petit-bourgeois*, more accurate perhaps was the characterization of the *grands ensembles* as harbingers of a new mass culture.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ “Or ce “droit” au logement est défini de deux manières: par l’emploi, et c’est alors l’employeur qui dispose de logements pour ceux qui travaillent chez lui, et par le nombre d’enfants. Dans une situation de pénurie, les logements vont d’abord aux familles les plus nombreuses. [...] Ces sources du peuplement Sarcellois influencent considérablement sa physionomie: les familles seront jeunes, les adultes en pleine activité professionnelle, les enfants nombreux. L’Etat sera cause qu’on y trouve plus de fonctionnaires, et aussi plus de rapatriés des anciennes colonies.” Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?* , 67.

³⁷⁶ Alain Touraine, *Le HLM: Une société petite-bourgeoise* (Paris: CRU, 1966).

TABLEAU N° 1. — *Histogramme démographique caractéristique de la population des grands ensembles.*



Répartition de 10 000 habitants par sexe et par âge au 1^{er} Janvier 1956

Source INED

Figure 3.6: Demographic composition of the new housing areas of the Paris region - representing more generally that of the *grands ensembles* nationally - in the late 1950s (Source: INED / René Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles* (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1963): 76).

In the first phases of Sarcelles, housing units were largely attributed to personnel from the companies that helped finance construction. Only 10 % was available for the municipality to attribute to its employees and those in bad housing, and the remaining 10 % was for SCIC's own personnel, the caretakers, and those with liberal professions. The fact that in Sarcelles only families had access to housing was reflected in its housing stock. The "F4" as it was called, a standard four-room apartment for a nuclear family, made up the bulk of dwellings in the first phases of the *grand ensemble*. There were practically no studios or very large apartments during its first decade. What further exacerbated the feeling of social homogeneity was the way buildings were allocated, at least initially. In many cases, up to 80 % of a particular building's inhabitants were employees from the same factory or company.³⁷⁷ The first generation of inhabitants - who lived in a neighborhood of numbered streets and buildings until street names were given in 1961 - thus referred to "the block of the cops," "the block of the Africans" - a slab that housed about 400 African interns and students - "the Citroën block" which provided homes

³⁷⁷ SCIC worked together with industrial companies to provide housing for their employees through the 1% of salary legislation (created in 1953, see Chapter 1). See: Bulletin d'information des entreprises participant au programme de construction à caractère social de la Caisse des Dépôts, 1956 (CDC/SCIC); Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 76; Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?*, 28.

for around 600 workers from the car manufacturer by the same name, and of course, the blocks of the *pieds noirs*.³⁷⁸ These were French nationals born in Algeria who massively migrated to mainland France after Algerian independence in 1962. Decolonization generated a considerable influx of such repatriates, who were often uncomfortably stuck in between two worlds, and for whom the State had targeted the *grands ensembles* as new home. At Sarcelles, over 3000 of them, many of whom North-African Jews, arrived in the early 1960s.³⁷⁹ This kind of residential segregation was soon considered a mistake and attribution was corrected to result in increased social mixing.³⁸⁰ Nevertheless, families were still separated from the others, who as special social categories were housed in specific housing typologies like the *Foyer des jeunes travailleurs* for young male workers and the *résidence des personnes âgées* for the elderly.

Despite the social homogeneity however and despite the fact that for the majority of first inhabitants the *grands ensembles* did not constitute their first urban experience,³⁸¹ the new social world they entered did not have much in terms of a shared urban culture or tradition. The only things to bind them were the sameness of their new dwellings, and the sheer novelty of the strange modern world outside their doorstep. In fact, the emergence of social life in the *grands ensembles* was shaped as much by their particular social make-up as by their physical characteristics, their unfinishedness and their often isolated location.

Sarcelles was again emblematic: in the national press its *grand ensemble* was persistently portrayed as a new city sprung up in the middle of nowhere, among the fields of cauliflower and beets that were so typical for this agricultural region that once supplied Paris with food. The new development was indeed located at a considerable distance from the existing village of Sarcelles, with which it had little in common apart from a denomination and a mayor. On its other side however, the housing estate bordered the suburban allotments of the adjacent municipalities of Stains and Pierrefitte. In fact, its first phase followed the orthogonal grid of an earlier, much smaller SCIC housing project situated right next to it (figure 3.7) and to which it was added like an extension. This adjacent housing development, designed by Jean Dubuisson, was an infill project in the existing suburban fabric of interwar allotments. Subsequent phases of Sarcelles followed the orthogonality set out by Dubuisson. This was also consistent with that of the agricultural land use pattern.

³⁷⁸ Jean Marty, "Une chance offerte à l'Eglise: Le cas de Sarcelles," in *Vers une nouvelle civilisation urbaine* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard / Centre catholique des intellectuels français, 1962), 115.

³⁷⁹ Mezrahi, *Regards et témoignages sur Sarcelles*, 173.

³⁸⁰ Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?*, 73.

³⁸¹ 43 percent came from the Paris region and 42 percent from the provinces. Only 6 percent came from rural municipalities. See: Paul Clerc, *Grands ensembles, banlieues nouvelles: Enquête démographique et psycho-sociologique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).

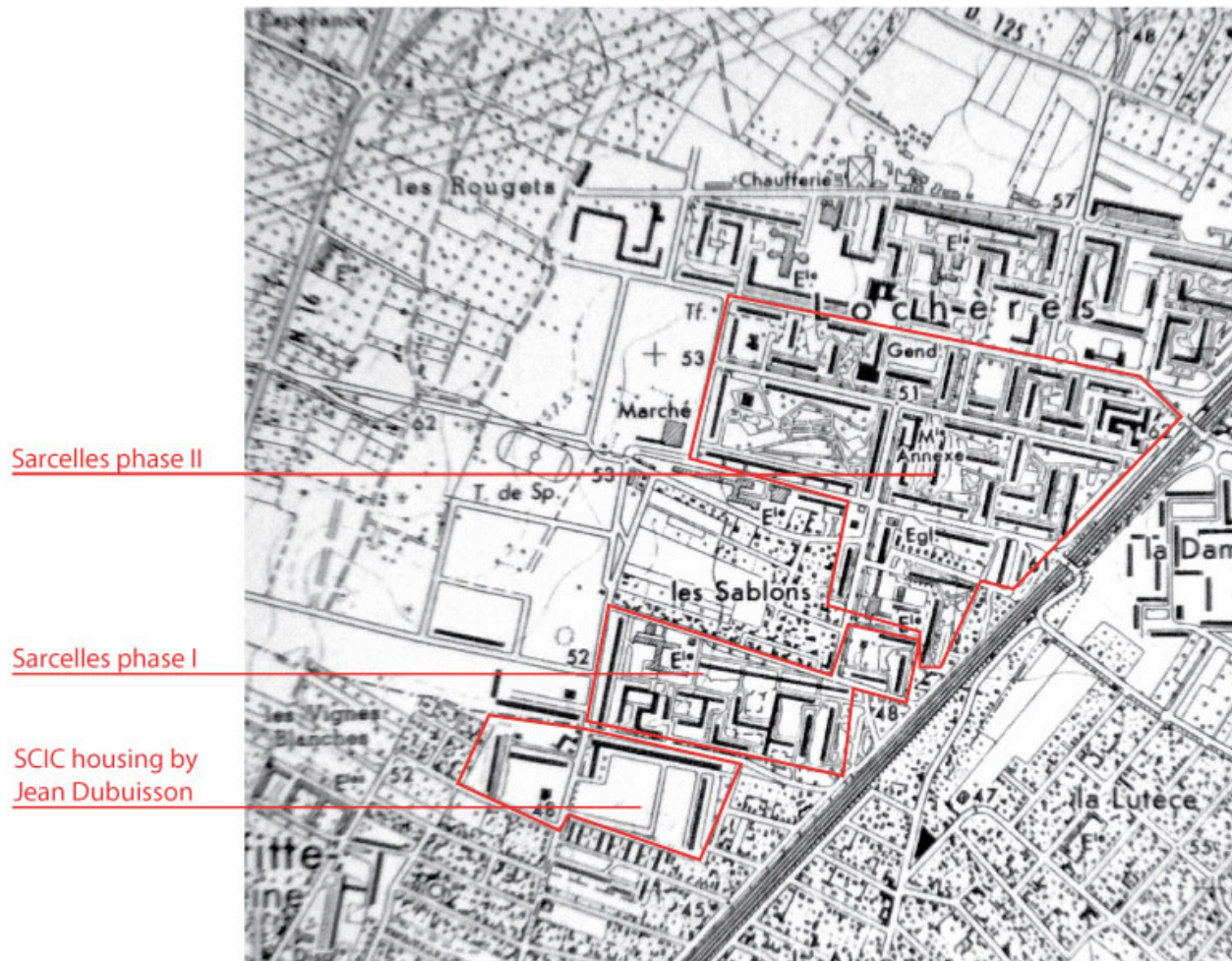


Figure 3.7: Topographic map of 1961 (Source: AN / Institut de géographie nationale, Paris).

The isolated nature of the housing estate that was to become the new Sarcelles was thus shaped less by its “isolated” location than by its sheer size and modernist form. It was in this sense that many *grands ensembles* were isolated from their surroundings. Their standardized architecture and modernist urban form simply negated their surroundings. The rigidity of their grid composition and the reversal of traditional urban form opposed them to the city center; and the exclusive presence of collective housing negated the suburban condition of interwar allotments in equally strong terms.³⁸² The architectural language of social modernization did nothing less than condemn its un-modern surroundings. The same facades, the same avenues, the same perspectives and window views, the same apartment layouts, and same interior finishings. But also: the same modern technologies and appliances, and especially, the same problems and aggravations when these did not function as they should.

³⁸² This argument was most convincingly made in the 1970s when a renewed attention to traditional urban form led to morpho-typological analyses like: Philippe Panerai, Jean Castex, and Jean-Charles Depaule, *Formes urbaines: De l'îlot à la barre* (Paris: Dunod, 1977).

Defined in such way, the *grand ensemble* constituted a new world, entirely onto itself. Not surprisingly, this condition engendered a particular climate of neighborhood solidarity. When in the Spring of 1957, the first inhabitants of “the new Sarcelles” moved into their newly-finished apartments, they were confronted with an unwelcoming outdoor space of construction dust, noise and mud. Without nearby train or bus connections, post office or shops, in a landscape of agricultural fields and shabby single-family home allotments, the inhabitants were almost literally stranded.³⁸³ In 1958, the nearby train tracks were electrified and trains stopped at Garges-Sarcelles. For an actual train station building, residents had to wait until 1966. In this climate of pioneers, “a spontaneous form of mutual aid emerged, like during the war, from these shortages: to avoid that two neighboring mothers had to queue at the store, one of them would look after the children together, while the other did the groceries.”³⁸⁴ To complement an urbanism of impersonal, state-aided provision, a culture of interpersonal “making do” emerged. At the Garges-Sarcelles stop, where trains dropped tired commuters in the evening, street vendors lined up the street to supply households in lack of local grocery shops (figure 3.8).³⁸⁵ In response to the lack of basic amenities, other forms of unplanned, provisional kinds of urbanism emerged. The lacking and unfinished character of their everyday environment stimulated inhabitants to find company in common goals: pavement instead of mud, shorter commutes to work, the opening of local shops and a post office. When they complained, inhabitants soon did so in group.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ See for instance: Marc Bernard, *Sarcellopolis* (Paris: Flammarion, 1964), 31.

³⁸⁴ “Une entraide spontanée naissait, comme pendant la guerre, de toutes ces pénuries: pour éviter que deux mères voisines ne fissent queue au magasin, l’une gardait les enfants ensemble, l’autre allait faire les courses.” Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 89.

³⁸⁵ Roth and Morin, eds., *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954-1976*, 33.

³⁸⁶ See for instance: “Les Sarcellois d’adoption se plaignent,” *La Renaissance du Val d’Oise* 1 June 1957.



Figure 3.8: Street vending near the train station of Sarcelles during the early 1960s, photo by Jacques Windenberger (Source: Sarcelles Maison du Patrimoine).

In an area with a predominantly leftist - a mix of Communist and socialist - political leanings,³⁸⁷ this kind of solidarity shaped associational life. The various inhabitant groups and local associations that were soon formed in the *grand ensemble* were often separate and different in nature from those of the surrounding villages and suburban allotments. At Sarcelles, the social distinctions between the existing village and the *grand ensemble* could not have been more stark.³⁸⁸ During the first two decades after initial construction, there was marked social tension between the two areas, each of which had its own demographics, politics, interests, and especially, local identity.

While many of the associations in the *grand ensemble* were typical for that time in France - sports and leisure clubs for example - others were of an entirely new kind. Most remarkable was the *Association Sarcelloise*. This voluntary association was established less than a year after the arrival of the first inhabitants at the end of 1957, with the explicit aim to “defend the material and moral interests of the inhabitants, tenants and homeowners of the housing groups in Sablons,

³⁸⁷ A more general feature of the suburbs around Paris, see: Fourcaut, *Banlieue rouge 1920-1960: Années Thorez, années Gabin: Archétype du populaire, banc d'essai des modernités*; Stovall, "French Communism and Suburban Development: The Rise of the Paris Red Belt."

³⁸⁸ Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?*, 18-22.

Bois de Lochères and Barrage.” While it was not initially recognized by the developer, the association nevertheless addressed both the developer and the centralized state administration directly. Through insistent letter-writing, the association complained about the many technical problems and lack of amenities of the housing areas - the lack of schools, public transportation, postal services, the insufficient sound insulation, and problems with heating.³⁸⁹ It also contested SCIC’s rent increases, collective charges and insufficient maintenance of the collective areas. Via a weekly newsletter *L’A.S.*, the association updated its members about these struggles and reported about similar situations in other *grands ensembles* (see figure 3.9).

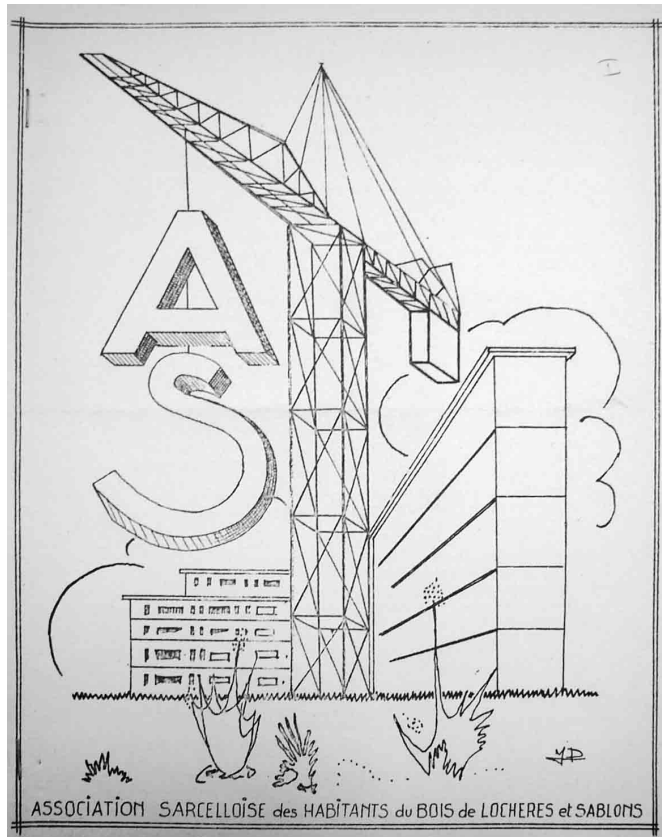


Figure 3.9: Cover of the monthly bulletin *L’A.S.*, 1958 (Source: AM Sarcelles).

The sense of solidarity in the *grand ensemble* of Sarcelles was perhaps particularly strong when compared to other developments. It was certainly intensified by the public stigmatization of Sarcelles, which encouraged inhabitants to defend it vigorously against often ill-considered critiques “from the outside.”³⁹⁰ The different interpretations of “sarcellite” exemplified this.

³⁸⁹ Local periodicals like *L’A.S.* and *En famille* reported abundantly on the heating system explosion of 1963 and the staircase collapse of 1967 (AM Sarcelles, BNF).

³⁹⁰ See: Jean Duquesne, "Lettre ouverte à M. le Directeur de Paris-Match: Ni pervers, ni inconscients, les Sarcellois en ont ras le bol," *Ville-nouvelles*, no. 25 (1971): AM Sarcelles. See also: Claude Jannoud, *La première ville nouvelle* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974), 82-84.

While the national press focused on the monotony and dehumanizing aspects of its architecture, medical doctors focused on its repercussions for inhabitants' mental health, and sociologists on the boredom of women and on the threat of youth delinquency.³⁹¹ Inhabitants however, tended to interpret "sarcellite" as an infectious form of passivity, the remedy for which was local activism, uniting inhabitants in their reactions to the mundane problems of the *grand ensemble*. The local periodical *En famille* reported ironically on the novel term: "Sarcellite, description of the disease: The virus: you need to live in the *grand ensemble*. Incubation: a couple of months, it makes the head empty. The disease: nervous breakdown, "in sixty percent of the cases, they buy a TV because the neighbor owns one." Remedy: consists first of all to be member of the Association des Famille... an active life, a brain that functions..."³⁹² During a public manifestation in 1965 of the local associations this idea was illustrated with a sharp sense of irony: one of the decorated cars of the procession portrayed "*sarcellomycine*," the supposed medicine against Sarcellite in the form of individual tablets on which the names of various local associations were inscribed (see figure 3.10).



Figure 3.10: A procession organized by the local associations in Sarcelles, 1965 (Source: Catherine Roth, *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles*, Collections Les Publications du Patrimoine en Val de France 10 (2007): 102).

³⁹¹ See: Vulbeau, "De la sarcellite au malaise des banlieues: trente ans de pathologie des grands ensembles."

³⁹² "La Sarcellite: description de la maladie: Le virus: il faut habiter le grand ensemble. Incubation: plusieurs mois, elle fait le vide dans le cerveau. La maladie: dépression nerveuse, "dans 60 pour cent des cas, on achète la T.V. parce que le voisin la possède" Remède: il consiste d'abord à être adhérent l'Association des Familles... une vie active, un cerveau qui fonctionne..." "La Sarcellite," *En famille* (January 1965): BNF.

Regardless of Sarcelles' unique status, its associational life was symptomatic for the *grands ensembles* more generally. Associations similar to the *Association Sarcelloise* were established in housing estates all over the nation.³⁹³ While many of them remained unknown, others were fervently scrutinized: apart from the association of Sarcelles, similar movements in Mourenx were reported by Henri Lefebvre and in Lyon-La Duchère by André Trintignac in a study for the Ministry of Construction.³⁹⁴ Not all were equally vibrant or successful, but just like in Sarcelles, the associations demanded collective facilities like schools and playgrounds, contested rent increases, and fought for the improvement of public transportation and street furniture.³⁹⁵ Even some housing developments of a smaller scale, developed by social housing organizations or private developers, witnessed the emergence of such associations. Some would remain more focused on the management of their apartment blocks, in particular when they were inserted in an already urbanized municipality with sufficient existing facilities and local political representation. In those developments the goals were often less ambitious and less a matter of urbanism, but they were not necessarily less active.

What shaped the “newness” of this associational life to a large extent was what it contested. For the *Association Sarcelloise*, complaints were directed against SCIC - which was not only the developer, but also the landlord, financier, builder, and manager of their everyday built environment. While it was initially established to build cheap housing types using state loans and grants - like the Logécos - the company soon changed course and began to also develop apartments for purchase. In Sarcelles the first such developments appeared in 1961 and began to predominate the later phases of construction from the mid-1960s onwards.³⁹⁶ The *grand ensemble* of Sarcelles was not exactly a company town, but SCIC as the monopoly holder was nevertheless ambivalently positioned: while it represented the state, it increasingly behaved like a large private company. SCIC soon went into the development of private housing through some of its many subsidiary. But even in 1980s, after having branched out further into private development, SCIC continued to define itself as a “social” and not a regular developer: “SCIC is not and cannot be a company like all others. Its history, the source of its capital, and the role of

³⁹³ See: Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 287. For the late 1960s and 1970s, see: Castells, *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne*. Recent local historical research in the Val d'Oise, a suburban region north of Paris has demonstrated a vibrant associational life, sometimes with a militant overtone, in many local housing estates, see: Catherine Roth, ed. *Les Carreaux 1955-1963*, Collection Les Publications du Patrimoine en Val de France, no. 6 (Villiers-le-Bel: Editions de la Mission Mémoires et Identités en Val de France, 2006); Pierre-Jacques Derainne, ed. *Un siècle de vie associative à Garges-lès-Gonesse*, Collection Les Publications du Patrimoine en Val de France (Villiers-le-Bel: Editions de la Mission Mémoires et Identités en Val de France, 2007).

³⁹⁴ In Mourenx, a new political party, which called itself “apolitical” but was in fact left-leaning, contested the developer/owner SCIC in an attempt to institute what it called “autogestion active.” See: Lefebvre, “Les nouveaux ensembles urbains, un cas concret: Lacq-Mourenx et les problèmes urbains de la nouvelle classe ouvrière.” In La Duchère, near Lyon, inhabitants established the *Association sociale familiale et culturelle de La Duchère* in 1962 with a similar goal in mind. The association was modeled explicitly after *l'Association Sarcelloise*. See: Lyon La Duchère, documentation folder (CAC 19771142/019).

³⁹⁵ Based on a survey of local inhabitant periodicals conserved at the BN. This interpretation corresponds to that of: Tellier, *Le temps des HLM 1945-1975: La saga urbaine des Trente Glorieuses*.

³⁹⁶ AM Sarcelles.

the State has given to it, make it serve first and foremost the local communities and national housing policy as defined by the government.”³⁹⁷

Despite its rhetoric of serving “the public interest” - supported by an ideology that identified the centralized state with the public good - the legal status of SCIC became the subject of debate during the 1950s and 1960 in the context of its rent policies. To the dismay of its tenant base, the company initially raised rents as it pleased. In July 1965, it announced a massive and sudden rent increase to purportedly adjust rents to “current market rates.” Inhabitants - given voice by associations like the *Association Sarcelloise* but also by local groups of national family organizations like the *Union nationale des associations familiales* (UNAF) - contested the rent increase and called for governmental regulation.³⁹⁸ The state responded by officially declaring SCIC a private company, and thus free from rent regulation: “We need to insist on the fact that the developments of the *Caisse des dépôts* are not subject to HLM legislation and regulation. The CDC [*Caisse des dépôts*] is considered, from this point of view, like a private owner and private law reigns in the relations between tenant and landlord. When HLM norms are concerned, they pertain only the construction norms and not those for management.”³⁹⁹

In many respects, conflicts between tenant and landlord in the *grands ensembles* were similar to those of the interwar period and went back in fact to the 19th century.⁴⁰⁰ Rent increase was the most typical domain of contestation and in this sense inhabitants’ activism in the *grands ensembles* was hardly new. Yet, with the development of mass housing during the postwar period such struggles became less locally specific and appeared on the national political arena in a new way. Many of the local associations in the *grands ensembles* were linked to national civil society organizations - tenant organizations such as the National Tenants Confederation (*Confédération nationale des locataires*) and family organizations like UNAF. Just like the trade unions, some of these organisations were represented in the government’s Economic and Social Council (*Conseil économique et social*) and helped shape national policy. At the same time, because they operated through departmental and local antennas, they also engaged in local activism. In Sarcelles, the *Association des familles*, established soon after the *Association Sarcelloise*, was affiliated with UNAF as one of its local antennas. Since its inception, it had advocated for childcare, and between 1962 and 1967 it managed Sarcelles’ first and only crèche.

³⁹⁷ “Cependant, la SCIC n’est pas, ne peut pas, et ne veut pas être une entreprise comme les autres. Son histoire, l’origine de ses capitaux, le rôle que l’Etat a bien voulu lui confier, la mettent avant tout au service des collectivités locales et de la politique du logement définie par les Pouvoirs publics.” “La SCIC: Une entreprise,” *CDC*, no. 134 (1980): CDC/SCIC.

³⁹⁸ See: “Vivre ou végéter?,” *En famille* (December 1965): BNF.

³⁹⁹ “Il faut également insister sur le fait que les constructions de la Caisse des Dépôts ne sont pas soumises à la législation et à la réglementation “HLM”. La Caisse est considérée, de ce point de vue, comme un propriétaire privé et c’est le droit privé qui régit les relations locataires-propriétaires. Lorsqu’il est question de normes HLM, il s’agit donc uniquement de normes de construction et non de gestion.” “Extrait du Journal Officiel, Débats parlementaires – Assemblée nationale, no. 98 du 20.11.1965,” *En famille* (February 1966): AM Sarcelles.

⁴⁰⁰ See: Christian Topalov, *Le logement en France: Histoire d’une marchandise impossible* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1987).

In 1963, the government had first instituted, and then immediately eliminated tenant representation in the administrative councils of the HLM organizations, purportedly to avoid the politicization of these councils and to make them more “efficient.”⁴⁰¹ This only incited the national tenant and family organizations, who found a common goal in what they called *syndicalisme de l’habitat*. This buzzword united the initiatives of both national organizations and local associations in the *grands ensembles*, and included demands far beyond these conventional domains of contestation - domains transcending the legal relationship between landlord and tenant.⁴⁰² Its advocates were inspired by the larger movement of *auto-gestion* or self-management, which had originated in Yugoslav workers’ management practices and became an increasingly popular notion in French leftist movements during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁰³

In Sarcelles, local associations led by the militant *Association Sarcelloise* began to demand participation in the management of the entire housing area and the provision of collective facilities corresponding to their own perception of what they needed. They called for the construction of schools - particularly secondary schools that were urgently needed because of the rapid increase in the average child age - as well as better roads and a greater range of shops offering less expensively priced goods. The associations became increasingly concrete in defining its goals in terms of urban planning. In 1959 already, the *Association Sarcelloise* began contesting the expropriation and demolition of individual homes in the Barrage area, where the developer wanted to clear space for subsequent phases of development.⁴⁰⁴ A year later, the association formulated a counter-proposal for this area in the form of a dedicated zone for individual home development: “We are convinced it is in the interest of everybody, both tenants and home-owners to maintain at the western edge of the estate a zone of individual homes with their gardens, flowers, and trees.”⁴⁰⁵ Concretely, they proposed one part of the zone, which was already scattered with small *pavillons*, to be densified with new individual homes, leaving the other part for SCIC to develop collective housing. In 1962, when the association published its list of inhabitant needs including the provision of a train station and a central market, it also included its own plan for Barrage.⁴⁰⁶ By that time however, SCIC had already obtained the land, and the plans were drawn. The municipal archives show that SCIC did build a few prefab individual homes - designed by the same architecture firm - in the area of the Castor allotment for reasons

⁴⁰¹ The representation of tenants in HLM organizations had been made obligatory on 3 September 1963, but was already eliminated by a decree in December that year. Only in 1972 was such representation formalized again. See: Bernard Roux, “Le rôle des associations d’usagers dans le domaine du logement,” *Recherche sociale*, no. 46 (April-June 1973): 5-24.

⁴⁰² Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 294-303; Claude Neuschwander, “Pour un syndicalisme de l’habitat,” *Le Monde* 1 March 1966.

⁴⁰³ For a theoretical account of French self-management movements, see: Pierre Rosanvallon, *L’âge de l’autogestion* (Paris: Seuil, 1976). See also: Henri Lefebvre, *L’irruption de Nanterre au sommet* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968), 94-100.

⁴⁰⁴ See: “Nouvelles de nos bâtiments,” *L’A.S.*, no. 7 (February 1959): BNF. The expropriation of Barrage area began in 1959. According to Mezrahi, there were not many expropriations, because SCIC bought the homes by amicable agreement, see Mezrahi, *Regards et témoignages sur Sarcelles*, 159. According to Catherine Roth however, 138 homes were destroyed for the development, according to a 1966 census, see: Roth and Morin, eds., *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954-1976*, 14.

⁴⁰⁵ “Indépendance ou affiliation,” *L’A.S.*, no. 13 (March 1960): BNF.

⁴⁰⁶ “L’A.S. demande que l’on passe des project aux réalisations,” *L’A.S.*, no. 27 (April 1962): BNF.

that remain unknown, but the Barrage area was built as just planned: in the form of dense collective housing.

SCIC's general response to inhabitants' demands was initially, if not hostile, lukewarm. The company did not deem inhabitants' demands and suggestions very valuable; the architects were the experts, and with the modest input of sociologists, they would know best what collective facilities to provide and where. While the company's managers were aware that some of the collective facilities were only built years after they were first needed, their planning was considered a matter of expertise, for which no input from users was necessary.

Despite its neglect of inhabitants' direct demands, SCIC nevertheless took its own initiatives to improve their everyday lives. Around 1960, SCIC built a "Hall d'Exposition" for local inhabitants (figure 3.11). Located in the central park of the *grand ensemble*, this was a small pavilion for local exhibitions. It served as an advertising tool for SCIC, allowing the developer to showcase the latest phase of development to local inhabitants and potential homebuyers. At the same time however, it also hosted various art exhibitions, including a popular show of Van Gogh replicas. The key strategy of the developer to address inhabitants' dissatisfaction however, was urban design. In the later phases of housing development during the mid-1960s, commercial functions were located on the ground floor of residential buildings in order to create more lively urban spaces, amounting to a "return to the street."⁴⁰⁷ The principal urban center, planned around 1960 but only finished by 1972, was another gesture to this effect, and led local observers to conclude that "SCIC had the ambition to sensibly transform the general appearance of the estate and to a large extent the everyday environment of its inhabitants."⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ See Chapter 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Mezrahi, *Regards et témoignages sur Sarcelles*, 166. About the design and construction of the urban center of Sarcelles, see Chapter 5.



Figure 3.11: The Exhibition Hall of Sarcelles, located in the central *Parc Kennedy*, featuring a large model of the *grand ensemble* in the early 1960s (Source: CDC/SCIC, Fonds photographique Sarcelles).

Independently from the developer however, the local associations of Sarcelles seemed to understand the unprecedented nature their built environment and were convinced they could improve it themselves, based on their position as inhabitants and their local knowledge. Initially, these aspirations were expressed in terms remarkably similar to those propagated in planning circles and the chambers of the centralized state. Just a year after the publication of the *grille*, which had brought the notion of *animation* to the center of attention in efforts to address the social consequences of mass housing estates, the *Association Sarcelloise* wrote: “The city of stone (or concrete) is built, now it is up to us to make it viable, to animate it to the best of our abilities. That is the task l’A.S. [*Association Sarcelloise*] invites you for.”⁴⁰⁹ The conceptual transformation of the inhabitant into an active participant in the organization of the built environment - suggested by the nebulous set of ideas, institutions and practices surrounding the notion of *animation* - thus found its concrete parallels in the civic activism of their inhabitants.

In the history of Sarcelles examples of this activism are plenty. The municipal library for the *grand ensemble* for instance, now in its own purpose-built facility across from the principal urban center, grew out of a personal initiative starting with a makeshift installation inside the private apartment of a local activist. In October 1958, the Grosso family, dedicated members of the *Association Sarcelloise*, moved in together with many other first arrivals. Appalled as they were by the lack of collective amenities, they decided to open an informal public library inside their own apartment, furnished with books borrowed from the existing library of the village of Sarcelles. The initiative was so successful that from 1960 the library was moved into the new municipal administration building just completed in one of the local commercial centers. In 1964, the library moved again, temporarily to a larger space but further from the center, and in 1969 finally, it was installed permanently in the building it is still housed in today.⁴¹⁰

Such stories were remarkable but far from unique. René Kaës described several examples of successful local activism in his 1963 study. One case was in Palente-lès-Orchamps (Besançon), where inhabitants established their own cultural center.⁴¹¹ The initiative was started in the late 1950s by members of the local family association, which organized a movie club and book club in the gathering hall of a local café. Despite difficulties in financing, the initiative soon led to the creation of a Popular Cultural Center, which would shape local culture in the next decades.

If there ever was a utopian side to the *grands ensembles*, it was most likely located in the minds and intentions of a small but very active group of inhabitants, who saw their activism as one of “completing” the modernity of their new environment. They would do so by bringing it to life, literally. The generally recorded sentiments were often less heroic. The local periodical “En Famille” of the *Association des familles*⁴¹² in Sarcelles hardly saw their housing estate as a utopian world: “Sarcelles has not been conceived to develop the Society of tomorrow, but to overcome the housing crisis. Sarcelles is therefore unfortunately not more than a dreary hybrid

⁴⁰⁹ “La ville de pierre (ou de béton) est construite, à nous de la rendre viable, de l’animer dans la mesure de nos moyens. C’est à cette tâche que l’A.S. vous convie.” In: “La presse et les Grands Ensembles,” *L’A.S.*, no. 15 (June 1960): BNF.

⁴¹⁰ See: délibération municipale, 06.02.1959 (AM Sarcelles); Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 173-75.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 151-62.

⁴¹² The *Association des familles* of Sarcelles was first established as an independent association, but it joined UNAF in 1959.

between bedroom suburb and rational urban center.”⁴¹³ “Not hell nor paradise,”⁴¹⁴ it needed their initiative in order to work, so the association’s members realized: “Sarcelles , a model city? Yes, but in five or ten years!”⁴¹⁵ Jean Duquesne drew similar conclusions in his analysis of Sarcelles: “It is the task of the local inhabitants, with the help of time and the will to participate in social life, to humanize their city.”⁴¹⁶ Many residents, not just the activists, agreed that its unfinished, half-hearted modernism could be brought to success by their collective efforts.

Social life in the *grands ensembles* during the first decades of their existence was thus dominated by a culture of local activism that was precipitated by ideas of consumerism as much as social militancy. The *Association Sarcelloise* defined itself explicitly as “at once a syndicate of tenants, an association of users, and a grouping of consumers.”⁴¹⁷ What is crucial here is the unique way they came to assert themselves: no longer just as tenants of housing blocks, but as users of a new kind of city. A survey of Sarcelles’ local periodicals demonstrates that they perceived the environment in which they lived as a new city (*une ville neuve, ville nouvelle*) more than as a housing area (*une nouvelle cité*).⁴¹⁸ Compared to the housing projects of the interwar period Sarcelles was a new kind of place, a “welfare state city” with its own governance and consequently, its own political struggles. These struggles were defined as much by its monopolistic ownership structure as by its physical characteristics. In many other *grands ensembles*, the emphasis on the autonomy of the development and the attempts to turn it into a “real city” might have been less pronounced, leading perhaps to a less lively associational life.⁴¹⁹ Nevertheless, in similar ways, *grands ensembles* across the nation were characterized by a fundamental ambiguity between housing and city. This was reflected in the confusion about their denomination: while the term *grand ensemble* was most often used, other expressions, like *villes nouvelles, nouveaux ensembles d’habitation, ensembles urbains, grands blocs, and cités neuves* remained common as well throughout the period.⁴²⁰

Sarcelles offers both a unique and an exemplary case for the *grands ensembles* and the particular social life it gave rise to. Its notoriety, scale, isolation from its urban surroundings, social composition, incremental construction and social and ethnic diversity made it perhaps more of a

⁴¹³ “Sarcelles n’a pas été conçue en vue d’aménager la Société de demain mais pour pallier la crise du logement. Sarcelles n’est donc hélas qu’un triste hybride de cité-dortoir et de centre urbain rationnel.” In: “Sarcelles en noir ou en rose?,” *En famille* (November 1964): BNF.

⁴¹⁴ See: “Ni enfer ni paradis,” *L’A.S.*, no. 4 (September 1958): AM Sarcelles.

⁴¹⁵ “Sarcelles, une ville modèle? Oui, mais dans cinq ou dix ans!,” *L’A.S.*, no. 5 (October 1958): AM Sarcelles.

⁴¹⁶ “C’est aux Sarcellois, avec l’aide du temps et la volonté de participation à la vie sociale, qu’il appartient d’humaniser leur ville.” Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?*, 265.

⁴¹⁷ “[...] tout à la fois syndicat de locataires, association d’usagers, groupement de consommateurs.” In: “Augmenter le nombre des adhérents: une nécessité vitale pour l’A.S.,” *L’A.S.*, no. 9 (September 1962): BNF.

⁴¹⁸ Based on survey of local periodicals and the publications of local associations (AM Sarcelles).

⁴¹⁹ This was suggested in: Centre d’études des équipements résidentiels (CEDER) and Fondation pour la recherche sociale (FORS), *Etude des facteurs de développement de la vie sociale dans les ensembles nouveaux d’habitation* (Paris: Ministère de l’Équipement et du Logement, 1970), 186 (CDU).

⁴²⁰ Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 39.

veritable city than many other large-scale housing estates. Yet, it was still a city built around the state-aided provision of housing, and in that sense, it expressed the fundamental ambiguities that characterized urban citizenship and belonging in the *grands ensembles* more generally: that between housing and city, private and public, and most importantly, between tenants, users, consumers and citizens as the basis of everyday life and social engagement.

2. Management or Urban Politics

Just like Sarcelles served as an example - both good and bad - in questions of how to *build a grand ensemble*, so it would become a crucial case in efforts to *manage* them. The activism of Sarcelles's first generation of inhabitants would ultimately inform new approaches to urban management and planning, both locally and nationally. This began with the involvement of social scientific study. Sarcelles had, from the end of the 1950s, not only been at the center of public outcry and government concern, but had also caught the attention of a growing number of journalists and sociologists. Throughout the 1960s, researchers of all stripes flocked to Sarcelles to gage the future of urban France. Their studies were not only useful to politicians and opinion makers, but also to the observed themselves.

Already in 1960, the *Association Sarcelloise* suggested that the municipality involve the research institute CEDER for a sociological survey of the inhabitants. The association's explicit goal was to find ways to "adapt the architecture to its users."⁴²¹ That same year, out of concern with the urban quality of their built environment, its members visited other *grands ensembles* in the Paris region, notably that of Massy-Antony. Soon after, an article published in its periodical dismissed the architects, "who think they don't need to listen to inhabitants and their needs."⁴²² The association eventually decided to organize its own survey by questionnaires mailed to the four thousand households of the *grand ensemble*. Eventually more than 1,200 forms were returned, and the results were published in *L'A.S.* in 1962. The survey showed that inhabitants were relatively satisfied with their apartments and content with "the rectilinear conception of the *grand ensemble* and the importance given to green space." It also showed the weak number of participation of inhabitants in the available facilities, like the library and the social center.⁴²³ But most importantly, it demonstrated the lack of other facilities, most importantly shops which were insufficient both in number and variety. While it did not find a direct application, the initiative demonstrated the growing importance of scientific knowledge about users, meant to both legitimize inhabitants' claims and demands and to guide planners. About the survey, *L'A.S.* wrote: "[...] we have a sense of the inconveniences, the shortages, the imperfections, and the lacunae of one of those new towns, and as such, we can inform the technical expert [*technicien*] about the needs of the inhabitants of the homes he will be building or who already live in a city that needs to be improved."⁴²⁴

Sarcelles' activists continued to harness social scientific study for their own ambitions. When in 1963 the Ministry of Construction with the support of SCIC commissioned another research firm for a sociological survey, the local associations organized a public presentation of the study in

⁴²¹ "La presse et les Grands Ensembles."

⁴²² "Pour l'équipement collectif de la Cité, il reste encore beaucoup à faire...", *L'A.S.*, no. 16 (July 1960): BNF.

⁴²³ Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 171-72.

⁴²⁴ "[...] nous éprouvons les incon vénients, les insuffisances, les imperfections, les lacunes d'une de ces cités nouvelles, et par là même, nous pouvons éclairer le technicien sur les besoins des habitants des logements qu'il va construire ou qui vivent déjà dans une ville que l'on devra améliorer." In: "L'A.S. mène l'enquête," *L'A.S.*, no. 19 (December 1960): BNF. The survey was subsequently published in a special issue: "Habitants du Grand Ensemble de Sarcelles: Vous avez la parole... Une enquête de l'A.S.," *L'A.S.* (February 1961). Its results were published in *L'A.S.* no. 28 (June 1962) and no. 29 (September 1962).

the Exhibition Hall.⁴²⁵ Sarcelles was not the only place where such initiatives took place: in Bron-Parilly for example, the local associations similarly commissioned sociological surveys in the early 1960s in the hope of using its results to legitimize their demands.⁴²⁶

As Sarcelles grew exponentially in the early 1960s so did its associational life. Soon enough, tension began to rise between SCIC, the municipality, and the local associations led by the *Association Sarcelloise* (figure 3.12). The *Association Sarcelloise* submitted a petition to stop the next phase of development. SCIC, no doubt aware of the potential danger of these tensions and faced with a similar situation in more of its *grands ensembles*, decided to organize a conference addressing what it saw as the “problem of the management of the *grands ensembles*.”

SCIC’s housing management was extremely centralized: while it had established more than two hundred subsidiary development firms for the execution of local projects, the management of their real estate was all done in its Parisian headquarters. Jean Duquesne described the situation as “an extremely concentrated and centralized organization in the no. 1 Rue Euler building in Paris. Like some Ministry direction, the direction of management is divided into services [...]”⁴²⁷ Most likely, SCIC managers themselves were increasingly aware of the mismatch between the extremely centralized operation and the task of managing an immense collection of buildings and projects scattered all over France. The broader goal of the conference was therefore not only to smoothen the relations between developers and residents in all of SCIC’s housing developments, but to reform the company’s management altogether. While it might have been a harbinger of participation in the eyes of inhabitants, in the mind of the developer the initiative was undoubtedly also a strategy towards more efficient management. Its housing stock had grown exponentially since its inception and had simply become too large for direct management.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ See: Compagnie d'études industrielles et d'aménagement du territoire (CINAM), *La vie des ménages de quatre nouveaux ensembles de la région parisienne (1962-63)*, 2 volumes (Paris: Ministère de la Construction, 1963) (CAC 19771152/002). For the public presentation, see: "Sarcelles pass au crible," *En famille* (December 1964): BNF.

⁴²⁶ The *Comité d'aménagement de la région Lyonnaise*, an association of around 150 families, organized a survey in 1962, see: Bron-Parilly, Documentation folder (CAC 19771142/019).

⁴²⁷ “Il s’agit donc d’une organisation extrêmement concentrée et centralisée dans l’immeuble du n. 1 de la rue Euler à Paris. Comme une quelconque direction d’un Ministère, la direction de la gestion se divise en services (...)” Duquesne, *Vivre à Sarcelles?*, 46.

⁴²⁸ The SCIC archives, managed by CDC (groupe Icade today), are unaccessible, which means it is not entirely clear what motivated SCIC to organize resident councils. My interpretation is based on the periodicals published by SCIC and CDC, available for consultation at the CDC/SCIC archives in Paris.



Figure 3.12: Local manifestation against the developer SCIC in the early 1960s, photo by Jacques Windenberger (Source: Sarcelles Maison du Patrimoine).

The meeting was held in Sarcelles on 11 January 1964 under the direction of Bloch-Lainé. Not only for researchers but also for those in charge, Sarcelles, again, constituted the perfect site of study: “[...] Sarcelles was a privileged site for two reasons: Sarcelles was already very well known, the symbol of the *grands ensembles* and thus everything we did there would be exemplary. If we would find something interesting in Sarcelles, it was known and could be done elsewhere. Sarcelles had a large enough size for attempting interesting experiments.”⁴²⁹

Following the conference SCIC commissioned the National Foundation of Political Sciences (*Fondation nationale des sciences politiques*) to do a social scientific study examining the possibilities for participation in the management of their housing estates. The foundation created a working group comprised of jurists, sociologists, and leaders of civil society organizations. Their work resulted in what was called the Sérieyx Report. This report proposed to distinguish two domains for increased participation, “that of the housing as such, where it considers that the decision of the landlord needs to remain sovereign, with nuances depending on whether it concerns rents or charges; and that of the socio-cultural facilities, for which it recommends co-

⁴²⁹ “Or, dans une expérience de ce genre, Sarcelles était un endroit privilégié pour deux raisons: Sarcelles était déjà très connue: le symbole des grands ensembles et donc tout ce qu’on y faisait était exemplaire: si on trouvait quelque chose d’intéressant à Sarcelles, ça se savait et ça risquait de se faire ailleurs. Sarcelles avait une taille suffisante pour qu’on puisse y tenter des expériences intéressantes.” Jannoud, *La première ville nouvelle*, 115.

management.”⁴³⁰ This implied, so the report argued, better information and the consultation of inhabitants in the realm of housing as well as shared decision-making for the collective facilities.

To this end, the report proposed the creation of an “Association of residents of the *grand ensemble* (*Association des résidents du grand ensemble*), which would operate via a Residents Council (*Conseil de résidents*) comprised of representatives elected by the inhabitants and delegates of local associations. After long negotiations with the various organizations representing inhabitants - national family organizations, tenant associations, and some local associations like the *Association Sarcelloise* - all parties agreed to a convention.⁴³¹ Signed on 24 June 1965, the agreement instituted such *Conseils de résidents* in twelve *grands ensembles*, ten of which in the Paris region.⁴³² Each council would work to regularize relations between developer and residents in three particular domains: rents, charges, and socio-cultural amenities. The convention would last for two years and would be tacitly renewable. First elections were in 1966. Two years later, new elections were held - this time for 3 years - and in 1969, eleven new councils were created in other *grands ensembles*, bringing the total to twenty three (figure 3.13). SCIC was initially very laudatory about the agreement. The family organizations were relatively positive about it, regarding it as at least a sign of democratic politics. The more militant tenant organizations nevertheless were soon critical of the agreement.

⁴³⁰ “celui du logement proprement dit où, estime-t-il, la décision du propriétaire doit demeurer souveraine, avec des nuances selon qu’il s’agit de loyers ou des charges; celui des équipements socio-culturels, pour lesquels il préconise la co-gestion.” In: Groupe de travail sur les relations entre promoteurs et résidents dans les grands ensembles, *Les relations entre propriétaires et locataires dans les grands ensembles* (Paris: Fondation nationale des sciences politiques / SCIC, June 1964) (CDU).

⁴³¹ The participating organizations were the *Union nationale des associations familiales* (UNAF), the *Confédération nationale des locataires* (CNL), the *Confédération nationale des associations populaires familiales* (CNAPF), the *Confédération syndicale des familles* (CSF) and the local Sarcelles ones, *Association Sarcelloise* and the *Association Familiale* of Sarcelles.

⁴³² See: J.M. Boucher and Elisabeth Théry, "L'expérience des conseils de résidents," *Habitat et vie sociale*, no. 2 (January - February 1974): BNF.



Figure 3.13: *Conseil de résidents* election day, photo by Jacques Windenberger (Source: Sarcelles Maison du Patrimoine).

During the following years, the councils in most *grands ensembles* were remarkably energetic. Sarcelles' council demanded the developer to legitimize all its rent increases by providing more information to inhabitants, and it won its struggle for the establishment of a new three-year rental contract guaranteeing protection from sudden rent increases. The council also made proposals to modify the communal charges, at least some of which were taken into account. With respect to the third domain, that of the co-management of socio-cultural facilities, the councils did not appear to be very motivated at first - perhaps detracted by the complexity of their financing and functioning. During the following years however, the councils demanded a more powerful voice in the working of social centers and youth centers, many of which were managed by SCIC's organization *Animation, Loisirs Familiaux, Action Sociale*. This was a non-profit organization established by SCIC to address social issues in its housing developments. In Sarcelles, it managed the new community center of Vignes Blanches that SCIS had just completed.

Some of the councils gradually broadened their goals and began to demand direct participation in issues of urban planning. Even SCIC itself was initially an advocate for such an approach.⁴³³ *Ville-nouvelles*, the new local periodical of Sarcelles' council uniting the *Association Sarcelloise*,

⁴³³ See for instance the article by Jean Lagarde, chef du service "études de l'Habitat" at SCIC: Lagarde, Jean, "Les grands ensembles douze ans après" in *Urbanisme* no. 106 1968, p. 30-34.

the *Association des familles*, and the *Union des copropriétaires* was a mouthpiece for these ambitions (figure 3.14). The *Conseil de résidents* saw the local knowledge and actions of inhabitants as the perfect tools for a new, “intelligent urbanism.”⁴³⁴



Figure 3.14: The periodical *Ville-nouvelles*, issue of December 1968 (Source: AM Sarcelles).

Meanwhile, the municipality of Sarcelles began to steer its own course with regards to these urban affairs. Initially the mayor's office was both ill-equipped and ill-prepared for the arrival of the *grand ensemble* “from Paris,” and remained practically silent during the first phases of construction. During the early 1960s however, encouraged by the growing contestation of local associations, it began to develop a more active interest in urbanism. In 1962, after an address by Noël Lemaesquier, the architect of La Dame Blanche in the neighboring municipality of Garges, the municipal council agreed that a program of studies for the future development of their community was indispensable.⁴³⁵ That year it also established an advisory committee meant to

⁴³⁴ “c'est avec de nombreuses remarques, petites ou grandes, que nous pouvons réaliser concrètement un urbanisme intelligent. Nous invitons donc tous les Sarcellois à faire preuve d'imagination, à critiquer, à proposer.” In: “Avec l'A.S. construisez Lochères,” *Ville-nouvelles*, no. 1 (1968): AM Sarcelles.

⁴³⁵ See: municipal deliberation, 8 June 1962 (AM Sarcelles).

allow inhabitants to participate in decisions of urban development. Despite its efforts to bring together representatives of the *Association Sarcelloise*, the *Association des familles*, the local youth center, the social center and the local sports association, the municipal council was not at all successful, and there was considerable mistrust between the municipal council and the local associations. In 1963, the council voiced concerns about SCIC's plans for future developments, in particular their high density of collective housing and purported lack of collective facilities. It began to obstruct further development by putting building permits on hold, and decided not to approve any construction until a detailed local survey was done to assess the current situation and inhabitants' "real" needs.⁴³⁶ Initially however, it lacked the necessary leverage to make such demands.⁴³⁷

Municipal actions only really changed in pace with the political shift of 1965, when the energetic communist Henri Canacos took over as mayor.⁴³⁸ Under his leadership, the municipality contested the developer more resolutely and in more specific terms. In a 1965 letter to SCIC, the municipal council again criticized its plan for future development: in the council's eyes, the housing program was too dense, the new neighborhoods did not include the necessary schools and commercial facilities, and when they did they were badly located. The secondary school was to be built on the other side of a future highway, cut off from the residential neighborhoods. SCIC replied dryly that it had taken all points into account.⁴³⁹

During the following years, the municipality began to systematically deny building permits. It formally demanded in-depth social scientific study preliminary to any future urban development on its territory. It also stipulated that sufficient land be reserved *inside* the *grand ensemble* for future collective facilities. Most importantly, it decided to hire its own experts for municipal urban planning.⁴⁴⁰ The expertise they needed was both sociological and architectural. The municipality hired ORGECO, a consultancy firm specialized in sociological research, for two studies: one specifically of the collective facilities, and another of the general technical, financial, and administrative situation. At the same time it also commissioned an architect-urbanist, Jean Bailly, to draw up more comprehensive plans for the future urban development of the municipality.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁶ For Sarcelles phase VIII and phase "Entree Ville Est," the municipality denied building permits based on the lack of an overall plan for the collective facilities, the high density of the proposed development, and the insufficiency of green space and parking, see: municipal deliberation, 30 October 1963 (AM Sarcelles); délibération municipale 13 December 1963 (AM Sarcelles).

⁴³⁷ Building permits needed to be approved at the municipal level, but the decisions could be trumped by the head of the department or directly by the Ministry of Construction.

⁴³⁸ Henri Canacos stayed on as mayor until 1983. On municipal politics, see: Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*, 83-84. See also the personal account: Henri Canacos, *Sarcelles ou le béton apprivoisé* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1979).

⁴³⁹ See: SCIC letter to the mayor on 8 December 1965 (AM Sarcelles).

⁴⁴⁰ See: municipal deliberation, 27 January 1966; municipal deliberation, 25 March 1966; municipal deliberation, 18 November 1966 (AM Sarcelles).

⁴⁴¹ In 1964, the municipality decided to hire an urbanist, Noël Lemaesquier, despite the opposition of council member Henri Canacos, who argued he would be on SCIC's side, see: municipal deliberation, 21 February 1964 (AM Sarcelles). After the election of Canacos as mayor, Jean Bailly will become appointed instead, see: municipal deliberation, 29 October 1965 (AM Sarcelles).

These plans aimed first of all to unify the existing village and the *grand ensemble*. In between these two separated urban entities, Jean Bailly proposed the construction of a new urban center containing administrative functions as well as housing and a connecting park. His plan also included the renovation of the existing village center, the implantation of an industrial zone to create local jobs, and a zone of low-rise housing on the yet undeveloped other side of the municipality (figure 3.15). The municipal council decided to commission Jean Bailly for the execution of the village side of the plan and SCIC’s architect Henri-Labourdette for the *grand ensemble* side.⁴⁴² During the following years, it spared little effort to convince inhabitants about the virtues of these overall plans (figure 3.16). Henri-Labourdette used the ORGECO study to create a synthetic map of existing and future collective facilities, on the basis of which the municipality could approach SCIC (figure 3.17).⁴⁴³ The municipality succeeded in obliging the developer to provide terrains and funding for the collective facilities, in exchange for approving its building permit applications for the final phases of the *grand ensemble*, most importantly its final “Entry to the City” phase (figure 2.20).⁴⁴⁴

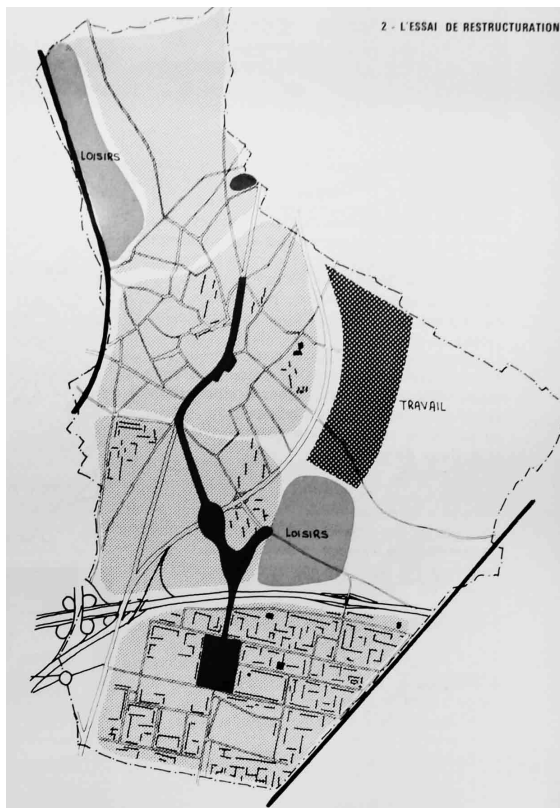


Figure 3.15: Jean Bailly’s municipal urbanism project that promised to bring the *grand ensemble* and existing village together, 1968 (Source: “Sarcelles” *Urbanisme* 110 “Etudes urbaines” (1969): 35).

⁴⁴² See: municipal deliberation, 12 January 1967 (AM Sarcelles)

⁴⁴³ See: municipal deliberation, 3 March 1967; municipal deliberation, 17 May 1967; Henri Canacos presentation for the municipal council, 6 December 1968 (AM Sarcelles).

⁴⁴⁴ The agreement between SCIC and the municipality was signed on 25 September 1968. and approved 31 July 1969 (AM Sarcelles).

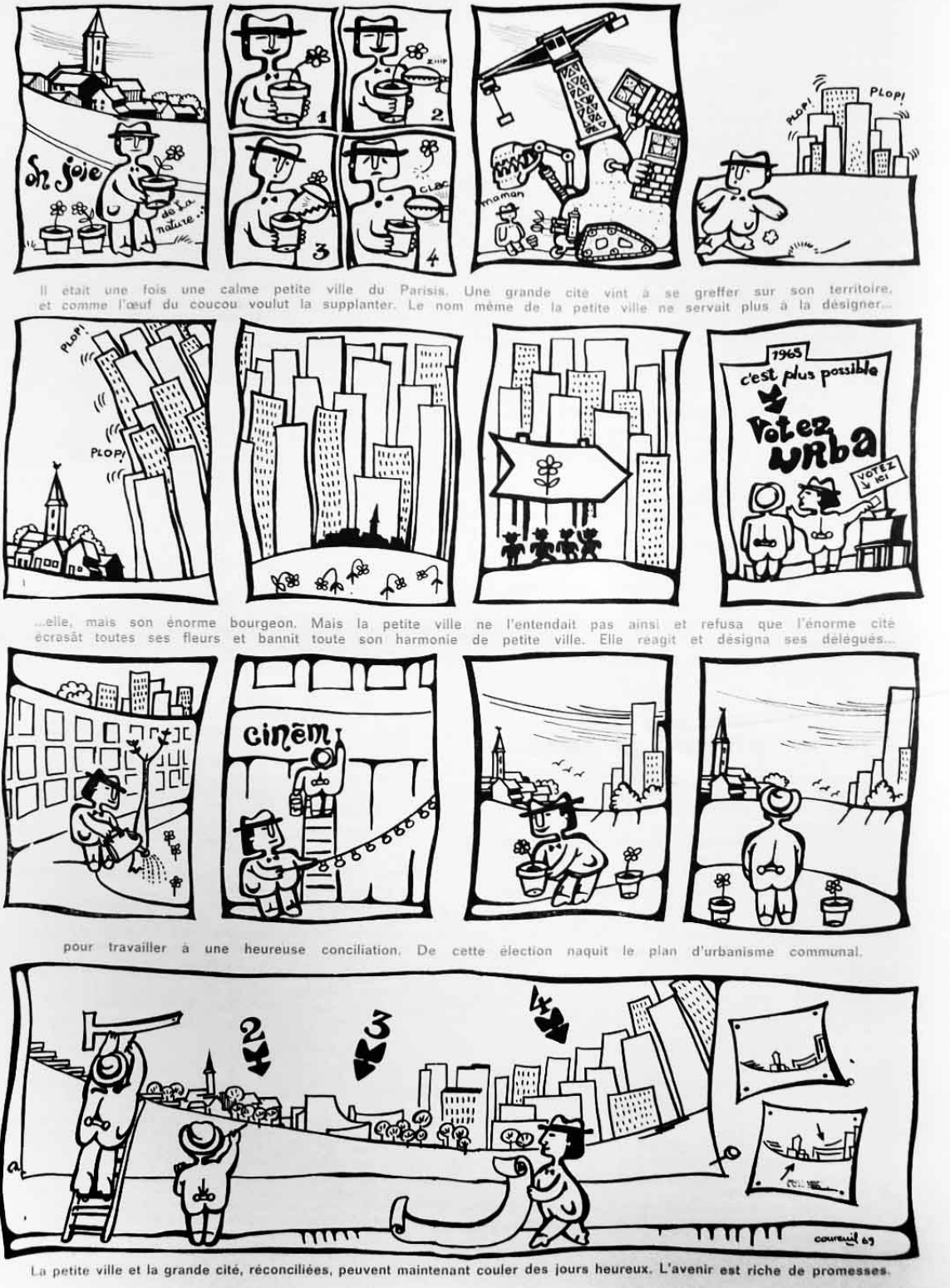


Figure 3.17: A story of reconciliation between *grand ensemble* and old village, cartoon from the *Bulletin Officiel Municipal*, décembre 1969, special theme issue “Urbanisme” (Source: AM Sarcelles).

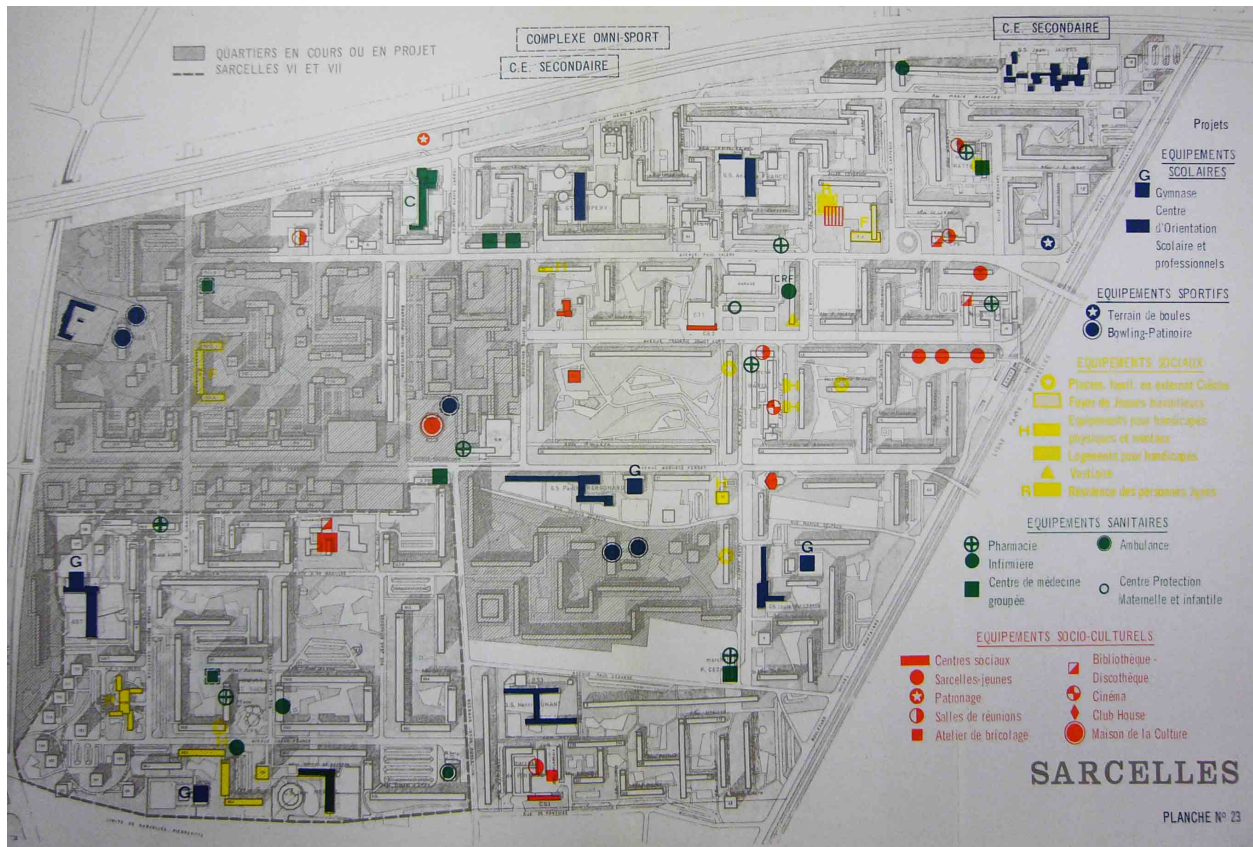


Figure 3.16: Map of collective facilities, by ORGECO, around 1968 (Source: AM Sarcelles).

The *Conseil de résidents* was kept out of these negotiations and had not been informed about it, neither by SCIC nor by the municipality. Despite the fact that certain of their recommendations had been taken into account, many of its adherents felt disillusioned and betrayed.⁴⁴⁵ While the council remained faithful to its militant position - in 1969 it went even further by demanding *auto-gestion*, instead of *co-gestion* - it did not succeed in getting a real voice in urban planning decisions. The agreements between municipality and developer had cut them off from this. One of its remaining goals, the construction of a second community center, was delayed.⁴⁴⁶ In subsequent years the council lost its vigor. After discussions about its powerlessness in what activists decried as a general climate of passivity, the periodical *Ville-nouvelles* was stopped in 1971.⁴⁴⁷ Subsequent elections of the council drew fewer and fewer crowds, and the percentage of

⁴⁴⁵ The *Conseil de résidents* was not informed despite a signed agreement between the municipal council and SCIC in december 1967 about obligatory consultation of the council before SCIC planning decisions. The mayor also refused the council access to the ORGECO and architects' study at first. See: "Urbanisme," *Ville-nouvelles*, no. 5 (1968): AM Sarcelles; "Si la SCIC ne modifie pas son attitude, le Conseil de résidents est décidé à dénoncer la Convention," *Ville-nouvelles*, no. 6 (1968): AM Sarcelles.

⁴⁴⁶ See: "Le Conseil des Résidents... son action," *Ville-nouvelles* 24(December 1970): BNF.

⁴⁴⁷ See: "A quoi sert ce journal?," *Ville-nouvelles*, no. 31 (July 1971): BNF.

inhabitants actively involved diminished continually.⁴⁴⁸ Ultimately, rather than the *Conseil* it was the municipality which achieved an increasingly important role vis-à-vis SCIC.⁴⁴⁹

A 1975 study of Sarcelles succinctly represented this political evolution in a graphic diagram (figure 3.18). In its initial period, from around 1954 until 1965, the various inhabitant associations - first informally led by the *Association Sarcelloise* and then officially by the *Conseil des résidents* - functioned as outside pressure groups attempting to intrude the closed decision-making process of the developer. Then, in a second period (1965-71) the developer accepted inhabitants' input, initially mainly from the *Conseil de résidents*, but increasingly also from the municipality led by Henri Canacos, who had launched his own process of negotiation independently. Both the *Conseil de résidents* and the municipality represented inhabitants and claimed to be the legitimate institution to do so. Eventually however, the council lost from the municipality, inaugurating a third period after 1971 in which the inhabitants could participate in decision-making via the municipality through “neighborhood unions” and “enlarged committees.” This diagram later inspired Manuel Castells and his colleagues in their well-known study of social movements in the Paris region: they published an almost identical diagram with a similar periodization.⁴⁵⁰

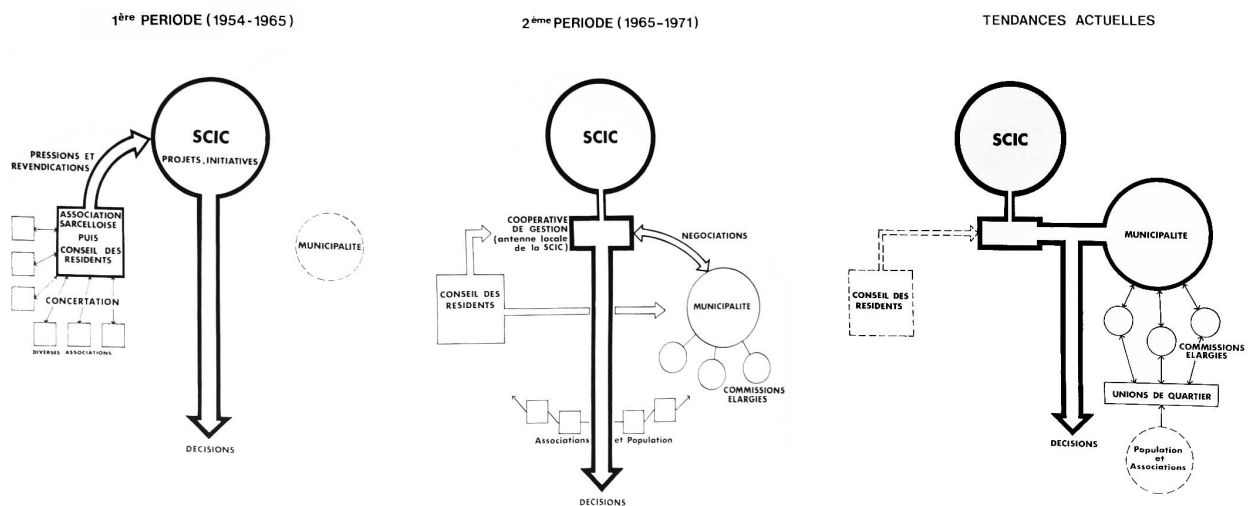


Figure 3.18: Diagram of the evolution of political negotiations in Sarcelles, in a sociological study commissioned by SCIC (Source: CDC/SCIC, Architecture et construction, dossier Sarcelles-Lochères, 1954-1974).

⁴⁴⁸ Jannoud, *La première ville nouvelle*, 118.

⁴⁴⁹ This dynamic is relatively typical of the conflict between the newly developed urban entities and traditional municipalities in France at this time. A similar situation occurred for the *villes nouvelles*, see Chapter 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Manuel Castells and his colleagues describe roughly the same three periods, “emergence of protest (1957-1965),” “syndicalism of collective consumption (1965-1969),” and “dialectics between syndicalism of collective consumption and municipal management (1969-1974).” See: Manuel Castells, Eddy Cherki, Francis Godard et al., *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne* (Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1978), 359-61.

When contemporaneous observers made the balance sheet of the *Conseil de résidents* in SCIC's *grands ensembles* in the beginning of the 1970s, they were forced to acknowledge the modesty of their achievements. Concrete results were a long-term lease contract offering better conditions to tenants, a system of accountability with regards to communal charge and maintenance, and a certain evolution towards the co-management of socio-cultural facilities. In terms of urbanism, some observers vaguely referred to "a certain rehabilitation of the *grand ensemble*" and "the improvement of the built environment."⁴⁵¹ Concretely, the *Conseil de résidents* of Poissy was able to slow down the extension of an industrial zone that it considered detrimental to the *grand ensemble*. In Sarcelles, the *Conseil de résidents* diverted plans for the construction of a car park building away from the central park.⁴⁵² Despite these successes there was a great deal of disappointment about the achievements of the councils, particularly in terms of urbanism.⁴⁵³ For the *Confédération nationale des locataires*, the experiment "was not a panacea. In their current state, the councils do not offer the possibility for a veritable participation."⁴⁵⁴

This kind of disappointment was nevertheless not a sign of status-quo. The experiment of participatory management in the *grands ensembles* might not have delivered on all of its promises, but it did result in a decentralization of decision-making and gave local municipalities an important voice in matters of urbanism. While SCIC constructed most of Sarcelles from the 1950s onwards, the municipality was now in charge of its own urban planning projects. The experiment thus set an important precedent for the political decentralization of the 1980s.

The political struggles in Sarcelles were indirectly influenced by residential mobility patterns with implicitly racial overtones. The moment when the *Conseil de résidents* lost its importance coincided with the departure of many of Sarcelles' first generation of activists.⁴⁵⁵ Immigrant families directly from abroad or from peripheral *bidonvilles* (shantytowns) tended to move into the older, less desirable flats left behind by French middle class families, many of them buying their own apartments or single-family homes in the suburbs. The arrival of the *pièds noir* and immigrant workers in the early 1960s was only the beginning of a social and racial diversification. The newly arriving inhabitants created a different social dynamics, which weakened the solidarity that was at the basis of many inhabitant associations. Contrary to the perception of the first activists, associational life continued to flourish, but was increasingly organized around culturally and ethnically defined interests.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵¹ "une certaine réhabilitation du grand ensemble" and "l'amélioration de l'habitat." In: Boucher and Théry, "L'expérience des conseils de résidents," 19.

⁴⁵² The plan for a parking structure inside the central Kennedy Park was quickly abandoned after protest by the local associations. See: "Parking dans le parc Kennedy," *Ville-nouvelles*, no. 30 (June 1970).

⁴⁵³ "Le Conseil des Résidents... son action."

⁴⁵⁴ "[...] n'est pas la panacée. En état actuel, les conseils n'offrent pas la possibilité d'une véritable participation." In: Boucher and Théry, "L'expérience des conseils de résidents," 25.

⁴⁵⁵ In 1970, *Ville-nouvelles* published news of some famous local inhabitants leaving Sarcelles.

⁴⁵⁶ See: Municipal periodicals, early 1980s (AM Sarcelles).

Also in class terms the *grand ensemble* diversified.⁴⁵⁷ Later phases of construction in Sarcelles included areas of luxury middle-class condominiums. This further concentrated the poor and the immigrants in the older, less desirable housing stock. While it initially served as a homogenizing and standardizing force, both socially and architecturally, housing was increasingly dealt with as an explicitly differentiating consumer product: for Sarcelles, this meant not only more luxurious condos, but also a larger diversity in unit size, including studios and one-bedroom apartments. With regards to this evolution, the Communist municipality did not just stand by: it encouraged SCIC to diversify its housing stock and to explicitly attract middle-class homebuyers (in the French socio-professional category of *cadres* or class of executives) in order to create the diversity of a “normal city.”⁴⁵⁸

In 1972, Sarcelles inaugurated an internal public transport line connecting the old village with the *grand ensemble*. It was the first of this kind in the Paris region.⁴⁵⁹ As the *grand ensemble* neared achievement, and the remarkably homogeneous character of the initial population gave way to intense social and racial diversification, Sarcelles became increasingly a city in and for itself. In the early 1970s, a census revealed 198 ethnicities or nationalities living in Sarcelles. At the same time, income levels were higher than the national average, contradicting the stereotype of the *grand ensemble* as the “place of the poor.”⁴⁶⁰ Yet, just like in other new developments, the concentration of a homogeneously undesirable housing stock led to an increasing problematization in terms of social segregation.

This brief episode of Sarcelles shows not only the conflicts, but especially the *interconnectedness* between political elites, high civil servants, experts, local activists, and inhabitant associations in the development of “participatory urbanism,” both as a discursive device and a veritable quality of the planning process. Some actors and institutions crossed these different spheres by working on multiple levels, by oscillating between national and local domains of action. Claude Neuschwander, the first leader of Sarcelles’ *Conseil de résidents* for example, was not only a local inhabitant and activist, but also an influential actor in the political scene.⁴⁶¹ Such figures saw participation both as a positive contribution to national efficiency and development, and a

⁴⁵⁷ See the municipal census of 1968 published in the *Bulletin Officiel Municipal* in January 1970. This census showed that the population of Sarcelles was becoming more and more similar to the national average. See also: Castells, Cherki, Godard et al., *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne*, 361.

⁴⁵⁸ Jannoud, *La première ville nouvelle*.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁶⁰ In 1959, the population of Sarcelles was 47 percent working class; in the early 1970s it was only 33 percent, less than the average for the Paris suburbs. During the same period, the social group of “cadres moyens” increase from 17 to 31 percent, more than the national average. See: *Ibid.*, 26, 126. This contradicts the general opinion that equals *grands ensembles* and social housing, with the latter becoming as Jacques Barou calls it, “the place of the poor.” See: Barou, *La place du pauvre: Histoire et géographie sociale de l’habitat HLM*.

⁴⁶¹ Born in 1933 and graduated in 1959 from the *Ecole centrale des arts et manufactures*, Claude Neuschwander started working at Publicis, a large advertising and public relations firm, and became the number two of the group ten years later. He was administrator at the *Fédération des cadres CFDT* between 1962 and 1970, and was an influential member of the PSU between 1967 and 1973. See: J.M. Offner, “Développement local et réseaux: Un entretien avec Claude Neuschwander,” *Flux*, no. 20 (1995): 46-49. See also his role in the promotion of the *villes nouvelles* in Chapter 4.

sine qua non for local development.⁴⁶² The ideology of participation in urbanism did not only grow out of social contestation “from below” but also “from above,” out of the initiatives and institutions of the centralized state apparatus itself as it was engaged in developing, projecting, building, and amending its urbanism. Participation was not a purely emancipatory device at the hands of inhabitants faced with an all-powerful state; it also entailed opportunities for a more efficient way of dealing with housing, happily seized by those in charge; and it also proved useful in the co-optation of inhabitants’ activism and the smoothening of contestation.

Most importantly, the history of Sarcelles confirms the importance of mediation as the precondition of participation - not only because of the involvement of associations or an elite of militants, but because of the crucial role of expert knowledge about the unknown world of the user.⁴⁶³ From the early 1960s, users themselves began to understand the role of the sociological survey as a mediating instrument that could translate their needs into a concrete program for improving their built environment. At the same time, a network of planning experts galvanized the idea that sociological inquiry was a necessary preliminary to planning, and that planning was therefore a matter of the social as much as the physical fabric.

⁴⁶² Paul Noddings, president of UNAF, saw participation in such terms, see: Paul Noddings, "La participation familiale," *En famille* (November 1964).

⁴⁶³ Already in 1970, observers warned that participation entailed the danger of an “elitism of militants,” which would obstruct the very fundamentals of participation. Only 7 % of inhabitants were part of inhabitant associations. See: H. Toinet, *Animation, participation, information dans les villes nouvelles: Comparaison avec l'expérience britannique. Rapport de stage* (Paris: Ministère de l'équipement et du logement, November 1970) (19910585/016).

3. After-Effects: The Experts of Participation

In the wake of the student and workers' revolts of 1968 the ideas of participation in the realm of the built environment transformed in two directions. On the one hand, intellectuals from the left - under influence of a renewed Marxism - advanced more fundamental critiques of the state apparatus and its role in the built environment: Manuel Castells's 1974 *Monopolville* used the case of Dunkerque to reveal the complicity of mass housing provision with industrial capitalism, Edmund Preteceille's *La production des grands ensembles* published that same year, described them as expressions of capitalist contradiction, and other researchers at the Center for Urban Sociology (*Centre de sociologie urbaine*) which at that time brought together some of France's most fervent marxists, advanced similar critiques of state-led urbanism.⁴⁶⁴ On the other hand however, the ideas of participation were taken up in a series of government initiatives during the early 1970s, which meant to overcome social critique and change existing urban practices.

Within the *Ministère de l'équipement*, sociological analyses preliminary to urban planning had slowly become standard practice by the end of the 1960s. Before 1968 however, many of these studies were purely instrumental to already set methods of planning, and thus hardly allowed for a critical position: their aim was to better know "user needs" in order to increase satisfaction levels.⁴⁶⁵ The *grand ensemble* remained a dominant model in practice, despite mounting evidence of its problematic consequences. One of the big changes precipitated by the events of 1968 was the development of urban research by the state: more theoretically informed, more critical, and more closely related to the development of academic sociology and other disciplines, this new wave of contractual research focused in particular on the social dimensions and consequences of state-led urban planning.⁴⁶⁶ While relatively independent, this surge of research was still meant by the state to eventually influence policy-making. Critique and reform were thus more closely entangled than the rhetoric of many leftist intellectuals - vigorously critiquing a state apparatus that nevertheless supported their livelihoods by financing their research - would appear to suggest.

The ideas and experiments with participation of the 1960s had gradually brought together social militants and local activists, politicians and civil servants, local associations and civil society organizations, academics, urban planners, state research institutions, and contractual research firms.⁴⁶⁷ While they did not make up a "movement" within a single milieu, they co-shaped the contested notion of participation as a loose network of individuals and institutions in a variety of professional and ideological contexts. Supported by the critical and activist momentum of 1968, and amplified by the availability of public money for research, particularly in the domain of

⁴⁶⁴ Manuel Castells and Francis Godard, *Monopolville: analyse des rapports entre l'entreprise, l'État et l'urbain à partir d'une enquête sur la croissance industrielle et urbaine de la région de Dunkerque* (Paris: Mouton, 1974); Preteceille, *La production des grands ensembles: Essai d'analyse des déterminants de l'environnement urbain*; Topalov, "Centre de recherche: Le Centre de sociologie urbaine."

⁴⁶⁵ In terms of housing, this kind of research focused mainly on defining the housing needs of specific social groups, like the disabled, the "socially maladjusted", migrant workers, the elderly, and so on. See: the archive deposits of *GRECOH, Service de l'habitation*, under direction of André Trintignac (CAC 19771141, 19771142, 19771152).

⁴⁶⁶ See Chapter 4.

⁴⁶⁷ See Chapter 4.

urban research, this network found its most clear expression at the beginning of the 1970s in the establishment of the program *Habitat et vie sociale* or “Dwelling and Social Life.”

To assure the application of new urban policies, the Ministry organized, with the help of the Foundation for Social Research (*Fondation pour la recherche sociale*) a series of regional seminars in 1972. Culminating in a national conference in Dourdan in February 1973, the initiative led to the creation of a coordination group charged with the development of social life in housing estates all across the nation. This group, also under the title *Habitat et vie sociale*, was the place where many advocates of participation in the early 1970s found common ground. The group’s main goal was to assemble a set of “best practices” and key precedents in all social aspects of housing and urban planning: participation, consultation procedures, *animation*, the development of associational life, and so on.⁴⁶⁸ André Trintignac, a civil servant at the Ministry who had been at the forefront of sociological research on housing from the late 1950s onwards, was one of the key members of the group.⁴⁶⁹ He was in charge of coordinating the meetings and local initiatives and worked closely with regional administrators who were in charge of developing exemplary projects. Paul Rendu, director of the *Centre de sociologie urbaine*, was in charge of the research division.

The group’s main public outlet was a periodical with the same name. It featured analyses of existing cases that could be useful for the development of new planning methods. The by now well-studied experiment of the *Conseils de résidents* figured prominently.⁴⁷⁰ And so did the case of Grenoble, where during the 1960s neighborhood units had led to the creation of a new political movement, the *Groupes d’Action Municipale*. Soon established all across the nation, these groups had substantially influenced urban planning practices, for which Grenoble remained an exemplary case.⁴⁷¹ Inspired by these existing cases, novel experiments were started through collaboration with regional administrators. In the Bouches-du-Rhone region for instance, following the regional seminar that was organized there in September 1972, the prefect of the department established a regional study group to develop participatory planning projects. These included new housing developments, like at the ZAC La Rousse in Miramas, where 600 new HLM dwelling units were designed by a team of architects and sociologists after an architectural competition.⁴⁷² It also included projects to improve existing *grands ensembles*, like the ZUP no. 1 in Marseille, and social *animation* projects to welcome inhabitants to new housing developments.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁸ See: André Trintignac, "Début d’inventaire des dispositifs de concertation," *Habitat et vie sociale*, no. 1 (November - December 1973): BNF.

⁴⁶⁹ See Chapter 1. See also: "Le Groupe permanent de coordination “Habitat et vie sociale”," *Habitat et vie sociale*, no. 1 (November - December 1973): BNF.

⁴⁷⁰ Boucher and Théry, "L’expérience des conseils de résidents."

⁴⁷¹ See: J.M. Boucher and A. Gotman, "Animation globale et équipement intégrés: Le quartier de l’Arlequin à Grenoble," *Habitat et vie sociale*, no. 1 (November - December 1973): BNF; Albert Rousseau and Roger Beaunez, *L’expérience de Grenoble: L’action municipale, ses possibilités, ses limites* (Les Editions Ouvrières 1971).

⁴⁷² See Chapter 6 for the emergence of such new kind of architecture for collective housing during the 1970s.

⁴⁷³ J. Sebastianelli, "Dans les bouches-du-Rhône, un dispositif de concertation “Habitat et vie sociale”," *Habitat et vie sociale*, no. 2 (January - February 1974).

Often modest in scale and scattered all over France, these projects reveal the contradictions of creating local participation by means of a centralized governmental think-tank. And yet, while the *Habitat et vie sociale* initiative was in itself not very successful, it did set the scene for the next decades of urban policy in France. In 1977, the group's initiatives were further expanded to include actions focused on the rehabilitation of the first *grands ensembles*. In 1982, the Quillot law and the National Committee for the Social Development of Neighborhoods (*Commission nationale de développement social des quartiers*) further institutionalized the participation of local associations in urban planning procedures.⁴⁷⁴ Over the following decades, these policies would become generally known as the *politique de la ville*, which scholars have pointed out was central in the stigmatization of *grands ensembles* as problem neighborhoods.⁴⁷⁵ Equally striking about these urban policies however, was the way they instituted sociological study, social work, and a bureaucratized procedure of local participation as unquestioned elements of any urban planning project. The state-sponsored research and experimentation with participatory planning of the 1969s and 1970s would thus lead to the dominance of user participation as subject of expertise in planning, rather than a direct transfer of agency to individual users or inhabitants. The history of Alma-Gare in Roubaix, in which local contestation led to the creation of a public workshop for urbanism, is another staple of urban participation in 1970s France. While it was in many respects a unique and isolated example, it also showed how local and national levels of activism were closely related, and amounted to a professionalization of activists and the development of an expertise of participation.⁴⁷⁶

Sarcelles, again, offers a very suggestive illustration of this situation at a later stage. More than a decade after the experiments with the resident councils, the large-scale project to restructure the commercial center of Les Flanades addressed users in an unprecedented way.⁴⁷⁷ During its long planning and construction, the center had been a beacon of hope for the municipality and local associations in their ambitions to improve Sarcelles' everyday environment.⁴⁷⁸ After its grand opening in 1974 however, the center had degraded rapidly and by the end of the decade a "revitalization" was already called for. At that time, planners and local activists alike cast the project as an ideal opportunity for the direct participation of inhabitants in the built environment. Pressured by the municipality, planners began by organizing a big "public consultation" project, paid for by the developer, a subsidiary of SCIC, and executed by a team of experts including ORGECO, the firm employed by the municipality for its own planning projects a decade before, the private consultancy firm COFREMCA,⁴⁷⁹ and Larry Smith & Co, the consultants who had

⁴⁷⁴ See: Françoise de Barros, "Genèse de la politique de Développement Social des Quartiers: Éléments de formalisation d'un "problème des banlieues"" (DEA Thesis, Université Paris 1, 1994).

⁴⁷⁵ See: Sylvie Tissot, *L'Etat et les quartiers: Genèse d'une catégorie de l'action publique* (Paris: Seuil, 2007); Jacques Donzelot, *Faire société: La politique de la ville aux Etats-Unis et en France* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

⁴⁷⁶ See: Michael Miller, *The Representation of Place: Urban Planning and Protest in France and Great Britain, 1950-1980* (Aldershot / Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2003).

⁴⁷⁷ See: Consultation revitalisation Les Flanades (AM Sarcelles W25).

⁴⁷⁸ "L'avenir de Sarcelles sera ce que tous ensemble nous le ferons: résidents (parents, enfants, éducateurs), associations, municipalité, aussie bien que la SCIC" In: "Flâner dans Sarcelles," *Sarcelles journal des associations*, no. 4 (1980): AM Sarcelles, 11.

⁴⁷⁹ See Chapter 1.

worked closely on shopping mall development with Victor Gruen.⁴⁸⁰ Designed by Jean Bailly, the municipal urbanist, the new center was to be more open and multifunctional, offering “well-being, conviviality and urbanity” in contrast to the “hyper-consumption and functionalism” of the previous center.⁴⁸¹ The design itself amounted to the postmodernization of Les Flanades: it covered the open plazas with pergolas, created elaborate landscaping, added exotic decoration, and expanded the parking scheme. More important than the shift from modern to postmodern design, the project revealed how expertise was invested with the social as much as the physical, and planning continued to conflate citizenship and consumerism by promoting user participation for what was basically a shopping mall remodeling. Despite disagreements between the developer and the municipality, market research and user participation had become not more than different varieties of the same planning process.

⁴⁸⁰ The developer CIRP, a subsidiary of SCIC, proposed a commercial revitalization without public consultation; the municipality requested a more global study of the problem “in urbanistic terms” rather than just a market study. It also demanded the “real consultation” of all Sarcellois. Municipality and CIRP signed agreement for the project in November 1979, the general lines of which were: a reinforcement of administrative, social and cultural equipment; a better insertion of the center into the city, and the creation of three individualized commercial nodes.

⁴⁸¹ See: Consultation revitalisation Les Flanades; Sarcelles ouvre son coeur, brochure (AD Val d'Oise BIB D613).

Conclusion

Social life and inhabitant activism in the *grands ensembles* during the 1960s shaped changing attitudes towards the user in the urbanism and urban policies of the 1970s. The implementation of *grands ensembles* gave rise to a complex series of local negotiations between inhabitant associations, developers, the centralized state, and municipal government. Sarcelles - which served at once as the national model of the *grands ensembles*, the focus of national public outcry, and a key object of urban sociological study - was situated on the crossroads of local contestation and national policy. The exemplary contestation of its initial inhabitant associations informed the state's urban research and policy, not only during the 1960s, but also in subsequent decades.

Social life in the *grands ensembles* was partly shaped by their particular spatiality - their isolation, homogeneity, and unfinishedness. Concomitantly, their associational life was often a factor of their ambivalence between housing and city - a condition which addressed the inhabitant at once as user, consumer and citizen. Between the late 1950s and early 1970s, social belonging in the *grands ensembles* shifted from an isolated question of participation in the (efficient, fair, humanized) management of housing to a contextual question of urban politics. During the 1960s, a number of local associations working towards participatory management of their housing estates instigated a national debate in which state officials, national-level organizations and social scientists took part. Their initiatives aimed to smoothen conflict by developing new participatory procedures of planning and management. Such ideas of participation quickly transformed into more intense critiques and claims with the social movements around 1968. Shaped at once "from above" and "from below," such exemplary attempts at participation show how the initial enthusiasm of collaborating and completing the "utopia" of modern urbanism gave way to an increasingly fundamental contestation of the developer and its modern urbanism.

This particular evolution - shaped by the policy of the *grands ensembles* as well as by the changing culture of French society more broadly - in turn influenced the course of French urbanism. During the early 1970s, exceptional instances of political mobilization in response to the state-led urbanism of the *grands ensembles* - like in Sarcelles and Grenoble - were harnessed as "good practice" in national attempts to develop participatory urbanism. Rather than implying a wholesale shift from the national to a more local level of decision-making, this led to a new kind of ambiguity: while remaining a national affair, experts increasingly acknowledged the need to treat the user as a differentiated actor embedded in local social life.

Most importantly, both the calls for participation and the project of developing social life strengthened the legitimacy of sociological expertise in planning and the increased engagement of various mediators between planners and users. The study of social life in new housing estates and the gradual validity given to local inhabitant associations as a source of expertise in urban affairs were key steps in the context of a broader reordering of urban expertise in postwar France. Contrary to the rhetoric of participation, state-sponsored research and experimentation in urbanism - both before and after 1968 - did not entail a more direct participation of inhabitants but instead, the intensified involvement of experts ambivalently positioned between civil society and the state. The *Habitat et Vie Sociale* initiative in particular spurred the development of specific kinds of user-oriented expertise in which the centralized state acted as primary platform.

While they promoted local urban research and the direct involvement of inhabitants, such initiatives nevertheless amounted to the further institutionalization of expertise in planning on the national level. Over the next decades, the expertise of participation informed social as well as architectural policies, and the *villes nouvelles* in particular would become key test cases in this respect.

Chapter 4: Lifestyle and Critique

*“From the 1960s on, the approach will change. The necessity to conceive of the city in its totality is increasingly called for: each large new operation needs to be studied and built according to a conception of the urban development as a whole. Furthermore, what is at stake is no longer only to house the inhabitants, but also to create their everyday environment: the grands ensembles show the inconveniences of an urbanism lacking in good architecture and in facilities for local social life. This orientation leads to an urbanism of new towns.”*⁴⁸²

When Pierre Viot, professor at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris, formulated these grand assertions in a 1969 article, he referred to France’s official new town project. By this time, that project was no longer just an item on the political agenda: large swaths of land around Paris and in provincial locations had been secured for urban development, many infrastructure works had started, and the first buildings were appearing on the horizon. The project to build “real” *villes nouvelles* or new towns had been around since the beginning of the decade, and was officially presented in 1965 as part of the *Schéma Directeur d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme de la Région de Paris* (SDAURP), the ambitious new urban plan for the Paris region (figure 4.1).⁴⁸³ This plan resolutely abandoned what was then referred to as the “mathusianism” of earlier plans - their acceptance of a relatively fixed footprint for Paris’ future urban development.⁴⁸⁴ Planners now realized that they needed to accommodate for exponential urban growth far beyond the bounds of the already urbanized area.⁴⁸⁵ The massive economic and demographic growth that had thoroughly reshaped the Paris region in the two decades since the war was confidently extrapolated into the future. This resulted in grand schemes for a Paris of 14 million inhabitants by 2000, implying no less than a doubling of the city’s existing footprint.⁴⁸⁶ Carried by the widespread optimism of the 1960s, the project was directed by Paul Delouvrier, the charismatic

⁴⁸² “A partir des années 60, l’orientation va changer. La nécessité de concevoir la ville dans sa totalité s’imposera de plus en plus: chaque grande opération nouvelle doit être étudiée et réalisée selon une conception d’ensemble du développement urbain. En outre, il ne s’agit plus seulement de loger les habitants, mais aussi d’aménager leur cadre de vie: les grands ensembles font apparaître les inconvénients d’un urbanisme pauvre en créations architecturales de qualité et en équipements destinés à la vie sociale de la cité. Cette orientation conduit à un urbanisme de villes nouvelles.” In: Pierre Viot, “Les villes nouvelles en France: Avenir ou fiction?,” *Revue Projet* (July - August 1969): CAC 19840342/173.

⁴⁸³ See: Les villes nouvelles: Etude de décision, présentation par Marie-Christine Kessler (CAC 19910585/009); François Fourquet and Lion Murard, *La naissance des villes nouvelles: Anatomie d’une décision (1961-1969)* (Paris: Presses de l’Ecole nationale des Ponts et chaussées, 2004).

⁴⁸⁴ Drawn by the Beaux-Arts architect-urbanist Henri Prost in the early 1930s, the *Plan Prost* signified the birth of modern spatial planning in France. Aimed at the decongestion of the city center, both in terms of housing and urban transport, the plan was based on a logic of hygienicism - not economic development. During the postwar, the plan was modified but not radically questioned. This led to the 1960 PADOG (*Plan d’aménagement et d’organisation générale de la région parisienne*), which was in essence a redressing of the previous plan: it also aimed to stabilize the population in the paris region, to slow down residential mobility and immigration, to decongest Paris through urban renewal and by transferring jobs to the suburbs, and to provide housing by large-scale housing estates on the periphery. See: Jean-Paul Alduy, “L’aménagement de la région de Paris entre 1930 et 1975: De la planification à la politique urbaine,” *Sociologie du Travail*, no. 2 (April - June 1979): 167-200; Fourquet and Murard, *La naissance des villes nouvelles: Anatomie d’une décision (1961-1969)*.

⁴⁸⁵ *Schéma directeur d’aménagement et d’urbanisme de la région de Paris*, (Paris: District de Paris / Premier Ministre, 1965).

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*; Fourquet and Murard, *La naissance des villes nouvelles: Anatomie d’une décision (1961-1969)*, 98-101.

“man of action” who at the side of De Gaulle was to modernize the nation and give it back the *grandeur* it deserved.⁴⁸⁷

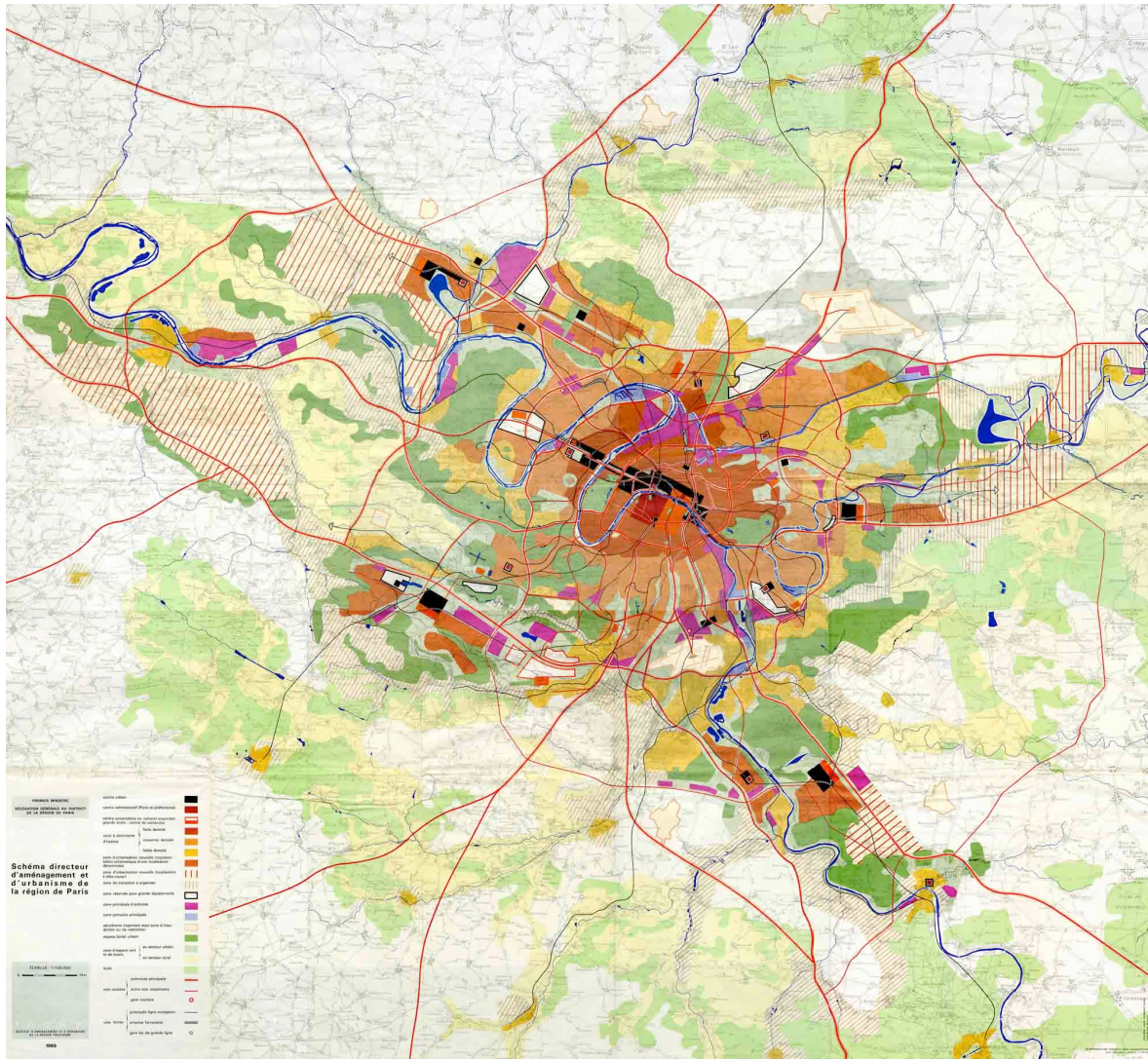


Figure 4.1: The regional plan for Paris published in 1965 (Source: District de Paris / Premier Ministre, *Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de Paris* (Paris, 1965): map in back).

To accommodate for such unprecedented urban growth, Delouvrier and his team needed a new scale of planning - both in time and in space. No longer on the neighborhood scale, that of the *grand ensemble*, or even the municipality, planners were at once to think the “unity of the urban region of Paris.” Planning was longer to be constrained by the span of a political administration; forecasts needed to be made over a forty-year period. The SDAURP thus set itself the ambitious goal to break with the gradual radio-concentric nature of the Paris region, which planners

⁴⁸⁷ According to the myth, De Gaulle told Delouvrier during his appointment at the District de Paris, to “put some order in this mess for me.” See: Ibid., 25. See also: Roselyne Chenu, *Paul Delouvrier ou la passion d'agir* (Paris: Seuil, 1994).

dismissed as suffocating and constraining. Instead, it would channel future urban growth along two “preferential axes.” On these axes large-scale new towns could be then developed that would absorb the anticipated demographic growth (figure 4.2). Initially eight were envisaged, but after a second estimate of future growth in 1968, the number was reduced to five.⁴⁸⁸ Nevertheless, compared to any existing French development - including massive ones like Sarcelles or Toulouse-le-Mirail - and to the British New Town experiments - which were rigorously studied and served as key counter examples - the French *villes nouvelles* would be up to five or even ten times the size, planners contended.⁴⁸⁹ At the same time, they would not be conceived as autonomous entities: unlike the modernist *tabula rasa* of Brasilia and Chandigarh, or even the Swedish or British satellite town developments, the French new towns would help restructure the often chaotically urbanized territories around them. Apart from the five new towns in the Paris region, four more would be built in the provinces to stimulate the regional economic development. Above all, the *villes nouvelles* project was a statement about the government’s new ambition in the realm of the built environment. Yet, in many cases it remained unclear to the French public how the *villes nouvelles* would be fundamentally different from the *grands ensembles*. Did the new towns actually mark a shift in urban thinking as planners contended? And if so, what exactly did it entail?

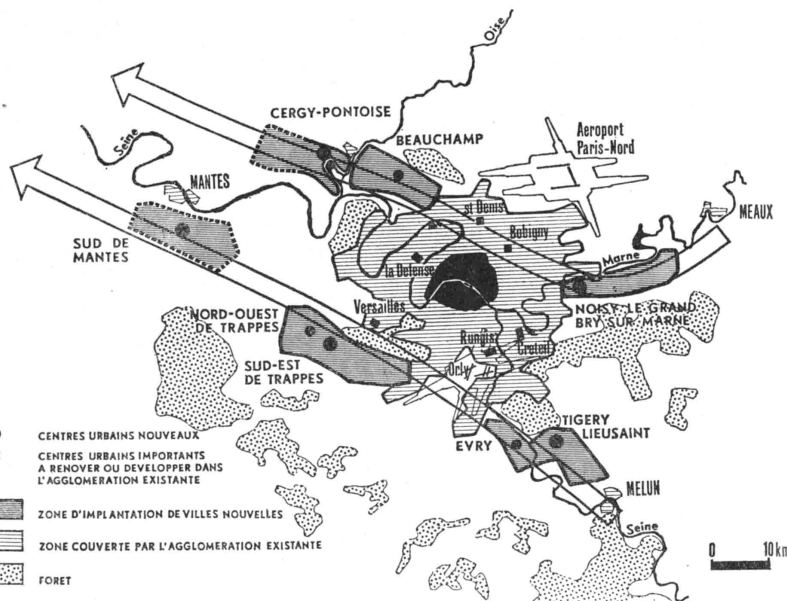


Figure 4.2: The two preferential axes for Paris guiding the location of the new towns in a diagram based on the 1965 regional plan (Source: Pierre Merlin, *Les villes nouvelles* (Paris: PUF, 1969): 262). Ultimately, five new towns will emerge from this initial plan: Cergy-Pontoise, Evry, Trappes, Marne-la-Vallée (initially called Noisy-le-Grand / Bry-sur-Marne), and Melun-Senart (initially called Tigery-Lieusaint).

⁴⁸⁸ Fourquet and Murard, *La naissance des villes nouvelles: Anatomie d'une décision (1961-1969)*.

⁴⁸⁹ *Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de Paris*, 70-71. The British and Scandinavian satellite towns and new towns were continually referenced by the French planners (CAC 19840342). See also: Fourquet and Murard, *La naissance des villes nouvelles: Anatomie d'une décision (1961-1969)*, 105-08. Frédérique Boucher also retains these two cases as examples for the French, although he does not demonstrate the concrete link, see: Frédérique Boucher, "Les modèles étrangers," *Cahiers de l'IHTP (Institut d'histoire du temps présent)*, no. 17 (1990).

1. The *ville nouvelle* as anti-*grand ensemble*

Planners' rhetoric cast the *villes nouvelles* as diametrically opposed to the *grands ensembles*. By the mid-1960s, many acknowledged these as a relative failure. The 1965 SDAURP rang the alarm bell about the acute lack of urban facilities in the suburbs, and had pointed at the construction of mass housing projects during the immediate postwar decades as the main cause. These unorganized developments, so planners argued, had made comprehensive urban planning impossible.⁴⁹⁰ The *grands ensembles* - even if some of them during the 1960s began to incorporate an impressive array of collective facilities - were thus cast as the root cause of the problem, leading to not more than "bedroom suburbs" on the outskirts of the city (figure 4.3). The Institute of Urban and Regional Planning of the Paris Region (*Institut d'Urbanisme et de l'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne* or IAURP), established by Delouvrier for the planning of the *villes nouvelles*, summarized this position as follows: "This new dimension of French urban planning policy constitutes first of all the outcome of a reflection about previous French experiments. It illustrates the will to transcend the notions of dormitory towns and *grands ensembles* (Sarcelles, Massy) of which the mistakes, often the same as those of the suburbs [themselves], are clearly perceived: uniformity and monotony, without the presence of urban functions other than housing."⁴⁹¹ Newspapers reported that "to recommence Sarcelles" was planners' number one fear."⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ "La banlieue sous-équipée" in: *Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de Paris*, 50.

⁴⁹¹ "Cette nouvelle dimension donnée à la politique française de l'urbanisme constitue tout d'abord l'aboutissement d'une réflexion sur les expériences françaises antérieures. Elle illustre la volonté de dépasser les notions de villes-dortoirs et de grands ensembles (Sarcelles, Massy) dont les maux, souvent les mêmes que ceux de la banlieue, sont clairement perçus: uniformité et monotonie, sans représentation des fonctions urbaines autres que celle de l'habitat." In: Note concernant la conception et la réalisation des centres urbains des villes nouvelles de la région parisienne, IAURP, June 1969 (CAC 199110585/011).

⁴⁹² "Comment se bâtissent les villes nouvelles - Les constructeurs ont une hantise: ne pas recommencer Sarcelles," *Paris-Presse* 5 June 1966.



Figure 4.3: A 1965 map of recent housing developments in the Paris region, showing their disorganized character of urban growth (Source: District de Paris / Premier Ministre, *Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de Paris* (Paris, 1965): 56).

While the *grands ensembles* became even more heavily criticized at the beginning of the 1970s,⁴⁹³ planners and state officials never fundamentally questioned the *villes nouvelles* project. Their opinions were based on the belief in an absolute distinction - opposition even - between the two forms of urban development. Olivier Guichard, who had worked on the *villes nouvelles* under Delouvrier and whose famous bill of 1973 officially declared the end of the *grands ensembles* as an urban policy, explicitly defended the *villes nouvelles* policy, in spite of their scale: "I am often asked: why do the *villes nouvelles* escape your condemnation? For the simple reason that they are the opposite of the *grands ensembles*. The *grand ensemble* opposes the center, while the *ville nouvelle* recreates a center. The *grand ensemble* is without moorings. The *ville nouvelle* becomes the node of a network of connections. In the Paris region, the *villes nouvelles* do not need to boost peripheral urbanization, but structure an already existing suburb, and assure its inhabitants also the right to the city."⁴⁹⁴

In the face of a nation beginning to show the growing pains of a rapid urbanization made possible by large-scale state-aided projects, the *villes nouvelles* project was credible only in so far as it appeared as something radically new.⁴⁹⁵ With its claims of an all-encompassing attention to all aspects of inhabitants' living environment (*cadre de vie*), the project promised an absolutely new style of planning. While they were products of state intervention just like the *grands ensembles*, the *villes nouvelles* brought together a different set of actors. Instead of HLM organizations and developers like SCIC who commissioned Beaux-Arts architects for their housing projects guided by the technical norms of the Ministry of construction, the *villes nouvelles* would be planned by specialist planning teams. These who would be locally installed yet guided by a special centralized think tank, the Central Group of New Towns (*Groupe centrale des villes nouvelles* or GCVN).⁴⁹⁶ They would develop basic schemes, and meticulously coordinate urban development by engaging with municipalities and semi-public and private developers. For the Paris region, Paul Delouvrier would continue to serve as their charismatic spokesperson. The coexistence of these two different planning machines and institutional frameworks within the same centralized state apparatus explains the contradictory role of the state in the built environment between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s - simultaneously endorsing and criticizing its own actions.

Initially, a key feature to distinguish the *villes nouvelles* from mass housing estates, apart from scale, was their political autonomy. In 1965, the CGP held that the only way to create successful

⁴⁹³ See Chapter 6.

⁴⁹⁴ "On me dit parfois: pourquoi les villes nouvelles échappent-elles à votre condamnation? Pour la simple raison qu'elles sont le contraire des grands ensembles. Le grand ensemble au centre, la ville nouvelle récrée un centre. Le grand ensemble est sans amarres. La ville nouvelle devient le noeud d'un réseau de liaisons. En région parisienne, les villes nouvelles ne doivent pas relancer une urbanisation périphérique, mais structurer une banlieue préexistante, assurer à ses habitants aussi le droit à la ville." In: "Déclaration sur les orientations de la politique urbaine, par Olivier Guichard à l'Assemblée nationale," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 17 May 1973.

⁴⁹⁵ More recently, historians have demonstrated the importance of antecedents and precursors for the French new towns. See: Danièle Voldman, ed. *Les origines des villes nouvelles de la région parisienne (1919-1969)*, Cahiers de l'IHTP (Institut d'histoire du temps présent), no. 17 (1990).

⁴⁹⁶ The GCVN, led by Jean-Eudes Roullier as *secrétaire général*, was created in 1970 under direct authority of the Premier in order to coordinate new town policy-making. It was foremost a think tank bringing together representatives of the Ministries of Finance, the Interior, Planning, Education, Environment, Culture, Health, as well as DATAR and the CGP.

new towns was to create veritably new communities, detached from the existing ones. For the *villes nouvelles* this concretely meant that the existing municipalities would lose the land on which the new town was built, and in return, they would not be responsible for the new town construction and management. The new town would thus become its own political entity. This idea was soon abandoned: three years later, in march 1968, the Association of Mayors in France (*Association des maires de France*) made a counter-proposition to include the option for the local municipalities to be included in the new town. This alternative proposal, officially adopted by a new law voted in July 1970 as the Boscher law, made the new towns more dependent on local politics and development.⁴⁹⁷ It also countered the assumption of the new towns as radically different entities landing on alien soil. Responding to the question of what the *villes nouvelles* would exactly become, Jean-Eudes Roullier, head of the GCVN, simply replied: “not entirely *villes*, nor entirely *nouvelles*.”⁴⁹⁸ One of his more suggestive ideas was to see the new towns not as artificial or autonomous but as responding “naturally” to the evolution of French urban growth by simply organizing and channeling it.

The desire for a radical change that was at the basis of the *villes nouvelles* rhetoric had remarkable parallels to that accompanying the *grands ensembles* a decade before.⁴⁹⁹ In 1956, when Pierre Sudreau was at the head of planning for the Paris region, he envisaged the *grands ensembles* as “veritable transplants on a sick body.” While they were in the first place a response of the national government to the housing shortage and an instrument of economic development,⁵⁰⁰ for Sudreau they were foremost the instruments of “a regeneration process, to tidy up the Parisian agglomeration.”⁵⁰¹ The *grands ensembles* were thus seen as ideal solutions for countering the chaos of the existing suburbs. In similar terms, Gérard Dupont, the administrator behind the *grille Dupont*, wrote in 1959: “To the conception of the Parisian agglomeration as having a single center linked via umbilical cords to dormitories further and further removed, needs to be substituted a polycentric development around *grands ensembles*, centers of new growth representing balanced and complete residential units - that is to say, containing centers for employment, commerce, administration, social protection, recreation, and culture.” More specifically, Dupont considered the *grands ensembles* as the answer to the mistakes of the past: “The *grand ensemble* needs to avoid the mistakes of preceding generations, the extension of new suburbs, the creation of commuter estates, the alignment of buildings without character and of dead homes.[...] If built as such, under the supervision and with the participation of the inhabitants, the City, with all its functions, needs to become not a dormitory

⁴⁹⁷ "Loi dite Boscher, tendant à faciliter la création d'agglomérations nouvelles," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 10 July 1970. This law allowed municipalities, right after the decision for the location of a new town was made, to choose between two options - a “community planning syndicat” between the existing municipalities or an entirely new municipal unit with a special governance regime. The latter was not successful. The *Établissement Public d'Aménagement*, established in 1969 for some of the first new towns like Cergy and Evry corresponded largely to the first of these options.

⁴⁹⁸ “ni entièrement des villes ni entièrement nouvelles.” In: *L'expérience française des villes nouvelles*, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques (n.d.), Jean-Eudes Roullier (CAC 19840342/171).

⁴⁹⁹ This has already been pointed out in: Annie Fourcaut, "Les grands ensembles ont-ils été conçus comme des villes nouvelles?," *Histoire urbaine*, no. 17 (2006): 7-26.

⁵⁰⁰ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁰¹ “Il s'agit essentiellement d'une oeuvre de régénération, de remise en ordre de l'agglomération parisienne.” In: Pierre Sudreau, "Déclaration," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 66 (July 1956).

and neither a place of solitude, but instead, a means of culture, an immense school of which all the organs need to fulfill a role of social and human education.”⁵⁰² This would mean creating an “integrated urban system” in which urban centers would be recreated in the suburbs, and housing would be brought closer to employment.

This description of the *grands ensembles* is remarkably similar to that provided by planners of the *villes nouvelles* a decade later. The *villes nouvelles* were also meant to decentralize Paris and bring employment and culture closer to housing. For planners of the new town of Cergy-Pontoise it was clear that “the *ville nouvelle* will be a failure if the jobs do not follow: 46,000 jobs need to be created in Pontoise before 1975.”⁵⁰³ The identification of the *ville nouvelle* as anti-*grand ensemble* was thus at least in part the product of a myth: an age-old strategy of projecting an absolute newness in order to separate the modernizers from the mistakes of the past - in this case the failure of the *grands ensembles* to satisfy their inhabitants and the French public at large.⁵⁰⁴

The planners of Evry explained their project for the new town as a way of addressing the problems of the southeastern suburbs of Paris: “The programming of the new town corresponds to an urgent need to structure the urban fabric, marked by the proliferation of housing, insufficiently compensated by the development of employment sites, means of transportation, and offering the inhabitants of the 14 municipalities - that will soon amount to 200,000 people - not more than mediocre possibilities for social life and exchanges, which the center of Paris - saturated and far removed - can no longer valuably assure.”⁵⁰⁵ In fact, unlike the preceding focus on mass housing, less than a third of the program of the new towns was to consist of new housing.⁵⁰⁶

The complexity of planning at this unprecedented scale prompted planners to address more centrally the factor time. Instead of the creation of an outcome, they emphasized the importance

⁵⁰² “A la conception de l’agglomération parisienne avec un centre unique relié par des cordons ambiliaux à des dortoirs de plus en plus éloignés doit se substituer un développement polycentrique autour de Grands Ensembles, pôles de croissance nouveaux représentant des unités résidentielles équilibrées et complètes c’est-à-dire comportant des centres d’activité, de commerce, d’administration, de protection sociale, de loisirs et de culture. [...] Le Grand Ensemble doit éviter les erreurs des générations précédentes, l’extension de nouvelles banlieues, la création de cités dortoirs, les alignements de bâtiments sans caractère et de maisons mortes.[...] Se réalisant ainsi, sous les yeux et avec la participation des habitants, la Ville doit devenir avec toutes ses fonctions non pas un dortoir ou un lieu de solitude, mais au contraire un moyen de culture, une immense école dont tous les organes doivent remplir un rôle de formation sociale et humaine.” in: Problèmes posés par la vie dans les grands ensembles d’habitation, déclaration de Gérard Dupont, 1959 (CAC 19770816/005).

⁵⁰³ “La ville nouvelle sera un échec si les emplois ne suivent pas: 46000 emplois doivent être implanté à Pontoise avant 1975.” In: Réunions du groupe de travail interministériel sur les villes nouvelles de la région parisienne, compte rendu 28 June 1966 (CAC 199110585/002).

⁵⁰⁴ French historians have recently begun to explore the ambiguities between *grands ensembles* and *villes nouvelles* in postwar France, see: Annie Fourcaut and Loïc Vadelorge, eds., *Villes nouvelles et grands ensembles*, Histoire urbaine, no. 17 (2006).

⁵⁰⁵ “La programmation d’une Ville Nouvelle correspond là à un besoin impérieux de structuration d’un tissu urbain marqué par la prolifération de logements, insuffisamment compensée par un développement adéquat de l’emploi, des moyens de transport, et n’offrant aux résidents des 14 communes – qui compteront bientôt 200.000 personnes; – que de biens médiocres possibilités de vie de relations et d’échanges, fonction que le centre de Paris – sursaturé et fort éloigné – ne peut plus valablement assurer (...).” In: Pour une expérience pilote d’action sur l’environnement urbain: La ville nouvelle d’Evry et la mise en oeuvre d’une politique de l’environnement, 1970 (CAC 19780319/001).

⁵⁰⁶ Pierre Merlin, *Les villes nouvelles: Urbanisme régional et aménagement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969).

of the *process* of planning. Some of this was again inspired by a critique of the *grands ensembles*. Their perceived (and real) failure to provide collective facilities, led planners to first attend to the construction of infrastructure and key public amenities, and only then to housing programs. At Cergy for example, one of the first buildings to rise up was the prefecture, the departmental administration building. In order to provide public facilities for the first inhabitants that would soon arrive, the building contained a public atrium, a cinema, a restaurant, a bar, an art gallery, and about fifteen shops, including a hair dresser, a shoe maker, a travel agent, clothing shops (figure 4.4).⁵⁰⁷ Realizing the nuisance of surrounding construction sites that bothered the first inhabitants of the *grands ensembles*, planners also aimed to build a new town “without construction sites” (figure 4.5).



Figure 4.4: Prefecture building of Cergy by the architect Henri Bernard, 1965-1970: a) photo of finished building (CAA Fonds Bernard 266 AA 54/2), b) photo of the atrium (Source: *Techniques et Architecture*, 32 no. 5 “Villes nouvelles de la région Parisienne” (1970): 60). The building, which contained a large interior atrium with public facilities, was a statement about the provision of collective facilities before housing construction.

⁵⁰⁷ "Cergy-Pontoise: Un coeur de ville dans une éprouvette de béton," *Le Monde* 3 November 1970; "Il n'y a pas encore d'habitants et pourtant... Cergy-Pontoise vit déjà grâce à sa préfecture," *La Croix* 6 June 1971.



Figure 4.5: "A city without construction sites" promised by a 1969 promotional brochure for Cergy-Pontoise (Source: CAC 19910585/009).

Planners understood such approaches as an absolute novelty compared to that of the despised and problem-ridden *grands ensembles*.⁵⁰⁸ Yet, to convince the public about the newness of an urban plan in a country literally inundated with new large-scale urban developments and new neighborhoods would turn out to be become of their most important challenges. The general public, the national and local press, and even government officials continued to be confused about what these *villes nouvelles* exactly were: as public surveys showed, people simply did not see the difference between what was called a *ville nouvelle* and what was known as a *grand ensemble*.⁵⁰⁹ Both terms were in common use to describe a variety of large-scale urban

⁵⁰⁸ This is confirmed by: Viviane Claude, "Les équipes d'aménagement des villes nouvelles," *Annales de la recherche urbaine*, no. 98 (2005): 15-24.

⁵⁰⁹ "Elle a révélé que la presque totalité des français (94%) ne connaissent pas les villes nouvelles ou les confondent avec des ensembles déjà existants (ainsi Sarcelles, Parly II...), des villes-dortoirs ou des villes "champignons". Dans 6 % des réponses seulement, l'idée de villes nouvelles est assimilée à l'idée de villes de décentralisation." In: Sondage sur les villes nouvelles, SIGMA, 1969-1970 (CAC 19840342/391).

developments built or planned at this time. What certainly did not help was that the official *villes nouvelles* project was first presented in 1965, when the mass production of *grands ensembles* was at its absolute peak. Some large-scale urban developments, like Mourenx, Créteil, Toulouse-le-Mirail, and Grenoble Echirolles, were explicitly branded by their developers as *villes nouvelles*. Others were explicitly promoted as finished consumer products, like SCIC's Val d'Yerres, which was offered to prospective inhabitants as "a turn-key city."⁵¹⁰ Even Sarcelles - the most typical counter-example for Delouvrier and his new town planners - tried to obtain the official status of *ville nouvelle* when the municipality found out about Delouvrier's project.⁵¹¹ As a result of this confusion, *grands ensembles* and *villes nouvelles* were vulnerable to the same public criticism, which dismissed large-scale, state-led urbanism for the unmanageable social problems it risked creating. Nevertheless, the continual critique and systematic efforts to improve the *grands ensembles* during the 1960s clearly culminated in the rhetoric of the *villes nouvelles*. In short, "the *villes nouvelles* are at the same time the last avatar and the antithesis of the *grands ensembles*."⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ Castells, Cherki, Godard et al., *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne*, 285.

⁵¹¹ See: AM Sarcelles. About the legitimate and deemed 'dissident' uses of the term *ville nouvelle*, see: Laurent Coudroi de Lille, "'Ville nouvelle' ou 'grand ensemble': Les usages localisés d'une terminologie bien particulière en région parisienne (1965-1980)," *Histoire urbaine*, no. 17 (2006): 47-66.

⁵¹² Georges Duby, ed. *Histoire de la France urbaine, tome 5: La ville aujourd'hui* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 366.

2. A New Planning Ethos?

What profoundly shaped the changing nature French urban planning during the 1960s was a novel consumer culture that slowly infiltrated all social and economic aspects of French society. The concrete effects of this infiltration nevertheless remained hidden to French observers until the eruption of May 1968. Meanwhile, throughout the 1960s, economic liberalization - in particular of commercial and industrial enterprise - was fundamental to the changing condition. After the first economic recovery plans of the late 1940s and early 1950s, a period in which large companies like Renault had been nationalized, private industrial and commercial development picked up again during the later 1950s and the 1960s. Contrary to the lasting perception of French authoritarianism and the legacy of the Vichy government in postwar France, French economic planning had in fact been relatively supple from the start: the Plan Monnet was based on an idea of planning whose method would continuously adapt to changing market conditions. In the national four-year plans that followed it, “planning became not a method of command but a way of facilitating collective decision making and encouraging communication, forecasting, reflection, and coordination.”⁵¹³ Economic planning was further promoted during the presidency of De Gaulle in the 1960s, but rather than based on direct state intervention, it was cast in terms of an *économie concertée* or mixed economy in which the public and private sectors would consult with each other. Initially espoused by Bloch-Lainé, this notion had gained widespread acceptance throughout the upper levels of state administration as a way to conceptualize the relation between state and market.⁵¹⁴ The state would now no longer be an impartial arbiter amongst competing interests, it should now - as the beacon of rationality and efficiency and the carrier of national progress - directly encourage economic development.⁵¹⁵ National modernization thus continued to be based on the oligopolistic collaboration of the state with large-scale capitalist enterprise.

Perhaps it was the continuity of this kind of economic model throughout the *trente glorieuses* that helped obscure the enormous social and cultural upheavals wrought by a quietly but unbeatably advancing consumer culture. Compared with the immediate postwar, in which “private interests” basically meant large industrial companies, individual consumers became increasingly central in the understanding and management of the economic realm. While mass consumption did not have the same weight in France’s economic life than in the United States, it did gain increasing dominance over economic and social affairs. The rhetoric of national economic planning was a clear reflection of this evolution. During the 1960s, its goals were increasingly described in terms that transcended the economic realm: planning now aimed at social and cultural development focused on “individual happiness” and “quality of life” -

⁵¹³ Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*, 247.

⁵¹⁴ After his lecture “A la Recherche d’une “Economie Concertée” (Paris, 1959). See: Henry Ehrmann, “French Bureaucracy and Organized Interests,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1961): 534-55, 553.

⁵¹⁵ Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*, 256.

concepts translated from the subjective world of individual consumption rather than that of macro-economic objectivity.⁵¹⁶

The realm of the built environment was not spared from this shift; commercial development in particular played an active role in placing the figure of the individual consumer at the center of planners' concerns. During the preparations for the IVth Plan (1962-1965), their dominant idea was still that commerce needed to be planned "top-down" by grouping it in commercial centers in concert with the neighborhood unit - a method for which the *grille Dupont* remained the manual.⁵¹⁷ During the preparations for the next national plan in the mid-1960s however, the door was opened for "modern, American solutions" to commercial development - in other words, suburban mall developments. Top-down planning of commerce was increasingly questioned, and not only on the grounds that it impeded the freedom of commercial developers and shop owners to choose the best location for their business. Increasingly, it was no longer the state official or the urban planner, but the individual developer or business owner who was the bearer of economic rationality. This shift was accompanied and certainly accelerated by the rapid development of suburban malls and big box stores all over France.⁵¹⁸

And just like private companies could choose where to locate, so did individual consumers have an increasingly important ability to choose, most crucially the location of their homes. Car ownership had radically increased the geographic mobility of middle-class French families, and as they became increasingly dominant in French society, so they became more powerful - not in the least through their augmented purchasing power. The number of privately financed housing units had risen sharply during the 1960s and was further encouraged by the 1963 legislation that called for private instead of public financing for housing.⁵¹⁹ This evolution was all the more remarkable considering the near-total absence of a mortgage policy, which forced homebuyers to put down deposits approaching half of the total cost of their new homes.⁵²⁰ Despite the absence of proper condominium legislation, which would only be developed in the late 1960s, many of these new homes were apartments. Modern single-family homes, a rare sight before the mid-1960s, slowly began to find their way into French urban development, and while still largely targeted at the upper echelons of the middle class they functioned as a powerful motor in the struggles for social distinction in a society increasingly driven by consumerism.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁶ Estrin and Holmes, *French Planning in Theory and Practice*. These scholars have argued that from the mid-1960s onwards, economic planning became increasingly practically irrelevant. At the same time however, planners increasingly set themselves the goal to transcend objective and quantifiable measures of planning.

⁵¹⁷ On the *grille Dupont*, see Chapter 2.

⁵¹⁸ On French shopping mall development, see Chapter 5.

⁵¹⁹ Rapports généraux de la Commission du bâtiment et des travaux publics, et de la Commission de l'habitation, IV Plan, n.d. / 1964? (CAC 19771152/001); Financement de la Construction (1966-68): Avis et rapport du Conseil économique et social, 26.03.1968 (CAC 19771142/045). See also: Bruno Lefebvre, Michel Mouillart, and Sylvie Occhipinti, *Politique du logement, cinquante ans pour un échec* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992).

⁵²⁰ The initial deposit was often still 40-50 percent of the total construction cost, and loans were only given for a maximum period of ten years. See: Financement de la Construction (1966-68): Avis et rapport du Conseil économique et social, 26.03.1968.

⁵²¹ On single-family home development, see Chapter 6.

Whereas the early postwar projects took place in the near-absence of a private housing market, and the *grands ensembles* initially filled this vacuum by producing mass standardized housing, state action at the end of the 1960s would necessarily be defined by the way it would take into account the dynamics of a differentiated housing market in which private developers and consumers had an increasingly powerful voice. More than any other initiative, it was the *villes nouvelles* project that demonstrates the way in which this evolution - which led individuals to be identified as consumers in search of distinguishing options more than as citizens bearing the right to housing - shaped French urban planning.

Despite the odds, the SDAURP intimated this changing mindset. In many respects, the plan was still indebted to the intellectual tradition of French territorial planning (*aménagement du territoire*) in which experts would determine the spatial organization of the territory. The will to modernize, with the help of a strong centralized state and a powerful corps of “men of action” like Delouvrier, had never been as strong as during the 1960s. It was only strengthened by decolonization and the insertion into the state administration of a generation of former colonial administrators. Their appetite for strong rule and their visions of bringing order to France’s suburban “wilderness” undoubtedly helped focus the state’s actions on modernizing the metropole.⁵²² The idea, briefly entertained during the postwar decades, of a *géographie volontaire* or voluntaristic geography, in which entire geographical regions would become the object of rational organization, reinforced such an approach.⁵²³ The SDAURP, which was drawn up behind closed doors by a small elite of planners and high-level politicians and adopted regardless of its brief “public consultation,” formed a perfect illustration of the authoritarian nature of French planning at this time.⁵²⁴ The premier author of the plan, Paul Delouvrier, was himself a perfect exponent of this approach: before being in charge of the District of the Paris region (1961-1969), he served as a member in Jean Monnet’s national planning committee during the late 1940s, moved in the highest ranks of the French government during the 1950s, and became general delegate for the Algerian government during its war of independence.⁵²⁵

Nevertheless, in discussions of the plan a growing awareness emerged that the private market could no longer be neglected, in particular in the way it shaped and was shaped by individual consumer choice: “The urban expansion obeys to imperatives born out of the notion of profit: a certain region is urbanized because it is known that it will be sought by a potential clientele of homebuyers. Can the objective of the plan be to substitute a different logic for this development? Can it impose, in the name of a reasoned urbanism, different solutions than those born from the

⁵²² See: Jean-Charles Fredenucci, "L'entregent colonial des ingénieurs des Ponts et chaussées dans l'urbanisme des années 1950-1970," *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'histoire* 3, no. 79 (2003): 79-91. Kristin Ross has made a similar argument without delivering the concrete evidence, see: Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*.

⁵²³ Jean Labasse, *L'organisation de l'espace, éléments de géographie volontaire* (Paris: Hermann, 1966).

⁵²⁴ Alduy, "L'aménagement de la région de Paris entre 1930 et 1975: De la planification à la politique urbaine."

⁵²⁵ Chenu, *Paul Delouvrier ou la passion d'agir*.

market economy? We are touching the limits imposed on the plan here.”⁵²⁶ Pierre Merlin, professor of geography and part of the IAURP as one of its main experts on French new town planning, would later write that one of the central objectives of the plan was to “restore the freedom of choice for citizens, and in particular those of the second zone that were the suburbanites: choice in employment, choice in the type of dwelling and its surroundings, choice in shops, choice in recreation, choice in friends, choice in love.”⁵²⁷ Undoubtedly colored at the time of writing by the liberalizing rather than authoritarian aspects of the plan, such statements nevertheless show how the nature of French planning was slowly changing during the 1960s: while it was still to be *voluntaristic* – defined by resolute leadership and expert decision-making – planning needed also to be *realistic* – taking at its basis the natural tendencies of the market and thus consumer choice in the urbanization process. The important place given to recreation and leisure in the SDAURP text was an indication of this new attention, which prefigured the advent of lifestyle as a category in planning.⁵²⁸

After the political turmoil of 1968 and the departure of De Gaulle economic liberalization was explicitly transformed into political creed. Urban planning ideology, still fundamentally shaped by a modernist planning ideology and a belief in expert leadership and decision-making, gradually opened up to a new conception of urban dynamics, focused on the citizen as a modern consumer with the right of mobility and individual choice. In the new administration of Georges Pompidou and Albin Chalandon the *villes nouvelles* project was no longer enthusiastically embraced: Pompidou did not seem to like the project very much and there were tensions with Delouvrier, who remained a Gaullist at heart. For the new government, short on money and focused on appeasing the French public, it was more than easy now to question the expensive and unpopular large-scale state interventions of the past decades. In the eyes of Chalandon therefore, “this excessive interventionism needed to be vigorously suppressed.”⁵²⁹ The colossal state project of the *villes nouvelles* with which the government was nevertheless stuck thus needed to be reframed. Officially, the new strategy was now to “1) limit the intervention of the public authorities in terms of both conception and construction, by concentrating it on the key structuring elements [...], 2) allow the largest possible flexibility to the intervention of the developers, in the framework of an advanced consultation process, 3) in any case, engage the

⁵²⁶ “L’expansion urbaine obéit en outre à des impératifs nés de la notion de profit: telle région s’urbanise parce qu’il est admis qu’elle sera recherchée par une clientèle éventuelle d’acquéreurs de logements. L’objectif du schéma peut-il être de substituer une motivation différente à ce développement? Peut-il imposer, au nom de l’urbanisme raisonné, des solutions différentes de celles nées de l’économie de marché? Nous touchons ici aux limites qui se trouvent imposées au schéma.” Extrait des avis recueillis sur le SDAURP, published by La Documentation française in 1966, quoted in: Alduy, “L’aménagement de la région de Paris entre 1930 et 1975: De la planification à la politique urbaine.”

⁵²⁷ “restaurer la liberté de choix des citadins et en particulier de ces citadins de seconde zone qu’étaient les banlieusards: choix de l’emploi, choix du type et du cadre d’habitat, choix des lieux d’achat, choix des loisirs, choix des amis, choix des amours.” In: Pierre Merlin, *Les villes nouvelles en France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1991), 38.

⁵²⁸ Annie Fourcaut, Emmanuel Bellanger, and Mathieu Flonneau, eds., *Paris/Banlieues: Conflits et solidarités. Historiographie, anthologie, chronologie, 1788-2006* (Paris: Créaphis, 2007), 338.

⁵²⁹ “cet interventionnisme excessif doit donc être vigoureusement combattu.” In: Compte rendu, 28 avril 1969, présentation Albin Chalandon, Ministère de l’Equipement (CAC 19840342/023).

public authorities only in as much as financial means allow.”⁵³⁰ Many state officials were also aware that corporate capital would no longer listen to a centralized state considered far too interventionist, regulatory and normalizing.⁵³¹ By the closing of the decade state planners like Jean-Eudes Roullier, at the head of the central *villes nouvelles* think tank, presented a new role for the plannerly state: it was no longer to regulate the private sector but just to mobilize and incite it.⁵³²

While this kind of political impetus did lead to a more careful integration of private development, the *villes nouvelles* project continued to be founded on the intervention of a centralized state that would define not only the concrete location of the new towns but also their urbanism. Governmental control over land use remained at the basis of French new town planning. Yet, the state now needed to intervene in new ways, at once more “soft” and more powerful. Because of their scale - they were initially projected to occupy an average surface of around 5000 hectares compared to an average of 100 to 200 hectares for the *grands ensembles* - the *villes nouvelles* could not be built using the same legislative mechanisms used for the *grands ensembles*. Planners’ ideal was a land acquisition method that would increase the power of the government over land prices while minimizing direct state investment. In other words, to maximize private investment while minimizing speculation. Direct land purchase was limited to the strategic elements of the plan - the urban centers, major amenities and public infrastructure - for which the government needed to become property owner. The majority of land however was planned in collaboration with the private sector, through novel procedures like the ZAC (*zones d’aménagement concerté*, or Zones for Concerted Planning) and ZAD (*zones d’aménagement différé*, or Zones for Deferred Planning).⁵³³

Yet the *villes nouvelles* project did much more than trigger new technical procedures for land acquisition. It precipitated new insights and methods of how to control large-scale urbanization and generate urbanity. The sheer scale of the *villes nouvelles* project required a more comprehensive approach to urban development. Consequently, urban planning could no longer be centered on the design of a master plan, as the *grands ensembles* had been. It was now redefined as the large-scale and more flexible programming of functional zones in already existing urban development.

⁵³⁰ “1) limiter, en la concentrant au maximum sur les éléments clefs structurants, l’intervention de la puissance publique, tant au point de vue de la conception que de la réalisation (...) 2) laisser, corrélativement, la plus grande souplesse possible à l’intervention des promoteurs, dans le cadre d’une concertation très poussée, 3) de toute façon, n’engager la puissance publique que dans la mesure des moyens financiers.” In: Notes d’Alain Lagier sur les villes nouvelles, 11 Avril 1969, Ministère de l’équipement (CAC 19840342/023).

⁵³¹ On how the SDAURP was revised in 1969-1971 to correspond to the liberalized economy, see: Alduy, "L'aménagement de la région de Paris entre 1930 et 1975: De la planification à la politique urbaine."

⁵³² L’action de l’Etat en matière foncière dans les villes nouvelles, note de Jean-Eudes Roullier, 22 Mars 1969 (CAC 19840342/023).

⁵³³ The ZAD procedure defined an area within which the state or a public institution was given the right to acquire land. Valid for fourteen years, any land for sale had to be offered first to the public authorities at hand at a price based on existing values. The ZAC were instituted by the *loi d’orientation foncière* of 1967 with the same goal of curbing speculation. They were shorter-term procedures and specifically geared towards private development, in which the state would practically act like a private actor. See: Ibid.

In the case of Evry, the new town was meant to guide the urbanization of the surrounding suburban region, which was already witnessing rapid urban development.⁵³⁴ Planners therefore cast their plan as an “open structure” that could adapt to the existing suburban surroundings while allowing to mold and structure them by means of the new town plan (figure 4.6). Despite this flexibility, the plan was still idiosyncratically shaped with its cross-shaped figure. This was meant to allow green space and urban parks to penetrate right into the new urban center, and allow for the main roads to be kept away from the residential neighborhoods (figure 4.7).⁵³⁵ For the new town of Cergy-Pontoise, a “*schéma des structures*” or structural diagram was drawn up between 1966 and 1968. This included not only the actual areas marked for new development, but encompassed the entire surrounding region: the existing village of Pontoise, and the existing forests and lakes that were being envisioned as recreational zones (see figure 4.8). This was a plan of relations and connections. It was first and foremost an urban network rather than a set of functional zones.



Figure 4.6: The structural plan for the new town of Evry in 1969 (Source: *Urbanisme* 114 “Villes nouvelles françaises” (1969): 14-15).

⁵³⁴ In 1954 the region counted 67.000 inhabitants; in 1962 already 103.000 inhabitants, and in 1967 already 150.000 inhabitants. See: *La ville nouvelle d'Evry*, par Jean-Louis Faure, Institut d'études politiques de Paris (CAC 199110585/009).

⁵³⁵ This idea was by the Dutch member of the planning team, Frans Van der Werf. See: Jacques Guyard, *Evry Ville Nouvelle 1960-2003: La troisième banlieue* (Evry: Espaces Sud, 2003), 45.

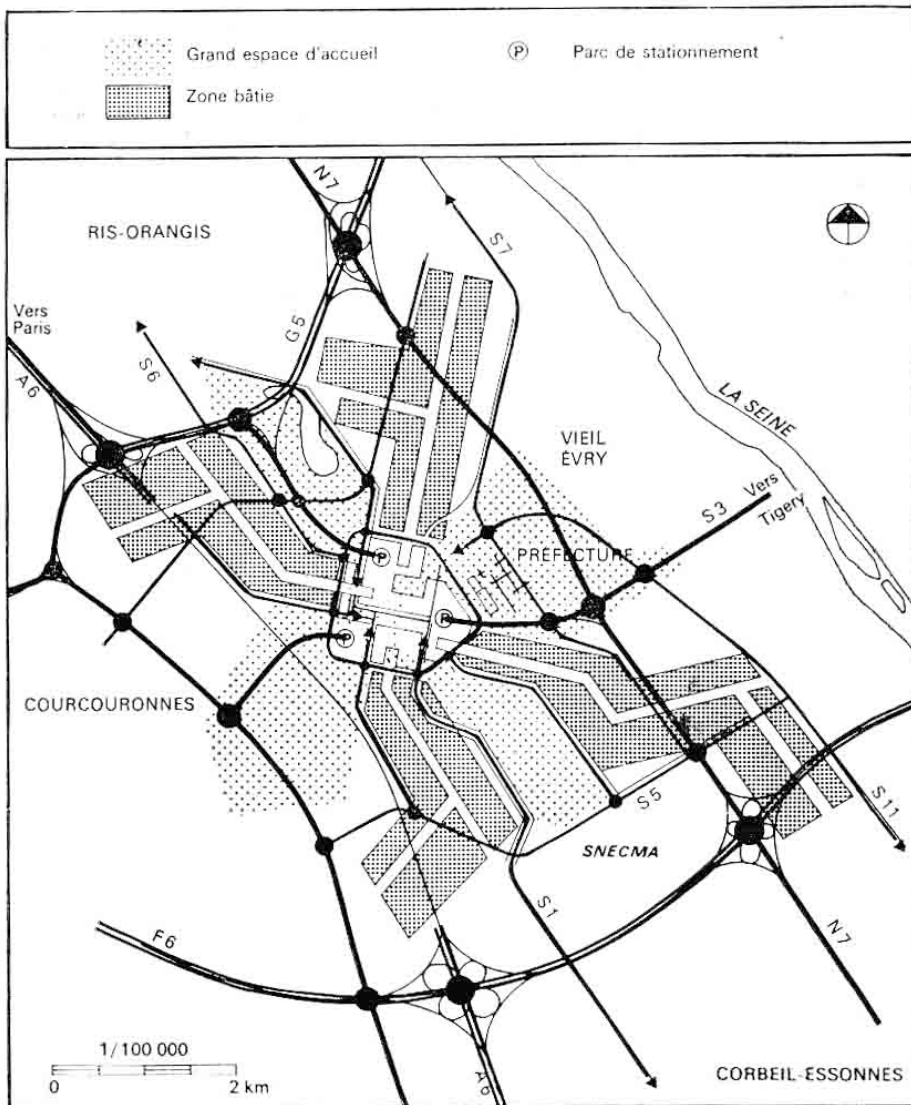


Figure 4.7: The new urban center of Evry in 1969, based on the idea of a cross of four *trames urbaines* or urban wefts (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 146 “Villes nouvelles” (1969): 46).

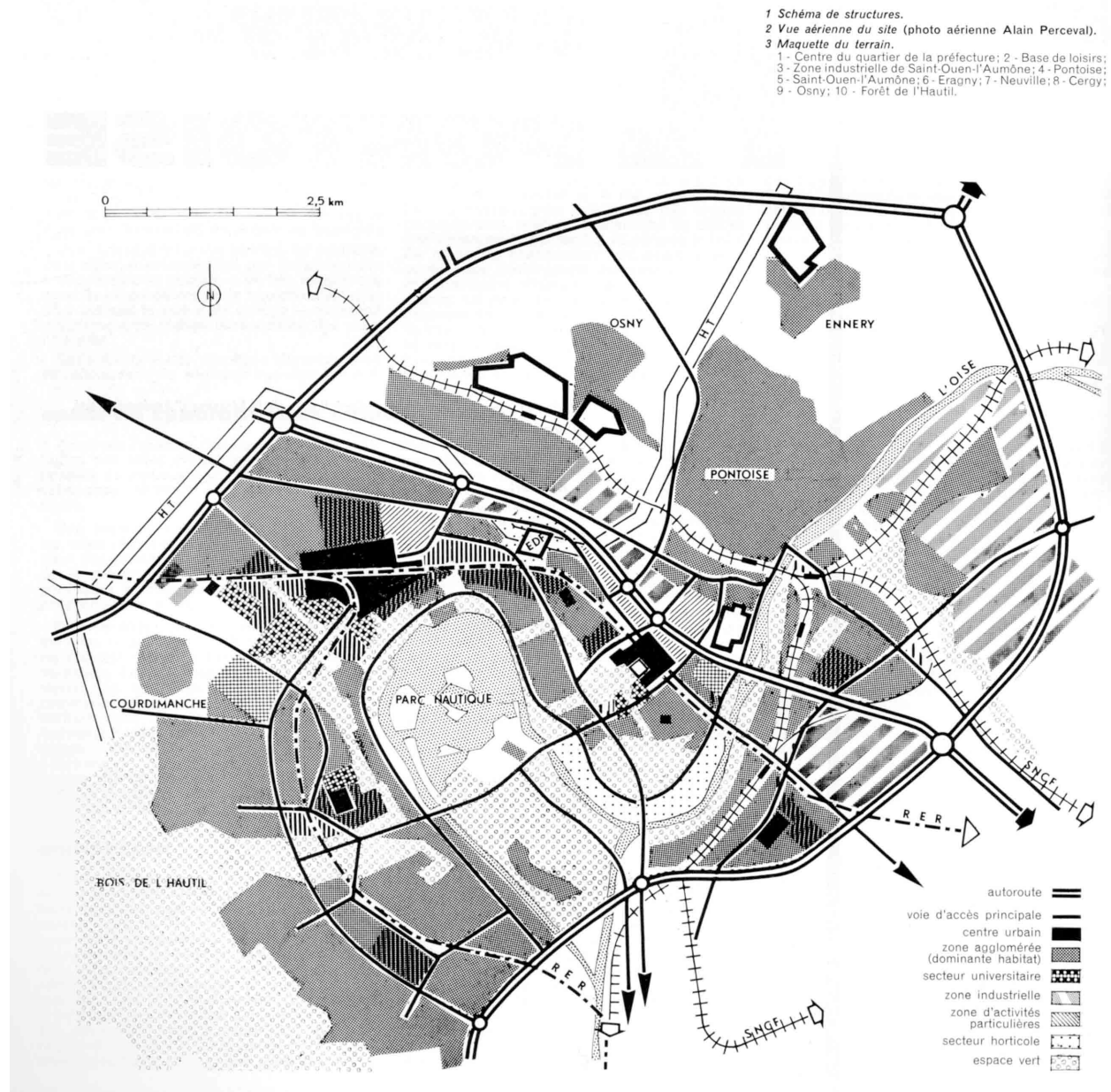


Figure 4.8: Structural plan for Cergy in 1970 (Source: *Techniques et Architecture* 32, no. 5 “Villes nouvelles de la région Parisienne” (1970): 46).

With a new set of planning instruments and buzzwords like “urban weft” (*trame urbaine*) and “urban armature” (*armature urbaine*), the need for large-scale structures that would efficiently reorganize large swaths of suburban land while facilitating the mobility of an increasingly demanding population was now at the forefront of planners’ concern.⁵³⁶ In the words of Jean-

⁵³⁶ See: Groupe I: Structures urbaines, Commission de l’Equpeement urbain, CGP: Rapport définitif, 1966 (CAC 19920405/007). This report is still based on the *grand ensemble* model and the *grille Dupont*, but points out the need for other ways to control urban growth through more flexible urban structures.

Eudes Roullier: “At the scale of 3000 hectares, the role of the first [the planners] is and can no longer be to create rigid French-style master plans or the city of an architect, but needs to be focused precisely on the problems of the center, the fundamental lines, and the issues of leisure and transportation in a flexible and living diagram.”⁵³⁷

This led some professionals to go as far as to proclaim a paradigm shift from *urbanisme* to *planification* and *programmation*. For Evry for instance, planning began with a geographic and programmatic comparison of different French cities. On the basis of quantified local needs and the existing program of these reference cities, a theoretical extrapolation was made for the new town. This “scientific” method led to five urban functions that had little to do with those of the Athens Charters: civic and political, economic, educational, cultural and recreational, and finally, residential.⁵³⁸ During the 1960s, the promise of science remained particularly appealing to professional planning circles and the attempt to brand planning as a rigorously scientific endeavor was part and parcel of the ascent of France’ elite engineers as urban planners inside the centralized state administration. This victory for the engineers was an obvious source of anxiety for French architects and urbanists, most of whom had a background in architecture.⁵³⁹

In 1963, the Territorial Planning Department (*Direction à l’Aménagement du Territoire*), initially a division within the Ministry of Construction, was placed under direct command of the premier. This led to the creation of a new, powerful regional planning institution, the Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action (*Délégation à l’aménagement du territoire et à l’action Régional* or DATAR).⁵⁴⁰ The Ministry of Construction remained charged with urbanism but saw part of its responsibilities taken away by the engineers at DATAR, whose approach was geared first of all towards regional-scale economic development. The fusion in 1966 of the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Public Works into a large and powerful *Ministère de l’Équipement* led by Edgard Pisani further galvanized the position of engineers in state-led urban planning. It was also a principal sign of the government’s ambition to gain a more comprehensive understanding and thus control over the urbanization process. Rather than to a more technocratic kind of urban planning however - at least in the sense of a predominance of technical and engineering aspects - it led to a more “scientific” approach in which the comprehensive view (*vue d’ensemble*) became key.⁵⁴¹

What such a comprehensive view required first of all was the fusion of multiple viewpoints of different kinds of experts. As such, the social sciences - economy, geography, sociology and so

⁵³⁷ “à l’échelle de 3000 hectares, le rôle des premiers n’est plus, ne peut plus être, d’élaborer des “plans mass” rigides “à la française” ou la ville d’un architecte, mais doit précisément se concentrer sur le problème du centre, des lignes de force, des loisirs, de la circulation dans un schéma souple et vivant.” In: *L’expérience française des villes nouvelles*, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques (n.d.), Jean-Eudes Roullier.

⁵³⁸ André Darmagnac, François Desbruyères, and Michel Mottez, *Créer un centre ville: Evry* (Paris: Editions du Moniteur, 1980), 32; “Evry, centre urbain nouveau et ville nouvelle,” *Cahiers de l’IAURP* 15(1969).

⁵³⁹ This professional anxiety was abundantly present in the pages of *Urbanisme*, the premier French journal of urbanists co-founded by the French Association of Urbanists (*Société française des urbanistes*).

⁵⁴⁰ DATAR was closely connected to the *Commissariat général du Plan d’Équipement et de la productivité*. See: Thoenig, *L’ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées*.

⁵⁴¹ See: Hecht, “Planning a Technological Nation: Systems Thinking and the Politics of National Identity in Postwar France.”

on - were considered to deserve a prominent place in planning.⁵⁴² This was meant to relieve the engineers - still largely in charge - of anxiety in the face of the growing complexity of French urbanization. The *villes nouvelles* could not be the product of a single man, who would create entire cities at will. They implied more than just the masterly hand of a Beaux-Arts trained architect-urbanist or the technical norms established by a Ministry; their planning entailed intense collaboration between architects, urbanists, engineers, economists, sociologists, and geographers. The methodology was to be that of a *team* of experts creating long-term, scientifically grounded visions, diagrams, reports and studies.⁵⁴³ These teams, which were by definition multi-disciplinary in nature, became the *modus operandi* for French new town planning and its challenging combination of market development and state-led planning.

⁵⁴² See: Thoenig, *L'ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées*, 99-112, 16. see Thoenig, p. 99-112 and esp. p. 116. Jean-Claude Thoenig and Erhard Friedberg, *La création des directions départementales de l'Équipement: Phénomène de Corps et réforme administrative* (Paris: CNRS - Groupe de sociologie des organisations, 1970), 147.

⁵⁴³ Thoenig, *L'ère des technocrates: Le cas des Ponts et chaussées*, 121-22.

3. The Reorganization of Urban Expertise

The project of creating new towns at an unparalleled scale was part and parcel of a large-scale reorganization of urban expertise in France. It was at once made possible and further precipitated new relationships between the professions and professionals involved in the built environment. Sociology was, at least symbolically, at the forefront of this reorganization. While Chombart de Lauwe had been one of the earliest proponents of the idea to include sociology in planning, the government had made attempts to include such new forms of expertise into its policies during the 1960s.⁵⁴⁴

Multidisciplinary planning teams had been called for since the 1950s; a decade later they were no longer considered to be a suggestion at the margins, they were becoming a reality. While economics, geography, and engineering were first incorporated into these planning teams, the role of sociologists was most called for. Not only did planners and policy makers increasingly call in the help of sociology for their planning practice; many sociologists also fancied a more proactive, “plannerly” role for themselves. The Center for Research on Urbanism (*Centre de recherche sur l'urbanisme*), jointly established by the Ministers of Construction and of National Education in 1962, was key in promoting this view.⁵⁴⁵ The center was meant to create “a direct relationship between applied and fundamental research”⁵⁴⁶ and brought together architects and state planners with academics of a wide range of social science disciplines. Robert Auzelle, Pierre George, Jean Stoetzel, and Jean Fourastié were its key figures.⁵⁴⁷ In the preface of a 1967 research publication sponsored by the center, its director Jean Canaux described the changing state of affairs: “[...] sociology begins to surpass the description of the existing condition, in order to reach a new phase in its history. It becomes capable, bit by bit, of discerning the transformative currents of the future society, and maybe even of acting on these in order to attain a desired future. [...] As such, an extremely fertile dialogue between the urbanist and the sociologist can be established.”⁵⁴⁸

The authors gathered for the *Urbanisme* journal issue on the theme of urban sociology in 1966 similarly argued that sociologists were “in the process of passing from the role of spectator to that of actor” and that “the intervention of the sociologists can not be limited to the sphere of reflection. It needs, from the start, be constantly associated on all levels to the creation of the

⁵⁴⁴ See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

⁵⁴⁵ Pierre George, "Enseignement et recherche en urbanisme," *Annales de géographie* 74, no. 406 (1965): 733-36.

⁵⁴⁶ “une liaison étroite entre la recherche appliquée et la recherche fondamentale” In: "Le Centre de recherche sur l'urbanisme," *Urbanisme* 75-76(1962): XIX.

⁵⁴⁷ The center also organized courses taken by architecture students from ENSBA that engaged them in social scientific and policy-making approaches to urban development. Courses organized by CRU under direction of CSTB. (1963-1965) ENSBA archives at AN. AJ/52/978

⁵⁴⁸ “[...] la sociologie commence à dépasser la description de l'état existant, pour accéder à une nouvelle phase de son histoire. Elle devient capable, peu à peu, de discerner les courants formateurs de la société future, et peut-être même d'agir sur eux pour atteindre un futur souhaité. [...] Ainsi peut s'instaurer progressivement un dialogue extrêmement fécond entre l'urbaniste et le sociologue.” In: Joffre Dumazedier and Maurice Imbert, *Espace et loisir dans la société française d'hier et de demain (vol 1)* (Paris: CRU, 1967), 1.

destiny and all transformative phases of the city.”⁵⁴⁹ Unlike previous calls, they envisaged a particular kind of urban sociology: “Freed from general and abstract notions, transcending the level of the family unit or the housing unit, sociology now engages at the level of urbanism: the level of the city or the agglomeration considered in their entirety.”⁵⁵⁰ Just like urbanism itself needed to be rethought - away from the housing estate, and towards a conception of the city at large - so was the intervention of sociology to change in scale.

Parallel to these calls, urban research - first of all economic and geographical, but increasingly sociological in approach - was instrumentalized by the government through a range of new institutions. Many of these were focused on large-scale urban and regional planning: not only the IAURP in Paris, but also new organizations in the provinces, like the Regional Organizations for the Study of Metropolitan Areas (*Organisme régional d'Etude de l'Aire Métropolitaine*) and the Urbanism Agencies (*Agences d'urbanisme*). While in all of these institutions multidisciplinary planning teams became standard practice, they remained the hallmarks of the *villes nouvelles* planning.⁵⁵¹

Such teams were in fact written in the basic legislation of new town planning. Concretely, upon the decision for the definitive location of each new town, the prime minister created a local study mission (*mission d'étude*). This multidisciplinary team was charged with all preliminary studies and planning. Once the overall plan for the new town was created, the mission would be transformed into a Public Planning Institute (*Etablissement public d'aménagement*) charged with the execution of the plan. In 1967, the local planning team of Evry was made up of around 25 professionals, divided into four groups: administrative and financial tasks, technical aspects, urbanism, and finally *programmation* or programming. Whereas the urbanism group was largely made up of architect-urbanists, the latter group entailed not only straightforward economists or experts in public administration, but also a new breed of planning experts.⁵⁵²

The multidisciplinary planning teams of the new towns encouraged this new kind of expertise and a new profession of “urban programmers” (*programmeurs*). With a diverse background in either political science, sociology, and sometimes architecture, they were the primary carriers of the belief that the social scientific research was fundamental to a better kind of urban planning.⁵⁵³ During the initial phase of planning the *villes nouvelles*, between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1970s, hopes about the virtues of this new kind of expertise were high: while in some cases it was not clear what *programmation* meant, it was considered an essential element in the

⁵⁴⁹ “[les sociologues] sont en train de passer du rôle de spectateur à celui d’acteur”; “l’intervention du sociologue ne doit pas être limitée aux premières heures de la réflexion. Il doit, dès le départ, être constamment associé à tous les niveaux de l’élaboration du destiin et à toutes les phases d’évolution de la ville.” In: “Editorial,” *Urbanisme* 93(1966): 3.

⁵⁵⁰ “Dégagée des notions générales ou abstraites, dépassant le niveau de l’unité de la famille ou du logement, la sociologie s’attache maintenant au niveau de l’urbanisme: celui de la ville ou de l’agglomération considérées dans leur ensemble.” See: Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Claude, *Faire la ville: Les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle*, 103-55; Claude, "Les équipes d'aménagement des villes nouvelles."

⁵⁵² See the organizational chart of the Evry planning team in: *La ville nouvelle d'Evry*, par Jean-Louis Faure, Institut d'études politiques de Paris.

⁵⁵³ See: J.M. Boyer, "La programmation urbaine et architecturale: L'expérience des villes nouvelles" (Ph.D. Dissertation, EHES, 1983).

planning process, in particular that of the collective facilities making up a substantial part of the program.⁵⁵⁴ Despite this embrace of sociological expertise, its concrete role remained often unclear. Was it to inform the public, consult them, engage their participation? Was it to intervene in specific urban problems or to make specific sociological studies? Or was it to coordinate the multidisciplinary team itself? While its existence owed much to the appeal of scientificity and quantification in planning, *programmation* was increasingly seen as a way towards a more user-centered approach to planning. The progressive consultancy firm CERFI (*Centre d'études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles* or the Center for Institutional Studies, Research and Formation) led by the psycho-analyst Félix Guattari who around this time collaborated with philosopher Gilles Deleuze, considered programming to be a crucial method of linking architecture to the user, albeit far from a scientific one.⁵⁵⁵

The initial planning process for the new town of Cergy-Pontoise brought the uncertainties of this new kind of expertise to the surface. Soon after the publication of the SDAURP, Henry Bernard, a Prix de Rome winner and architect of the Maison de la Radio in Paris, drew up a plan for Cergy-Pontoise. He proposed a representative, symbolic center with administrative buildings bounded by dyke-like structures. Both the appointed urbanist Jean Coignet and the prefect of the department opposed the plan for its lack of openness and attention to social life. Coignet then suggested to consult children, “since it was them, more than adults, that would be directly concerned by the *ville nouvelle*.” With the help of the Ministry of National Education he organized a regional drawing competition in primary schools. While it was considered a big success and it received national attention - the *Musée de l'Homme* even proposed to analyze the drawings - it did not immediately lead to guidelines for planning.⁵⁵⁶ In 1966, a team of urbanists led by Coignet was installed in a temporary office on the location of the future new town in order to allow a more intimate knowledge of the terrain and give inhabitants the change to serve as local interlocutors. A year later, when this team was turned into an official planning mission under direction of Etienne Hirsch, it was substantially enlarged both in number and in diversity of professionals involved.⁵⁵⁷ Sociologists, both internal and external to the team, were explicitly involved now. Hirsch believed they were at the cutting edge of planning practice.

Despite his initial enthusiasm however, he soon became disappointed because “the sociologists were unable to respond and practical recipes never entered into their preoccupations, which

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ “It is not a sort of science of programming, made up of a range of abstract models; the essential quality of a program lies in its particularity, in its original way of intertwining the different constraints of the project. In the majority of cases, the users are the only ones in the position to mark, determine, and formulate these specific constraints.” [Il ne s’agit pas d’une sorte de *science de la programmation* constituée d’un éventail de modèles abstraits: *L’essentiel d’un programme réside dans sa particularité*, dans sa manière originale d’entrecroiser les différentes contraintes du projet. Dans la plupart des cas, les usagers sont seuls en position de repérer, cerner et formuler ces contraintes spécifiques.”] CERFI, *Programme général provisoire des équipements d’hygiène mentale de la ville nouvelle d’Evry* (February 1973) (AD Essonne 1523W/630).

⁵⁵⁶ Bernard Hirsch, *Oublier Cergy... L’invention d’une ville nouvelle, Cergy-Pontoise 1965-1975. Récit d’un témoignage* (Paris: Presses de l’Ecole nationale des Ponts et chaussées, 1990), 58.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 73.

revolved entirely around an abstract discourse and esoteric language.”⁵⁵⁸ Sociology had nevertheless led to some concrete actions. When Mme Lévi, a female sociologist, was hired directly to be part of the planning team, she was charged to study the immigrant construction workers. Her involvement led to the construction of emergency housing for single men and an attribution policy to house immigrant families in the apartments of the new town. According to Hirsch nevertheless, “the useful but unrewarding work of Madame Lévi did not have a big effect on her colleagues.”⁵⁵⁹ Many sociologists visited Hirsch’s team to study the planning process. During one visit, Jean-Paul Trystram, professor of sociology in Lille, tried to convince Hirsch that sociologists needed to take a more central role by contributing to “more general ideas” in the conception of the new town. Alain Touraine, by that time a well-known sociologist, was given a research contract by the IAURP to study the mechanisms of decision-making in the planning process. The planning team found his work too theoretical to be of any concrete use. Hirsch then suggested that a sociologist come work and observe for a longer period. Touraine responded by sending his assistant Jean Lojkine. In the eyes of Hirsch, he remained a quiet observer and disappeared “without exchanging his findings to the team.”⁵⁶⁰ The involvement of sociology in planning was thus fundamentally ambivalent: partly engaged and instrumental, partly removed and critical.

⁵⁵⁸ “les sociologiques n’étaient pas capables de répondre et les recettes pratiques n’entraient pas dans le champ de leurs préoccupations, entièrement tournées vers le discours abstrait et le langage ésotérique.” Ibid., 146.

⁵⁵⁹ “le travail utile mais ingrat de Madame Lévi n’avait pas beaucoup de retentissement auprès de ses confrères.” Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 149.

4. Research, Critique, and Design.

While over the next decade sociology remained a crucial point of reference in French planning - and that of the *villes nouvelles* in particular - it would become increasingly critical in its attitude towards planning. The conference on Urbanism and Sociology, held during the first three days of May 1968 in the quiet settings of the Royaumont abbey outside Paris, was a landmark for this critical turn. Four years earlier, the Ministry of Construction had commissioned a team of university sociologists to pursue a series of case studies of provincial cities like Lille, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, and Toulouse.⁵⁶¹ The aim was to find out how exactly sociology could contribute to urban planning. This eventually led to the 1968 Royaumont conference, organized by Françoise Dissard, an urbanist at the Ministry, and Jean-Paul Trystram.⁵⁶² Apart from a wide range of sociologists - including Henri Coing, Raymond Ledrut, Henri Lefebvre and Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe - the meeting gathered state officials like Paul Cornière, architects like Marcel Lods, Gérard Thurnauer and Hubert Tonka, urbanists like Robert Auzelle, and representatives of various user and family organizations. The conference was the veritable culmination of a decade of discussions about the virtues of linking sociology and urbanism, but also sign of growing sociological critiques of state-led urbanism. Ultimately, the conference would mark the end of a belief in a strictly consensual or instrumental relationship between sociologists and urban planners. Soon after, the development of a critical sociology of planning became radically opposed to the simply instrumental use of sociological data in planning.⁵⁶³ Urbanism was no longer understood as just a technique or a neutral form of expertise, but a fundamentally political and critical force. The social unrest that was unleashed soon after the end of the conference that same month of May had much to do with this changing understanding. As much as it had changed the face of urban France over the past decades, state-led urbanism was now criticized *generally* for its complicity in maintaining a classist capitalist society. Influenced by Lefebvre's writings, Tonka concluded after the conference that "the urban question is not innocent in the global strategy of class power, because our society - according to the latest news - is a classist society." Consequently, so he argued, "urbanism is not an issue in itself, exterior to class struggle," but has a "coherent repressive rationality:" expertise of urbanism is thus a direct instrument of class power.⁵⁶⁴

Not only the *grands ensembles*, but also the *villes nouvelles* were an easy target for May 1968. Michel Mottez, one of the planners of Evry, recounted the period with ambivalence: "It is a fact that the wind of 1968, of which we made use in our approaches and reflections, was often turned against us by many inhabitants for whom we were the slaves of big capital and of a technocratic

⁵⁶¹ See: Jean-Paul Trystram, Françoise Dissard, Georges Granai et al., *Sociologie et développement urbain* (Paris: Ministère de la Construction, 1966) (CAC 19770685/012). Also see the contributions in the issue: "Sociologie urbaine," *Urbanisme* 93(1966).

⁵⁶² Jean-Paul Trystram, ed. *Sociologie et urbanisme* (Paris: Fondation Royaumont - Editions de l'Epi, 1970).

⁵⁶³ See: Lassave, *Les sociologues et la recherche urbaine dans la France contemporaine*; Amiot, *Contre l'Etat, les sociologues: Eléments pour une histoire de la sociologie urbaine en France, 1900-1980*.

⁵⁶⁴ "La problématique urbaine n'est pas innocente dans la stratégie globale du pouvoir de classe, puisque notre société - aux dernières nouvelles - est une société de classe. "L'urbanisme" n'est pas un problème en soi extérieur aux luttes de classes." In: Hubert Tonka, "Pratique urbaine de l'urbanisme," *Urbanisme* 106(1968): 7-10.

government.”⁵⁶⁵ Such critiques also reverberated within the governmental institutions that were responsible for the reigning condition. The “events” of May 1968 engendered a new, self-critical culture within the state administration. Rather than fundamentally negating the legitimacy of the state, this kind of attitude was closely linked to the idea of pragmatically improving state action. Just like the government had an obvious interest in understanding the reasons for the popular and intellectual unrest of 1968, so it had an interest in sociological expertise of the urban. As quantitative studies and opinion polls had failed to predict May 1968, such studies were off the table at this point.⁵⁶⁶ The kind of research that was in demand was often theoretically inclined and qualitative in method. During the following decade, the French state would further cultivate this kind of research - more independent, fundamental, in-depth, critical and academically oriented.

The ground for this evolution had already been laid before 1968 in the development of state-sponsored urban research. At mid-decade, the General Delegation of Scientific and Technical Research (*Délégation générale de la recherche scientifique et technique* or DGRST), a premier governmental research institution, had launched a series of open call for research projects under the broad theme of urbanization.⁵⁶⁷ This theme expressed the government’s desire to get a more comprehensive grasp of the unpredictable social repercussions of urban planning and urbanization. A similar call for research that same year had come from the Central Technical Service of Planning and Urbanism (*Service technique central d’aménagement et d’urbanisme*). This institution exploded in 1968 soon after it was established and was exemplary of the widespread movement of contestation in the hallways of many governmental institutions around May 1968.⁵⁶⁸ Its work was taken over by the DGRST, where from then on the commissioning of urban research was unified under the leadership of Michel Conan.⁵⁶⁹ Its open calls made space for a new type of research. Projects were no longer directly commissioned with a specific application in mind; instead the government began to launch calls for research projects around broadly defined themes to which researchers could respond freely. As such, they enjoyed more freedom to be critical - despite the fact that their conclusions often remained within the realm of policy.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁵ “Il est un fait que le vent de “soixant-huit” , dont nous faisons usage dans nos démarches et réflexions, était souvent retourné contre nous par de nombreux habitants pour qui nous étions les serviteurs du grand capital et d’un pouvoir technocratique.” In: Michel Mottez, *Carnets de campagne: Evry 1965-2007* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), 39.

⁵⁶⁶ According to Anne Querrien, the DGRST did not want opinion polls at this point. This was only because it was funded elsewhere and was too expensive, but also because IFOP had finished an opinion poll just before 1968 showing that youth were happy and just wanted consumption products and to be normal, something that clearly did not stroke with the protests that would follow that same year. Faith in opinion polls was thus lost: it assumed “average” consumer profiles and failed to register what was going on “on the ground.” See: Interview of the author with Anne Querrien, 25 February 2008.

⁵⁶⁷ See: Programmes d’actions concertées, 1966-1970 (CAC 19771142/041).

⁵⁶⁸ See: Jeannine Verdes-Leroux, *Les Candidats-aménageurs dans une organisation en quête de finalité: Le Service technique central d’aménagement et d’urbanisme* (Paris: SN, 1972) (CDU). See also the summary of political discussions held around May 1968 at a series of governmental institutions, including BERU, CSU, SCET, CERAU, CEDER, and STCAU: “L’urbanisme et question,” *Urbanisme* 106(1968).

⁵⁶⁹ Michel Conan was inspired by U.S. urban research and was very critical of quantitative models. See: Interview of the author with Anne Querrien, 25 February 2008.

⁵⁷⁰ See: Programmes d’actions concertées, 1966-1970. See also: DGRST research programs of 1972-1974 (CAC 19910319/045&047).

This kind of support opened up a veritable “market” for urban research, to which a range of emerging research offices responded.⁵⁷¹ Many had emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some of them were offsprings of large semi-public economic research institutions; others were entirely new and claimed novel urban research expertise.⁵⁷² Situated on the borders of the university, the public sector, and the private consultancy sector, they were a wind of change in the research landscape otherwise dominated by the schism between “ivory tower” academic studies, and the “applied” research directly commissioned by the government. As such, a variety of research firms - institutions like the *Centre de sociologie urbaine* (CSU), research cells like CERFI and teams like that around Baudrillard or the *Institut d’urbanisme de Grenoble* - received state financing at a time when various governmental bodies began funding independent research projects.⁵⁷³

Many of these offices were on the political left, and their work was specked with the kind of neo-Marxist and post-structuralist tendencies that remained dominant until the end of the 1970s. Yet, while they were fervent in their criticism of the state they continued to owe their very livelihood to it. CSU became one of the hotbeds for this kind of research.⁵⁷⁴ In contrast to the center’s original founder Chombart de Lauwe, who as Amiot has put it “did sociology for planners” the new generation “did sociology *of* planners and planning itself.”⁵⁷⁵ Despite Chombart de Lauwe’s attempts to understand the diversity of the user - in terms of class, age, and gender (but definitely not race) - his research was still based on a functionalist, universalist concept of the user. This was now unveiled as part of an ideology of state planning. The time of Chombart was over: instead of an objective study of material needs, urbanism was now understood to be a political act of interpreting the complexity of user/consumer aspirations. Despite the radical nature of this new critical apparatus, the imbrication of state critique and action led some of this sociological expertise to ultimately find its way back into planning - with the necessary detours and translations.

The architects, despite joining in rather late, did not remain at the sidelines. After a remarkable silence, architectural culture was vigorously woken up by May 1968. By then, a younger group of architects had slowly emancipated from its elders and had become critical of their ideas still dominated by Beaux-Arts academicism and an uninspired interpretation of the Athens Charter. Their critique was certainly radicalized by the awareness that this older generation was responsible for designing and building the first *grands ensembles*. French architecture education, with its notoriously outdated system of education at the *Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts* (ENSBA), was crucial in this shift. The educational reforms at ENSBA during the 1960s - like the institution in 1963 of an external atelier led by Georges Candilis and Alexis Josic, who

⁵⁷¹ Claude, *Faire la ville: Les métiers de l’urbanisme au XXe siècle*, 168-78.

⁵⁷² Rapport du Groupe V: Etudes urbaines, Septembre 1965 (CAC 19920405/009).

⁵⁷³ Interview of the author with Anne Querrien, 25 February 2008.

⁵⁷⁴ While sociology had always perhaps been more on the left than the right, a renewed Marxism flourished in particular amongst sociologists at this time, see: Topalov, “Centre de recherche: Le Centre de sociologie urbaine.”

⁵⁷⁵ Amiot, *Contre l’Etat, les sociologues: Eléments pour une histoire de la sociologie urbaine en France, 1900-1980*, 41.

told their students to attend the lectures of Henri Lefebvre then teaching at Nanterre - were crucial in preparing the upheavals of May 1968 that would mean the end of the Beaux-Arts system.⁵⁷⁶ Whether the school's resistance to renewal only exacerbated the contestation of 1968 or, as Jean-Louis Violeau has argued, "May 1968 did not invent anything at ENSBA," that year change in the French discipline of architecture was sped up to the level of a veritable cultural revolution. What posited itself as a direct vehicle of much-needed renewal - and what initially filled the vacuum left by the Beaux-Arts system - was a unique mix of social critique, devotion to sociology, and immersion in architectural research.

During the 1950s and 1960s, architecture at ENSBA remained in the hands of the "mandarins," as its leaders would later be referred to. Only the development of urbanism in the curriculum, which introduced a novel sensibility towards the urban, figured as a harbinger of the change to come. Urbanism at ENSBA was synonymous with the Atelier Tony Garnier. This was founded by André Gutton, who also taught at the *Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris* (IUP). Originally a professor in architecture theory, Gutton had developed courses in urbanism based on his own interpretation of the Athens charter and the French ambitions of national planning.⁵⁷⁷ When Robert Auzelle joined him in 1961, the course was transformed into a seminar and workshop (*Séminaire et Atelier d'Urbanisme*).⁵⁷⁸ The elective also functioned as a semi-independent association, whose briefs would be informed by the "real world" demands of private developers and the state.⁵⁷⁹ Not just the teachers, but much of the student body crossed over between ENSBA and IUP at this time. The seminar enjoyed a relative distance from Beaux-Arts formalism. Following Auzelle, it was not only indebted to CIAM principles, but was also inspired by the "human sciences" as they had been translated into the field by figures such as Gaston Bardet, Pierre George, and Chombart de Lauwe. Rather than looking at "the building itself", so Gutton argued, the Atelier Tony Garnier was the only studio to study "the building in the city." This for him entailed a shift from *form* to *program*,⁵⁸⁰ or in other words, "the architecture of the building was no longer only linked to its function, the building in itself 'had a goal' in the social life of the city."⁵⁸¹ Although a curriculum change was planned the year before,

⁵⁷⁶ On architectural education reforms around 1968, see: Michel Denès, *Le fantôme des Beaux-Arts: L'enseignement de l'architecture depuis 1968* (Paris: La Villette, 1999); Donald Drew Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture: Illustrated by the Grand Prix de Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Jean-Louis Violeau, *Les architectes et Mai 68* (Paris: Editions Recherches, 2005). (For the comment about Candilis and Lefebvre, see: *Ibid.*, 41.) See also: Lengereau, *L'Etat et l'architecture, 1958-1981: Une politique publique?*, 85-106; Jacques Lucan, *Architecture en France, 1940-2000: Histoire et theories* (Paris: Moniteur, 2001), 187-200.

⁵⁷⁷ In 1957, Untersteller, ENSBA's director, established a chair of urbanism for Gutton. Aublet took over his architecture theory course, so Gutton could shift completely to teaching urbanism.

⁵⁷⁸ Courses by André Gutton and Robert Auzelle. See also: André Gutton, "Séminaire et Atelier Tony Garnier: L'enseignement de l'urbanisme à l'ENSBA," *Urbanisme* 82-83(1964).

⁵⁷⁹ It was established as an association separate from ENSBA because Gutton and Auzelle wanted an engagement with planning practice and private development, see: André Gutton, "SATG 1961-1973 Séminaire et atelier Tony Garnier," *Urbanisme* 142 (1974): 81-117.

⁵⁸⁰ "De même, il ne s'agissait plus d'étudier seulement la "forme" de la cité, mais son "programme" mis au service de l'homme." In: Gutton, "Séminaire et Atelier Tony Garnier: L'enseignement de l'urbanisme à l'ENSBA," 100.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.* See also his published courses: André Gutton, *Conversations sur l'architecture, vol. VI: L'architecte et l'urbaniste* (Paris: Vincent Fréal & Cie, 1962).

ENSBA students would have to wait for actual courses in sociology until the upheavals of 1968.⁵⁸²

The IUP, while it was the oldest institution for urbanism in France, lacked the institutional strength to create an environment for proper urban research. During the 1950s, the ideas within the school were dominated by Auzelle's "Théorie Générale de l'Urbanisme." This course explicitly promoted an urbanism of "applied social sciences" including economics, biology, sociology, demography, geography and history.⁵⁸³ Opposed to the "academicism of beautiful plans" as much as the "Le Corbusier copycats," Auzelle's idealism was based on Marcel Poète's theory of the city as a complex social organism and its subsequent renderings by Gaston Bardet.⁵⁸⁴ Despite his focus on social use, he remained wary of opinion polls, following the argument of Catherine Bauer, the American modern housing advocate, that such polls strengthened traditional views and obstructed innovation.⁵⁸⁵ The only sociology course at IUP, "Introduction à la sociologie urbaine" taught by Jean Margot-Duclot since the early 1960s and based on the work of Georges Gurvitch, Georges Friedman, Maurice Halbwachs, Max Sorre and Pierre George, and Chombart de Lauwe, was of little impact.⁵⁸⁶

Sociology and urban research were thus present in the curriculum well before 1968, but remained marginal in architectural culture. They would take a central place in the institutional reorganization of 1968 as a direct result of students' critiques. The popular workshop (*Atelier populaire*) which students installed at ENSBA for the production of political art and was "open to all" was only one indication of how fundamental these critiques were. Its poster art was a direct political medium and featured statements like the famous "Motion of 15 May" which read: "We want to fight against the conditions of architectural production that submit it to the interests of public or private developers. How many architects have accepted to realize projects like Sarcelles [*des Sarcelles*], large or small? How many architects take account in their project specifications of the conditions of information, hygiene, and security of the workers on their

⁵⁸² In a 1967 note to teachers and students of ENSBA, Untersteller wrote that new faculty would be hired in 1968 to introduce students to the human and social sciences. Michel Ecochard and Jean-Paul Flamand were to decide which courses would be necessary and who to employ for teaching it. See: Enseignement de l'urbanisme et des sciences humaines, Note by Untersteller to the teachers and students of ENSBA, June 1967 (AN ENSBAAJ/52/978).

⁵⁸³ Théorie générale de l'urbanisme, Cours Robert Auzelle, année 1959-1960, Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris Créteil.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. For Bardet, see: Bardet, *Le nouvel urbanisme*. See also chapter 2.

⁵⁸⁵ Théorie générale de l'urbanisme, Cours Robert Auzelle, année 1959-1960, Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris Créteil.

⁵⁸⁶ Introduction à la sociologie urbaine, Cours de Margot-Duclot, année 1961-1962, Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris Créteil (CAC 19890277/002).

construction sites and would do it if not a single developer would respond to their call for tender?"⁵⁸⁷ The contestation at IUP was not very different.⁵⁸⁸

The only savior for architecture and urbanism was an awareness of its social use in society and its role in the larger question of the city.⁵⁸⁹ And what else promised critical architects such an enlightenment but the social sciences? For the younger generation of architects and students, the user - the obvious domain of the social sciences - was an entity unknown to their discipline under public attack, and was crucial to its rejuvenation. Architects' embrace of radical social critique was thus accompanied by a devotion to sociology. While before 1968 architects, teachers and students at ENSBA had often received it with hostility, sociology now came in heavy demand from all sides.⁵⁹⁰ Despite the highly politicized climate, its inclusion in architectural production was based on an ideal of scientific rigor. Scientificity was posited as the opposite of a strict focus on architectural form and production, and thus the solution to what was wrong with the architecture culture of the preceding decade.⁵⁹¹

Lefebvre had just assumed a teaching position at the University of Paris at Nanterre and began teaching at ENSBA as well. His work created an crucial link for students between architecture and urbanism on the one hand, and sociology on the other.⁵⁹² Many of the Pedagogical architecture units (*Unités pédagogiques d'architecture*) created after the educational reforms of late 1968 offered a prominent place to sociology and "scientific" research more generally. Grouped according to the political ideologies and pedagogical interests of both students and

⁵⁸⁷ "Nous voulons lutter contre les conditions de la production architecturale qui la soumettent, en fait, aux intérêts des promoteurs publics ou privés. Combien d'architectes ont-ils accepté de réaliser des Sarcelles grands ou petits? Combien d'architectes tiennent compte dans leur cahier des charges des conditions d'information, d'hygiène, de sécurité des travailleurs sur les chantiers et le feraient-ils qu'aucun promoteur ne répondrait à leur appel d'offre?" In: *Atelier populaire, présenté par lui-même: 87 affiches de mai-juin 1968*, (Paris: Bibliothèque de Mai, U.U.U. (Usines, Universités, Union), 1968). The "Motion of 15 May" was also published in the special number "May 68" of *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* (July 1968).

⁵⁸⁸ Just like ENSBA, IUP was in shambles after the contestation of May 1968. There had already been some minor reforms in 1966-67, but radical demands for self-management emerged in March 1968, accompanied by a similar critique of what was called the "Mandarin system." See: "L'institut d'urbanisme en autogestion: Commission d'étude de l'enseignement," *Urbanisme* 106(1968): 13. The institute at the rue Michelet was abandoned that same year, and a new IUP was established in Vincennes and at Dauphine. The latter would already be replaced in 1972 for the IUP at Créteil. At the same time, urban planning also became part of engineering education with the creation of a degree in *aménagement urbain* at ENPC in the early 1970s.

⁵⁸⁹ Denès, *Le fantôme des Beaux-Arts: L'enseignement de l'architecture depuis 1968*, 181-97.

⁵⁹⁰ Monique Eleb and Christian Gaillard, "Le savoir et la provocation," in *Espaces des sciences humaines: Questions d'enseignement en architecture*, ed. Centre de recherche en sciences humaines (Paris: Institut de l'environnement, 1974).

⁵⁹¹ See: Jean-Louis Violeau, "Why and How 'To Do Science'? On the Often Ambiguous Relationship between Architecture and the Social Sciences in France in the Wake of May '68," *Footprint* no. 1 (2007): 7-22, 9; Denès, *Le fantôme des Beaux-Arts: L'enseignement de l'architecture depuis 1968*, 111-15.

⁵⁹² Lukasz Stanek has demonstrated Lefebvre's concrete role in French architecture and urbanism during the 1960s and 1970s: his wide network of contacts with architects (of the older generation like Jean Prouvé and of younger architects like Henri Ciriani, Paul Maymont, Nicolas Schöffer, Paul Chemetov, and so on) and artists (the Situationists, Constant); his teaching not only at Strasbourg and Nanterre, but also at IUP, ENSBA and later the UP 7; his critical reviews of modern architecture and urbanism (like that of Mourenx and Furtahl); his contribution to the establishment of state-aided architectural research from the mid-1960s onwards; his role in the reform of architectural education after the fall of ENSBA in 1968 (for example his participation in the "commissions Querrien" that led to the inclusion of sociology in the architectural curriculum); his role in architectural discourse through the founding and editing of journals like *Utopie* and *Espaces et Sociétés*; his collaboration on interdisciplinary research projects (like with Ricardo Bofill in the 1960s); his presence in juries of architectural competitions; and so on. See: Stanek, "Henri Lefebvre and the Concret Research of Space: Urban Theory, Empirical Studies, Architecture Practice".

teachers, some units were more enthusiastic than others. Yet, their general openness to social critique strengthened the position of sociology in architectural education during the following decade. To many architects, the main task of the sociologist was to supply them with answers to the question of user needs.⁵⁹³ The functionalist definition of need in modernist architecture having been discredited, architects realized that the definition of the user was now increasingly complex. Users' needs and desires in a thriving consumer culture were acknowledged as being invented rather than given. Unsurprisingly, Jean Baudrillard's theories became hugely popular in this context. In his words: "A theory of needs has no sense: the only thing that can exist is a theory of the ideological concept of need."⁵⁹⁴ More generally, sociology and anthropology were central in the redefinition of need from a mere physiological or biological given to a complex of culturally, psychologically, and socially defined elements.⁵⁹⁵ Sociology took up such an important position that it was soon referred to by some as "an imperialism at the hands of architecture"⁵⁹⁶

To sociology and critique was soon added architectural research, the development of which could ride on the wave of state-led urban research. Michel Conan, who was devoted student of the architectural doctrines of Christopher Alexander, was a key figure in bridging architectural and urban research.⁵⁹⁷ The DGRST calls for research he directed gave many architects the opportunity to execute funded research projects. In 1969 then, professor Lichnerowicz, a mathematician, was charged by the minister of cultural affaires to establish a governmental committee for architectural research. Heated policy discussions in which prominent sociologists like Philippe Boudon, Bernard Lassus, Nicole and Antoine Haumont as well as Henri Raymond took part, resulted in the establishment of a Committee for Research and Development in Architecture (*Comité de la Recherche et du Développement en Architecture*) to years later.⁵⁹⁸ This committee helped foster a new environment for architectural research in early 1970s France, and collaborated with DGRST to stimulate architectural research and to encourage and evaluate experimental architecture projects.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹³ See for instance: *Besoin(s): Analyse et critique de la notion*. Cahiers pédagogiques, no. 5 (Paris: Institut de l'environnement / Centre de recherche en sciences humaines, 1975).

⁵⁹⁴ "Une théorie des besoins n'a pas de sens: il ne peut y avoir qu'une théorie du concept idéologique de besoin." In: Jean Baudrillard, "Genèse idéologique des besoins," *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* 16, no. 47 (June - December 1969): 45-68, 61.

⁵⁹⁵ This was one of the central preoccupations in the collective research project: Françoise Bedos, Michel Dameron, Claude Leroy et al., eds., *Les besoins fonctionnels de l'homme en vue de leur projection ultérieure sur le plan de la conception architecturale, compte rendu de fin de contrat* (Paris: CRAUC, 1970).

⁵⁹⁶ "un impérialisme face à l'architecture." In: Michèle Teboul, "Ailleurs, Colloque 1972," in *Espaces des sciences humaines: Questions d'enseignement en architecture*, ed. Centre de recherche en sciences humaines (Paris: Institut de l'environnement, 1974), 36.

⁵⁹⁷ See a later article by him: Michel Conan, "Urgence des recherches sur la conception architecturale," *Architecture et comportement* 5, no. 3 (1989): 215-31.

⁵⁹⁸ The latter three were students of Lefebvre; Chombart de Lauwe was explicitly excluded because of his rivalry with Lefebvre, according to: Violeau, "Why and How 'To Do Science'?: On the Often Ambiguous Relationship between Architecture and the Social Sciences in France in the Wake of May '68."

⁵⁹⁹ Under the responsibility of a *Secrétariat de la recherche architecturale* (SRA) at the *Direction de l'architecture*, CORDA's first call for research projects was in 1974, second one in 1976. For Plan Construction, see chapter 6.

Journals like *Urbanisme* and *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* functioned as sounding board for this novel branch of the discipline, “research.” One of the main figures in architectural research at this time was Bernard Huet.⁶⁰⁰ Ambivalently situated in between professional ideologies and the academy, “being scientific” would remain the obsession throughout the 1970s.⁶⁰¹ To a large extent, the emergence of architectural research in France mirrored what was going on elsewhere in Europe and the United States. At a moment when architecture went through a fundamental crisis, figures from Nicolas Habraken to Christopher Alexander turned towards research. They formulated a seductive, productive alternative to both the “business as usual” of an older generation and the radical negativity of critics like Tafuri and Cacciari.

This ambivalence was also reflected in the societal position of the French architect at this time. While before the 1950s architecture was still largely defined by its status as a liberal profession, the overwhelming role of the state in architectural building during the *trentes glorieuses* had radically overturned architects’ identity. In the eyes of the public, they were often seen as not more than accomplices of the centralized state, responsible of its purported mistakes like that of the *grands ensembles*. The combination of social critique and self-critique, which shaped the intellectual universe of young architects in the years around 1968 placed them in often contradictory situations. Their opportunities for experimentation often existed by virtue of the very same institution they criticized so fundamentally: the centralized state.

Young collaborative architecture offices like Atelier d’Urbanisme et d’Architecture (AUA) presented this ambiguous attitude towards practice.⁶⁰² In a proposal for the *ville nouvelle* of Evry, they explained their position as follows: “As long as sociology and town planning continue to serve a system where urban functions are restricted to the storage of the manpower necessary to the development of capitalism, theoretical choice shall be restricted to either the utopia of a testimony concealing impotence or the search for experimental spaces, while awaiting a liberated social practice that shall come at the proper time. [...] The city is not a free space for the accumulation of functional envelopes, it is an experimental support for intercourse. Our mission is to imagine its mechanisms and processes of development. While waiting for an adult society capable of constructing its own environment, we willingly accept the role of Demiurges ascribed to us, limiting our ideology to DIDACTISM and COMPLEXITY.”⁶⁰³

The collective was held together by a resolute adherence to communism. This critical position - at a time when neo-Marxism shaped the dominant intellectual mindset - did not stop them from submitting projects for large state-led urban planning projects, like for the new towns of Evry

⁶⁰⁰ Bernard Huet edited the important issue “Recherche + Habitat” of *Architecture d’aujourd’hui* in 1974.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² AUA was established in 1960 by the urbanist and sociologist Jacques Allégret together with Georges Loiseau, Jean Perrottet and Jean Tribel. Other members included Paul Chemetov, Henri Ciriani, Jean Deroche, Borja Huidobro, and Michel Corajoud, landscape architect. See: Pascale Blin, *L’AUA: Mythe et réalités. L’Atelier d’urbanisme et d’architecture, 1960-1985* (Paris / Milan: Moniteur / Electa, 1988).

⁶⁰³ Presentation of the office AUA, sent in by the architects, n.d. (CAC 19840342/324).

and Cergy-Pontoise, the Villeneuve project of Grenoble, and La Défense (figure 4.9).⁶⁰⁴ These were not the kind of projects that constituted a radical break from the large-scale capitalist state-led urbanism of the preceding decades, on the contrary. Such a conflicting attitude was not uncommon for the young, often collaborative offices that would be patronized by the French state during the 1970s. The *villes nouvelles* would become a primary playground for this kind of architecture, which as Manfredo Tafuri would note, speaks the language of contradiction remarkably well.

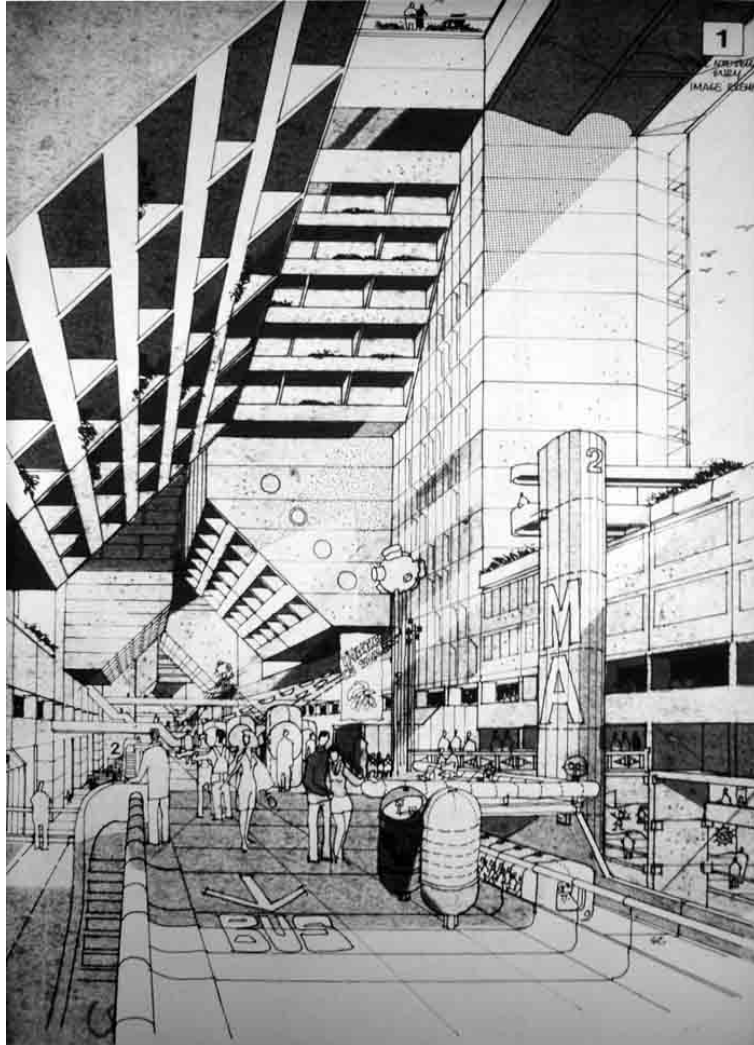


Figure 4.9: Proposal for the new town of Evry (competition Evry I, 1971-1972) by Paul Chemetov, Georges Loiseau, and Jean Tribel (AUA), together with Taller de Arquitectura-Ricardo Bofill, Jean Ginsberg and Martin van Treeck (Source: CAC 19840342/324).

⁶⁰⁴ On the competition entry for Evry, see: Lucan, *Architecture en France, 1940-2000: Histoire et theories*, 179-81; Blin, *L'AUA: Mythe et réalités. L'Atelier d'urbanisme et d'architecture, 1960-1985*, 90-95.

5. Le Vaudreuil

Perhaps more than by the direct insertion of sociological knowledge, the reorganization of urban expertise - in which French new town planning was a crucial element - was driven by the strong attraction to a certain sociological sensibility. Le Vaudreuil, one of the official new towns launched in 1965 and the first to be developed in architectural detail, was exemplary of how sociological concern with the user and a social critique of existing practices entered into the planning process.

The new town was part of the *Schéma directeur d'aménagement de la Basse vallée de la Seine*, the first regional planning study in France outside the Paris region. While it was developed in participation with local politicians and the private sector, this plan still fit the mold of a Gaullist France in the ban of national *grandeur*. Optimistic forecasts at the height of the *trentes glorieuses* legitimized the plan for a new town of 100,000 inhabitants in the middle of a still largely rural region. The plan was drastically scaled down in the mid-1970s, and of the gigantic new town plan eventually remains, thirty years later, a small municipality of 13,500 inhabitants with a new name, Val-de-Reuil. Despite this failure when compared to large French new towns like Cergy-Pontoise, its architecture and urbanism - some of which got built - embodied high hopes for the creation of a better kind of urbanity.⁶⁰⁵

These hopes began with the very first proposals for the new town, developed by the young collaborative architects' office Atelier de Montrouge, which was commissioned for the new town's first urban plan in 1967.⁶⁰⁶ The office was created in 1958 by Pierre Riboulet, Gérard Thurnauer, Jean-Louis Véret, and Jean Renaudie, graduates from ENSBA with a mix of leftist political affiliations from socialism to maoism. Its collaborative nature in and by itself was already considered revolutionary in the reigning architectural climate of France. As Catherine Blain and others have described, the collaborative was one of the more vocal proponents of the younger generation that helped overturn the Beaux-Arts system.⁶⁰⁷ They were first commissioned for Le Vaudreuil in 1967, when the team still included Jean Renaudie. After his departure the following year, the three others continued to work on the new town plan (until 1972), now in collaboration with the official study mission, the *Mission d'étude de la ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil*.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁵ See: Claire Brossaud, *Le Vaudreuil Ville Nouvelle (Val-de-Reuil) et son imaginaire bâtisseur: Identification d'un champ autour d'une ville* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003). For a first personal historical account, see: Jean Maze, *L'aventure du Vaudreuil: Histoire d'une ville nouvelle* (Paris: Dominique Vincent, 1977). See also: Frédéric Saunier, "L'urbanisation en Basse-Seine: Regards sur la conception et l'évolution des grands ensembles et de la ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil," *Histoire urbaine*, no. 17 (2006): 129-46.

⁶⁰⁶ My analysis is to a large extent based in part on the research of Catherine Blaine on l'Atelier de Montrouge, see: Catherine Blain, "L'Atelier de Montrouge (1958-1981): Prolégomènes à une autre modernité" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Université Paris 8, 2001); Catherine Blain, "L'Atelier de Montrouge et le Vaudreuil," *Ethnologie française*, no. 1 (January - March 2003): 41-50; Catherine Blain, "Val-de-Reuil, ville pilote pour l'environnement," *Études normandes*, no. 2 (2004): 64-77; Catherine Blain, "Le Vaudreuil: Contribution théorique à une manière de penser et de produire l'habitat," in *Le Team X et le logement collectif à grande échelle en Europe: Un retour critique des pratiques vers la théorie. Actes du séminaire européen, Toulouse 27-28 mai 2004*, ed. Bruno Fayolle Lussac and Rémi Papillault (Pessac: Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine, 2008); Blain and Delaunay, *L'Atelier de Montrouge: La modernité à l'oeuvre, 1958-1981*, 182-91.

⁶⁰⁷ For a history of the office, see: *Ibid.*, 15-23.

⁶⁰⁸ The team was initially chosen because Thurnauer had worked for Louis Arretche, the city architect of Rouen in the region.

More than a real proposal for construction, the initial submission of the Atelier de Montrouge was the graphic expression of a theoretical statement. Their concept channeled much of the ideas of the 1960s utopian projects - from Constant's New Babylon to the French generation of "spatial urbanists" like Yona Friedman and Nicolas Schöffer promoted by Michel Ragon - in particular their suggestion that freedom, change, and spontaneity were the basic ingredients of urbanity.⁶⁰⁹ It also took inspiration in the megastructural urbanism initially proposed by Alison and Peter Smithson in their Golden Lane and Berlin Hauptstadt projects, and further developed by Candilis-Josic-Woods. Projects like these aimed to replace the rigidity of functionalist space with a complex, flexible, and open structure that gave some form of agency to its users. In the late 1960s, these modernist technological utopias escaped the harshness by which the *grands ensembles* were condemned, but were nevertheless criticized for their social irresponsiveness. In the initial designs for le Vaudreuil, remnants of these utopian schemes meshed with heightened social concerns and sociological theorization. As Jean Renaudie expressed in his drawings of theoretical propositions for le Vaudreuil, the architects suggested a networked urbanism that encouraged individual mobility and flexible forms of sociability. At the same time, the proposals envisioned an alternative kind of urbanity in which the intimacy of social life would be fostered by the complex organicism of an all-encompassing environment (figure 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12).

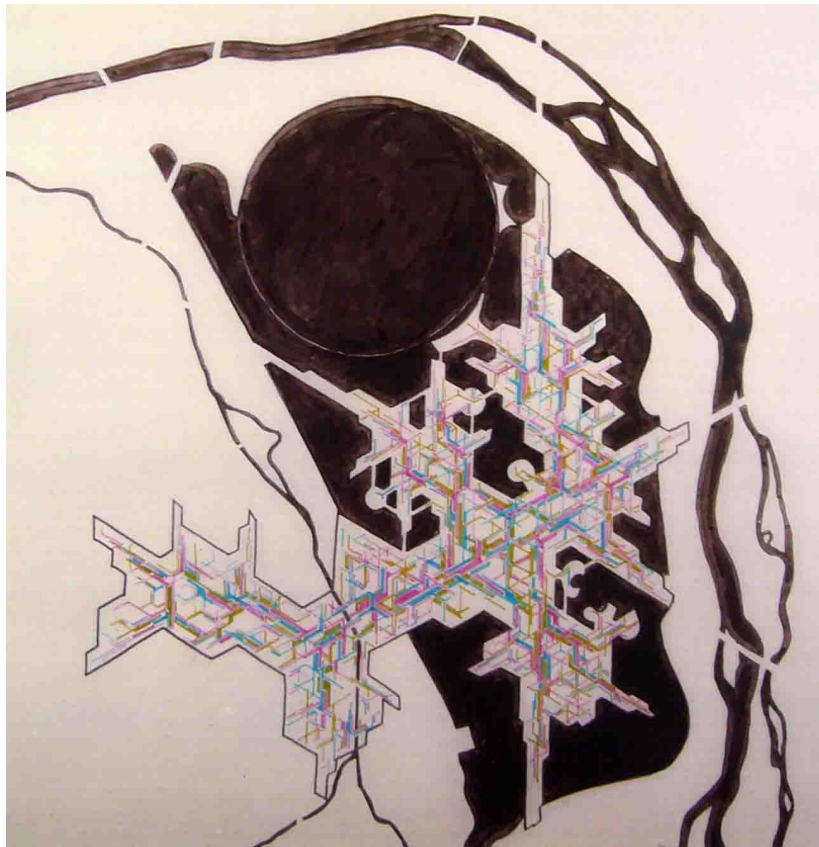


Figure 4.10: Atelier de Montrouge, proposition A for Le Vaudreuil (1967-1968) (Source: CAA Fonds ATM 162 IFA 712: MEBS Le Vaudreuil, ville nouvelle. Premières recherches, April 1968 (Renaudie, Riboulet, Thurnauer, Veret).

⁶⁰⁹ See: Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970*.



Figure 4.11: Atelier de Montrouge, proposition B for Le Vaudreuil (1967-1968) (Source: CAA Fonds ATM 162 IFA 712: MEBS Le Vaudreuil, ville nouvelle. Premières recherches, April 1968 (Renaudie, Riboulet, Thurnauer, Veret).

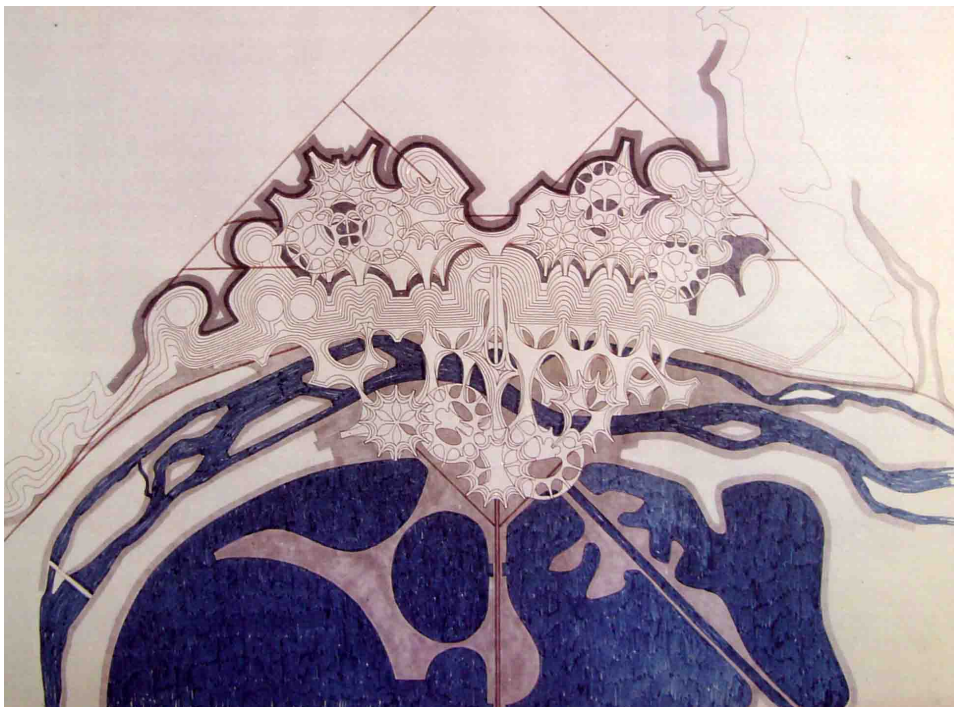


Figure 4.12: Atelier de Montrouge, proposition C for Le Vaudreuil (1967-1968) (Source: CAA Fonds ATM 162 IFA 712: MEBS Le Vaudreuil, ville nouvelle. Premières recherches, April 1968 (Renaudie, Riboulet, Thurnauer, Veret).

After the establishment of the official study mission 1968, the architects further developed their plan in close collaboration with this large multidisciplinary team, and in particular with its sociologists. Led by Jean-Paul Lacaze, the team included some architects and planners (for executive work and technical detailing), a geographer, a landscape architect, an economist, and several sociologists.⁶¹⁰ Initially, its preliminary studies for planning were primarily economic, demographic, and geographic. Rather than to pursue sociological study, the stated role of the sociologists was first of all to reflect on the methodology of the planning process. According to one of them, Gérard Héliot, they encouraged the team to think outside of their special expertise, and reflect more globally, “almost philosophically” on the project. Their role subsequently changed, as they began to report and synthesize the multidisciplinary team’s reflection on the city and the goals of the project. Later on, their function became more specialized: they became responsible only for the programming of the collective facilities alone.⁶¹¹ Despite these changing roles, there was a strong and continuing alliance between the sociologists in the team and the architects of the Atelier de Montrouge. Both parties insisted the whole team sit together to theorize the project globally before doing any drawing.⁶¹² The overall approach to the urbanism of Le Vaudreuil was thus developed by the sociologists and the architects together. As Héliot later recounted in an interview: “To me it seems that the role of the social sciences, in le Vaudreuil, has been fundamental during the whole study period. I repeat: social sciences, that is to say a certain state of mind that was led to a certain way of reasoning and wanting to pursue studies that were prevalent as much with the social scientists [sciences] properly speaking, as with a group of architects that were particularly sociologized, if I may say so.”⁶¹³

Rather than providing a master plan that would define the new town in its entirety, the architects wanted to provide only “the conditions of its birth and its development.”⁶¹⁴ This intention was most clearly expressed in the planning idea of a *germe de ville* or “embryo of a city.” Instead of a normative procedure of discrete phases of development, the gradual growth of the city was conceived of as an organic process, in which each subsequent phase of development was “complete in itself” (figure 4.13).

⁶¹⁰ Sociologists were: Anne Hublin, Gérard Héliot, Rémy Daniel, and Maurice Imbert. See: Blain, "L'Atelier de Montrouge et le Vaudreuil," 45.

⁶¹¹ André Grandsard, "Le recours aux sciences humaines dans la conception de la ville nouvelle de Vaudreuil, 1967-1973" (Ph.D. Dissertation, EHESS, 1989), 30.

⁶¹² Interview with Gérard Héliot in: *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶¹³ “Moi il me semble que le rôle des sciences humaines, dans le Vaudreuil, a été fondamental pendant toute cette période d’étude. Je répète bien: sciences humaines, c’est-à-dire un certain état d’esprit qui était une certaine manière de raisonner et de vouloir faire des études qui était répandu aussi bien chez les sciences humaines proprement dites, que chez un groupe d’architectes particulièrement sociologisés, si je puis dire.” Interview with Gérard Héliot (sociologist) in: *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶¹⁴ Blain, "L'Atelier de Montrouge et le Vaudreuil," 44.

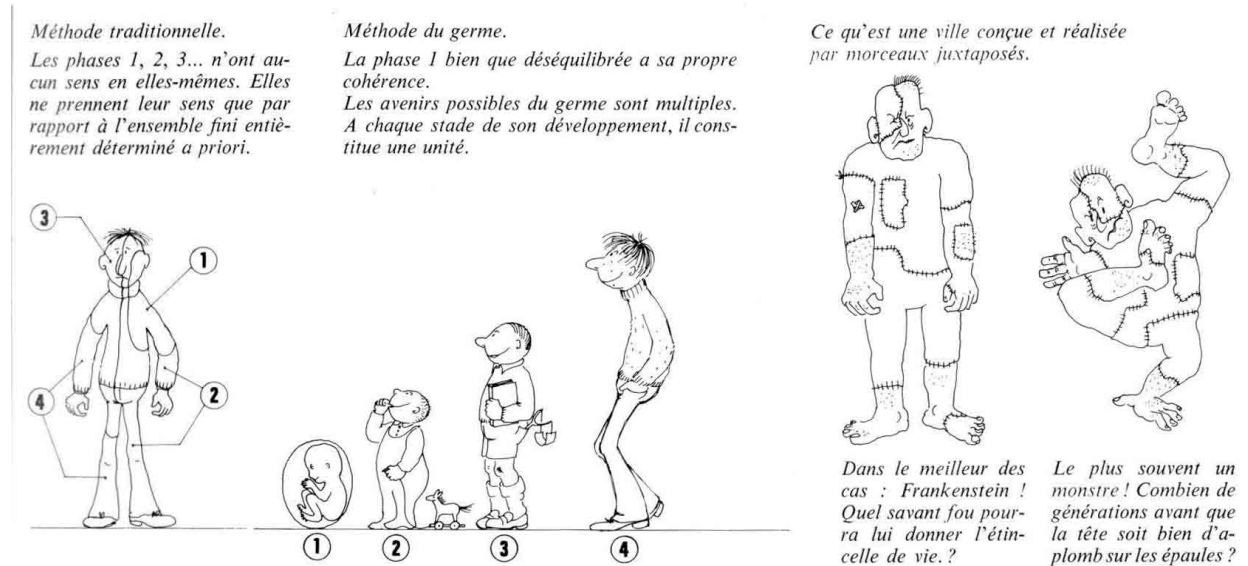


Figure 4.13: The “embryo of a city” concept explained by cartoon (Source: “Le Vaudreuil: Une méthode d’étude et de réalisation” *Cahiers de l’IAURP* 30(1973): 23).

At the basis of the theoretical reflexion of the architects and the planning team was the “choice to make a new kind of city.” Their proposal was no less than a manifesto: with a diverse and open structure that would allow freedom of choice in both lifestyle and future planning, it was to be “a combinatory, complex, and flexible city.”⁶¹⁵ By combinatory, they meant that the sum would be larger than its individual parts; all parts of the city would be linked to each other in a complex whole.⁶¹⁶ In the words of Jean Renaudie: “In the city, there are no simple objects, there is undoubtedly not even an object at all. Each element takes a meaning only in the combination in a much vaster whole, that is itself implied at the very heart of the element.”⁶¹⁷ This idea - both organicist and structuralist in inspiration - constituted a direct critique of previous French urbanism and CIAM functionalism: by this time many architects criticized them for creating individual functional zones without the indispensable linkages that make it a city.⁶¹⁸

The notion of “combinatory” had already been introduced into architecture by Robert Le Ricolais and Reima Pietilä in an article published in 1959 in *Le Carré bleu*, one of the principal

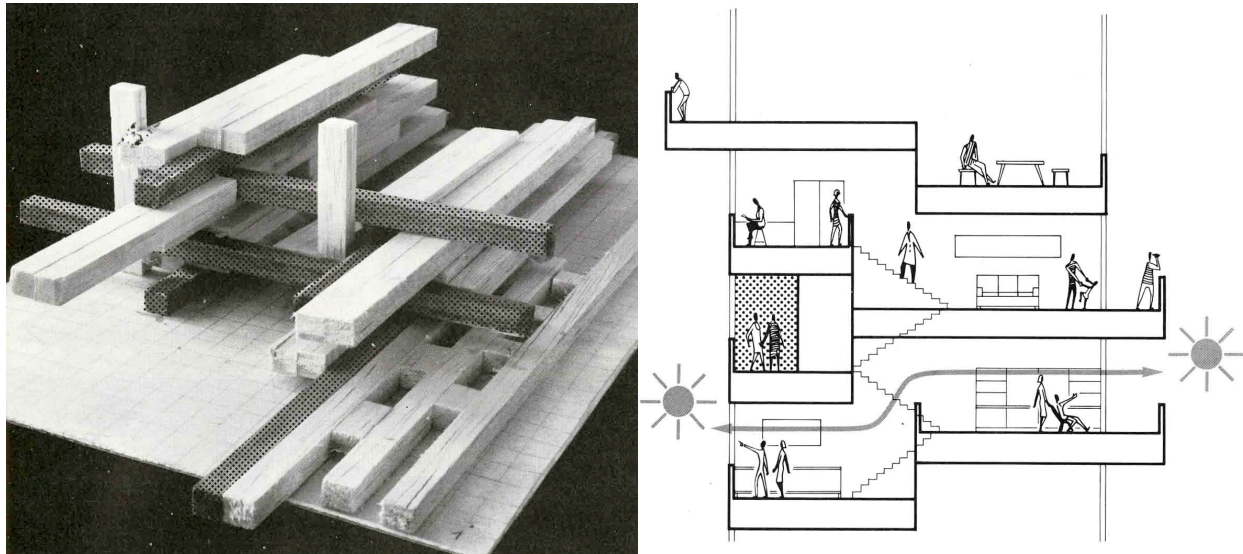
⁶¹⁵ “une ville combinatoire, complexe, évolutive” In: *Le Vaudreuil, ville nouvelle: Premières recherches*, MEBS /Atelier de Montrouge, avril 1968 (CAA ATM 162 IFA 712).

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ “Dans la ville, il n’y a pas d’objets simples, il n’y a sans doute pas d’objet du tout. Chaque élément ne prend un sens que dans sa combinaison dans un ensemble plus vaste, lui-même impliqué au plus profond de l’élément.” In: Jean Renaudie, “Pour une connaissance de la ville,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 146 (October - November 1969): 10-16, 12.

⁶¹⁸ “Les explications de la biologie sur la structure des organismes vivants semblent illustrer parfaitement l’organisme complexe qu’est une ville” In: *Ibid.*, 13. For Jean Renaudie’s critique of CIAM functionalism, see: Paul Bossard, Claude Parant, and Jean Renaudie, “Trois architectes répondent,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 138 (June - July 1968): 30-33.

institutions of the postwar architectural avant-garde.⁶¹⁹ The concept was inspired by systems-thinking and evoked Wiener's cybernetics, not surprisingly, at the height of an architectural culture heavily attracted by the hard sciences. At the same time however, this borrowing served the poetic and the social. It led the architects to develop a theoretical conception of urbanity as one of communications, patterns, elements, relations, structures. Of course, it also responded to the dominant mindset of structuralism during the 1960s, a time which some would later refer to as "the Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Lacan years."⁶²⁰ The gradual shift in structuralism from closed to open systems as a mode of analysis was paralleled by an evolution in urban planning concepts: from the hierarchy of the neighborhood units to the open structure for which the architects' design for le Vaudreuil was exemplary.⁶²¹ The planning team and the architects of the Atelier de Montrouge were inspired by these new structuralist principles, in particular by that of the Dutch SAR group led by John Habraken. In 1971 the planning team commissioned this group for a study on the patterns and "rules" for the urban organization.⁶²² Their eventual proposal was a three-dimensional urban mesh (*maille*) that could be filled in at random to create a diversity of different dwelling conditions and public spaces (figure 4.14).



⁶¹⁹ This has already been pointed out by Blain, see: Blain, "L'Atelier de Montrouge et le Vaudreuil."

⁶²⁰ See: Jean-François Sirinelli, "Les années 1960, première manière," in *Histoire culturelle de la France: Le temps des masses, le vingtième siècle, tome 4*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Seuil, 1998), : 260.; Jean-Pierre Delas and Bruno Milly, *Histoire des pensées sociologiques* (Paris: Dalloz / Sirey, 1997), : 233-59. For an account of structuralism in architecture around 1968, see: Violeau, *Les architectes et Mai 68*, 229-35.

⁶²¹ The structuralism of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu (in particular his study of domestic space in Kabylia) and Lévi-Strauss, and so on reverberated in the work of architects like Jan Van Eyck, John Habraken and his SAR research group, and Yona Friedman. See for instance: Yona Friedman, "La théorie des systèmes compréhensibles et son application à l'urbanisme," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 115 (June - July 1964): 28-29; Claire Duplay and Michel Duplay, "La création collective du tissu urbain par les systèmes d'éléments combinatoires," *Le Carré bleu*, no. 4 (1972).

⁶²² Patterns for Le Vaudreuil, SAR Eindhoven, mai 1971, étude pour MEVNV (CAA ATM 162 IFA 1551/1).

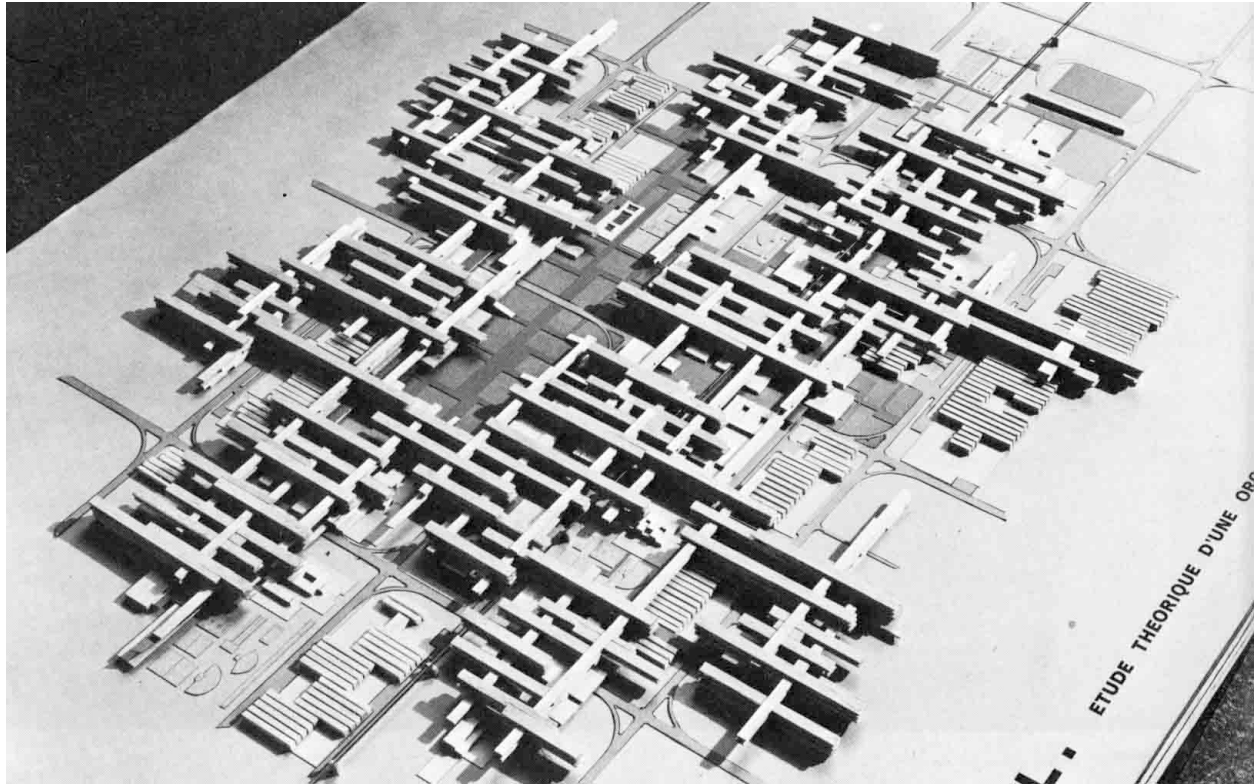
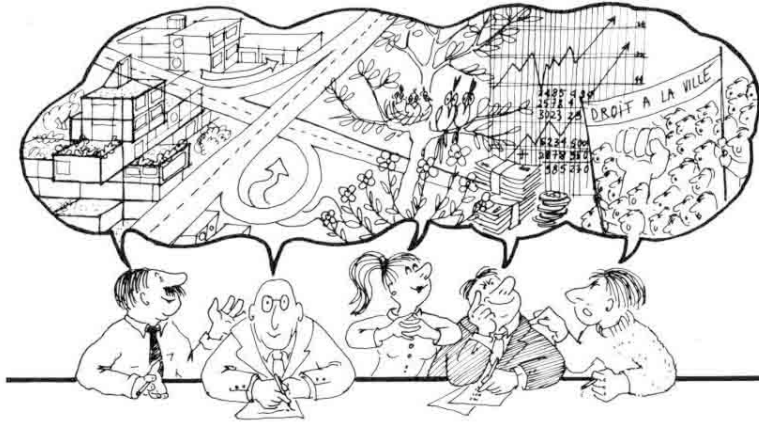


Figure 4.14: The proposal of a three-dimensional woven structure by Atelier de Montrouge for le Vaudreuil, 1968-1972 (Source: “Le Vaudreuil: Une méthode d’étude et de réalisation” *Cahiers de l’IAURP* 30(1973): 51 & 54).

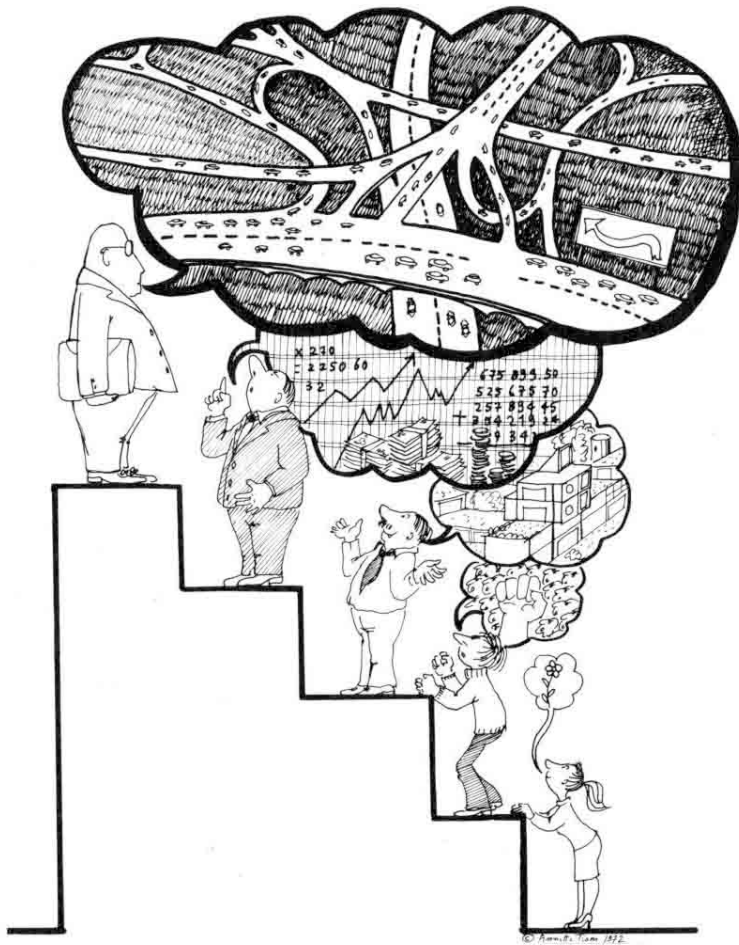
This urban conception was derived from sociological concepts that had been circulating over the past decade. The planning and design proposal for the new town, as it was published in the *Cahiers de l’IAURP* in 1972, abundantly cited sociological work like Raymond Ledrut’s “L’espace social et la ville” and Christopher Alexander’s “A city is not a tree.” But it was the work of Henri Lefebvre that constituted the primary source of inspiration for the architects. As pointed out earlier, Lefebvre was a key mediator of sociological concepts and critiques into the domain of architecture. His “The Right to the City” of 1968 had rapidly become a classic for the young generation of French architects (figure 4.15).⁶²³ The call by the Atelier de Montrouge for what they called a “right to architecture” was a direct adoption of Lefebvre’s notion of the “right to the city.” For Pierre Riboulet - who became a regular contributor to *Espace et Sociétés*, the critical architecture and planning journal established by Henri Lefebvre and Anatole Kopp in 1970 - “the city is architecture,” and thus the “right to architecture” was understood as equal to the right of inhabitants to freely create their everyday urban environment.⁶²⁴

⁶²³ Stanek, “Henri Lefebvre and the Concret Research of Space: Urban Theory, Empirical Studies, Architecture Practice”, 33; Gérard Monnier, *L’architecture moderne en France, Tome 3: De la croissance à la compétition, 1967-1999* (Paris: Picard, 2000), 55-56; Violeau, *Les architectes et Mai 68*, 209-14.

⁶²⁴ Notes sur la création des villes par leurs habitants ou le droit à l’architecture, Pierre Riboulet, Octobre 1968, in: *Recherches pour la ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil, 1972* (CAA ATM 162 IFA 713).



Fonctionnement d'une équipe pluridisciplinaire non hiérarchisée.



Fonctionnement d'une équipe pluridisciplinaire hiérarchisée.

Figure 4.15: Cartoon illustrating the “non-hierarchical” working of the multidisciplinary design team of le Vaudreuil (top), compared to that of a hierarchical one (bottom). It also demonstrated how central Lefebvre’s *Le droit à la ville* was in this new way of planning (see top right) (Source: “Le Vaudreuil: Une méthode d’étude et de réalisation” *Cahiers de l’IAURP* 30(1973): 8).

One of the more famous phrases in Lefebvre's book read: "The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: the right to freedom, to individualization in the social world, to housing [*habitat*] and dwelling [*l'habiter*]. The right to the creative work (the participatory activity) and the right to appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property) are all implied in the right to the city."⁶²⁵ It was this crucial concept of appropriation which the architects of Atelier de Montrouge and the planning team of le Vaudreuil adopted.

The notion of appropriation was not a novelty in sociology. Chombart de Lauwe had employed it already during the 1950s in his analyses of suburban housing estates. He spoke about inhabitants' use of interior decoration in new apartments as a way to appropriate or personalize them. While they recognized the importance of such processes, researchers like Chombart and René Kaës did not emphasize the spatially transformative aspect of appropriation.⁶²⁶ For Lefebvre however, appropriation was first of all a critical and creative response to the functionalist concept of need at the basis of the *grands ensembles*. Two sociological studies had provided him with the concrete material for this understanding. The first was a government-funded research project on dwelling culture in French suburban single family homes. Published as *L'habitat pavillonnaire* in 1964, with a preface of Lefebvre,⁶²⁷ the study revealed inhabitants' practical and symbolic markings of space, and demonstrated the creative possibilities and changing uses of attics, basements, garages, and front lawns as a form of spatial flexibility. A second study, by Philippe Boudon, analyzed the process by which the inhabitants of Le Corbusier's suburban housing estate in Pessac had altered their homes over the years since its construction to adapt to changing needs and popular tastes. The study resulted in a 1969 book *Pessac de Le Corbusier*, again prefaced by Lefebvre.⁶²⁸ The findings of these two studies were instrumental to Lefebvre in the development of his concept of appropriation, which was "at the same time analytical, critical, and prospective."⁶²⁹ It was understood as a set of creative practices that substantially transformed a given spatial setting or model without destroying it. It was this understanding of appropriation that circulated in architectural culture at the end of the 1960s. The collective research project on "the functional needs of man" sponsored by DGRST and in which many French architects and sociologists collaborated - from Henri Lefebvre to Georges-Henri Pingusson - marks its height. The study was directly founded on the dichotomy between "architectural space" as conceived by architects, and "users' space," which was the result of "the

⁶²⁵ "Le droit à la ville se manifeste comme forme supérieure des droits: droit à la liberté, à l'individualisation dans la socialisation, à l'habitat et à l'habiter. Le droit à l'oeuvre (à l'activité participante) et le droit à l'appropriation (bien distinct du droit à la propriété) s'impliquent dans le droit à la ville." In: Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968), 155.

⁶²⁶ Mainstream interpretations did not emphasize the creative or critical content of appropriation. René Kaës for instance described inhabitants' use of interior decoration as appropriation, see: Kaës, *Vivre dans les grands ensembles*, 99.

⁶²⁷ Henri Raymond, Nicole Haumont, Marie-Geneviève Raymond et al., *L'habitat pavillonnaire* (Paris: Centre de recherche d'urbanisme, 1964).

⁶²⁸ Philippe Boudon, *Pessac de Le Corbusier, 1927-1967: Etude socio-architecturale* (Paris: Dunod, 1969). Translated as: Philippe Boudon, *Lived-in architecture: Le Corbusier's Pessac revisited* (London: Humphries, 1972).

⁶²⁹ Stanek, "Henri Lefebvre and the Concret Research of Space: Urban Theory, Empirical Studies, Architecture Practice", 118.

praxis of space by its users, considering that they build their personal space by marking and appropriating it.”⁶³⁰

In 1968, Riboulet, cited Lefebvre’s concept of appropriation as he had formulated it in *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* in his own text with the title “La mobilité dans l’architecture en tant que moyen d’appropriation.” This essay celebrated the creative and transformative characteristics of appropriation in architecture.⁶³¹ At this time, the architects of the Atelier de Montrouge were also explicitly inspired by Boudon’s study of Pessac.⁶³² For Riboulet then, appropriation was closely linked to the architectural conception, which needed to be open, free, and mobile. Mobility and structure were reconciled in a similar way as they had been by Constant Nieuwenhuys and Yona Friedman: by means of an overarching structure that would allow the free and adaptable montage of elements and thus changing activities or functions. The technological mobility the architects sought would thus “need to allow to ‘mount’ and ‘dismount’ the structure of the city, it will thus need to allow inhabitants to act on this structure, in fact to create it within a [certain] language so that the coherence and cohesion of the city is maintained in all possible configurations.”⁶³³ Fixed elements - necessary because of technical demands - were constraints that would in turn facilitate the mobile elements that were the vehicle of individual appropriation. The planning team and the architects of the Atelier de Montrouge explicated as one of their official goals “to allow as early as possible the appropriation of the city by its inhabitants.”⁶³⁴

As such, in the eventual plan for le Vaudreuil as it was presented in 1972, Lefebvre’s notion of appropriation found formal expression in architectural flexibility and complexity. The design was founded on a radical critique of existing planning methods, denouncing the belief in a determinate, linear relationship between users’ needs, architectural form, and function.⁶³⁵ Structural openness and architectural complexity were basically seen as facilitating qualities for the participatory creation of urban life, in all its complexity and spontaneity. For Jean Renaudie architecture was “the physical form which envelops human lives in all the complexity of their relations with their environment,” and therefore it needed to be as complex as the life inside it.⁶³⁶ In short, architectural complexity became the symbolic carrier of intentions to create a new kind

⁶³⁰ Bedos, Dameron, Leroy et al., eds., *Les besoins fonctionnels de l’homme en vue de leur projection ultérieure sur le plan de la conception architecturale, compte rendu de fin de contrat*, 2.

⁶³¹ La mobilité dans l’architecture en tant que moyen d’appropriation, Pierre Riboulet, Décembre 1968, in: Recherches pour la ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil, 1972. (CAA ATM 162 IFA 713).

⁶³² Groupe de réflexion sur les équipements socio-éducatifs, séance su 18 septembre 1969, notes de Pierre Riboulet (CAA ATM 162 IFA 1540/3).

⁶³³ “La mobilité technologique que nous cherchons devra donc permette de ‘monter’ et de ‘démonter’ la structure de la ville, devra donc permette aux habitants d’agir sur cette structure, donc de la créer et ceci à l’intérieur d’un langage pour que la cohérence, la cohésion de la ville soit maintenue dans tous les cas de figure.” in: La mobilité dans l’architecture en tant que moyen d’appropriation, Pierre Riboulet, Décembre 1968, in: Recherches pour la ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil, 1972.

⁶³⁴ Objectifs et méthode, Thurnauer & Hélot, MEVNV juin 1969 (CAA ATM 162 IFA 1540/3).

⁶³⁵ Stanek, "Henri Lefebvre and the Concret Research of Space: Urban Theory, Empirical Studies, Architecture Practice", 118-49.

⁶³⁶ See: Irénée Scalbert, *A Right to Difference: The Architecture of Jean Renaudie* (London: Architectural Association, 2004), cover citation.

of city. And by “giving the city ‘to make’ to its inhabitants,” it would be naturally “évolutive,” continually transformable by social use.⁶³⁷

This wealth of sociological and philosophical ideas remained to some extent in the eventual planning of Le Vaudreuil when the study mission was officially transformed in a planning institute charged with execution in 1972.⁶³⁸ In the official planning credo one point remained crucial: “to make possible the appropriation of the city by its inhabitants by means of their participation in the conception of their living environment, as such breaking with a taken-for-granted urbanism.” Consequently, so planners contended, “in the domain of relationships with the inhabitants, it has been deemed essential to abandon traditional urban planning methods and to recommend a collective practice between specialist designers and users.”⁶³⁹ Nevertheless, instead of a direct transfer of agency towards the user, this “collective planning practice” first of all entailed novel ways of enticing the user. With the 1972 advertising slogan “Change life, come live at le Vaudreuil!” (“*Changez de vie, venez vivre au Vaudreuil!*”),⁶⁴⁰ meant to attract new inhabitants, the new town became the center of interest in national rallies for the development of a new urban lifestyle.⁶⁴¹ As such, the “socio-architectural utopia” of the Atelier de Montrouge’s plan for le Vaudreuil found a logical succession in the branding of the new towns as beacons of new lifestyle.

⁶³⁷ Notes sur la création des villes par leurs habitants ou le droit à l’architecture, Pierre Riboulet, Octobre 1968, in: Recherches pour la ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil, 1972; Renaudie, “Pour une connaissance de la ville.”

⁶³⁸ See Chapter 6.

⁶³⁹ “rendre possible une appropriation de la ville par ses habitants par leur participation à la conception de leur cadre de vie, rompant ainsi avec un urbanisme octroyé.” [...] “Dans le domaine des relations avec les habitants, il a paru essentiel de sortir des méthodes de l’urbanisme traditionnel et de préconiser une pratique collective entre concepteurs spécialistes et utilisateurs.” In: “Le Vaudreuil: Une méthode d’étude et de réalisation,” *Cahiers de l’IAURP* 30(February 1973), 1.

⁶⁴⁰ This was the slogan of the poster for the 1972 exhibition, see: Blain, “L’Atelier de Montrouge et le Vaudreuil,” 47.

⁶⁴¹ In 1970, a French-American scientific program for the reduction of environmental pollution was added to the ambitious program of the new town. This was accompanied by a social scientific research program, led by DGRST, that was to be linked to the actual conception of the new town. See: Jean-Paul Lacaze, *Une ville pilote pour la lutte contre les pollutions et les nuisances: La ville nouvelles du Vaudreuil* (Paris: Documentation française, 1973).

6. Lifestyle and Participation: Branding the New Towns.

The most important aspect of French new town planning was perhaps its novel way of engaging the user: unlike the mass housing of the *grands ensembles*, the *villes nouvelles* needed to entice and convince future inhabitants as well as the public at large. The new towns were of course more than consumer products, but nevertheless began to assume some of their characteristics. Many planners and policy makers saw them as products that needed to be sold in order to be successful. The brochure for the new town of Cergy-Pontoise in 1968 no longer promoted dwelling units, shopping centers or office buildings, but foremost “a new way of life... which is tied to the most profound traditions of urban life: to work in proximity of one’s residence, to slide down the hills to bathe in the lake, going to the countryside or the coast on Sundays without the nightmare of traffic, to go out in the evening without needing to reverse tickets weeks in advance, to enjoy the liveliness of an urban center without suffering from its noise, to drive or leave your car as you please, to leave the children to go to school by themselves without risk...” (figure 4.16).⁶⁴² For the urban development of Grenoble-Echirolles, not part of the official *villes nouvelles* program but branded as a new town nevertheless, the brochure employed the drawings by the collaborative architecture office Atelier d’Urbanisme et d’Architecture in order to sell a new urban lifestyle to future inhabitants (figure 4.17).

Ce qui n'est pas sur le plan:
un mode de vie nouveau

qui se rattache aux plus profondes traditions de la vie urbaine : travailler à proximité de son domicile, dévaler les pentes pour se baigner dans le lac, aller à la campagne ou à la mer le dimanche sans que les routes soient un cauchemar, sortir le soir sans retenir ses places plusieurs semaines à l'avance, profiter de l'animation d'un centre sans souffrir de son bruit, faire rouler ou ranger sa voiture à sa guise, laisser sans risque les enfants aller seuls à l'école, ce mode de vie n'est nouveau que dans la mesure où depuis cinquante ans il a disparu dans des villes étouffées par leur croissance et inadaptées à la voiture.

A Pontoise-Cergy, l'automobile sera remise à sa place, celle d'un instrument commode. L'homme disposera d'espace, 250 m² par habitant.

Ville nouvelle, Pontoise-Cergy se veut aussi une ville pilote et un lieu d'accueil pour toutes les expériences : en matière d'enseignement, les écoles maternelles et les écoles primaires seront aussi dispersées que possible de façon à éviter les concentrations inhumaines et les longs trajets pour les enfants. En matière d'équipement sanitaire une polyclinique — hôpital du jour — sera installée dans le centre et travaillera en liaison étroite avec les médecins de la ville de façon à réduire les hospitalisations inutiles.

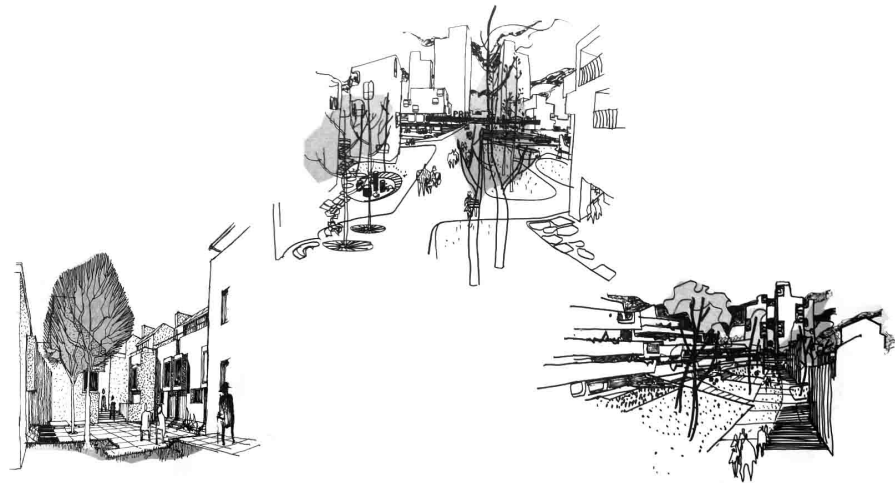
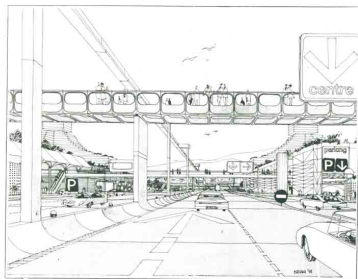


Figure 4.16: Promotional brochure for the new town of Cergy-Pontoise, 1968 (Source: CAC 199110585/009).

⁶⁴² “un mode de vie nouveau... qui se rattache aux plus profondes traditions de la vie urbaine: travailler à proximité de son domicile, dévaler les pentes pour se baigner dans le lac, aller à la campagne ou à la mer le dimanche sans que les routes soient un cauchemar, sortir le soir sans retenir ses places plusieurs semaines à l’avance, profiter de l’animation d’un centre sans souffrir de son bruit, faire rouler ou ranger sa voiture à sa guise, laisser sans risque les enfants aller seuls à l’école (...)” In: Pontoise-Cergy ville nouvelle, brochure de promotion, 1968 (CAC 199110585/009).

Promenade dans la ville neuve...

Une ville où, jusqu'au cœur du centre, l'on accède en voiture



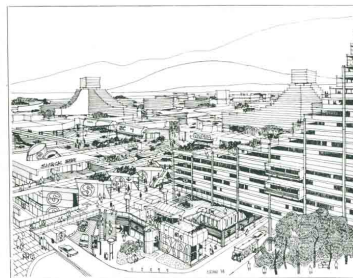
ACCES AU CENTRE PAR LA VOIE 24. Directement raccordée aux autoroutes et grandes artères grenobloises, la voie principale permet d'accéder en plein centre jusqu'aux grands parkings situés sous la dalle piétons au centre des unités commerciales.

en transports en commun...



ACCES AU CENTRE PAR LE METRO. Un métro suspendu reliera la Ville neuve au centre de Grenoble. Une station desservira directement sur le pont commercial, pièce maîtresse du centre, qui franchit la voie d'accès principale et relie les deux moitiés nord et sud de la Ville neuve.

dans un milieu urbain vivant...



LE CENTRE VU D'UN IMMEUBLE TOUR. Au-dessus des parkings et des voies automobiles, les piétons se déplacent au milieu des équipements publics et des commerces. Leur promenade peut se poursuivre sur les terrasses aménagées. L'habitation domine cette vie animée, face aux montagnes.

qui, du centre, se prolonge vers les nouveaux quartiers...



LA PLACE SUD DU CENTRE OUVERTE SUR LES QUARTIERS. Les rez-de-chaussée des immeubles d'habitations constituent des rues couvertes qui serpentent tout le long des quartiers et aboutissent aux places du centre.

Tout concourt à développer la joie de vivre des enfants de tous âges...



L'AMENAGEMENT DE LA RUE INTERIEURE

ses prolongements extérieurs



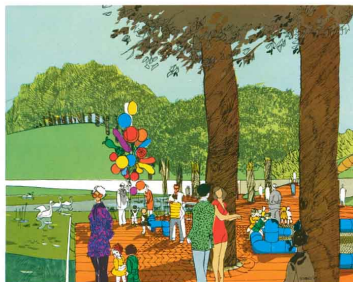
ACCES VERS LE PARC

... des emplacements privilégiés pour l'information des citoyens et l'animation de la ville...



LE MOBILIER URBAIN

... au centre du parc, le plan d'eau, un lieu calme...



LE PAYSAGE AU CENTRE DU PARC

Figure 4.17: Promotional brochure for Grenoble-Echirolles “ville neuve,” 1969 (Source: Harvard Loeb library vertical files): “A stroll through the new town: A city accessible by car, up until its center... by public transport... in a lively urban environment... which, from the center, continues into the new neighborhoods... Everything is organized for the joy of children of all ages... extending to the outside... privileged placements for citizen information and urban animation... at the center of the park, the pond a calm place...”

Lifestyle was a relatively young concept in French culture. While the notion of *mode de vie* or “way of life” had a long history and had been explicitly used by French geographers and sociologists from the beginning of the century, its meaning shifted fundamentally during the postwar period. *Mode de vie* no longer had the essential connotation of timeless regional tradition, but instead, began to be explicitly related to notions of modernity and newness - in other words, the term approached the English term of lifestyle. This specific understanding of *mode de vie* was founded upon the rise of middle-class consumerism and the advent of a new “post-industrial society” founded upon a radical diminution of working hours, paid holidays and other welfare state benefits, and dominated by an emerging culture of leisure and consumerism.⁶⁴³

The notion of lifestyle found its way into French urbanism during the 1960s. During the making of the SDAURP in the early 1960s there was not yet any mention of it. In a 1961 press conference about the goals of the plan, Paul Delouvrier had stated the aim of “improving everyday life” as part of his larger ambition to “design the Paris of 1975” and “think that of the year 2000.” In the eventual publication of the plan in 1965, concerns with what would later be called lifestyle or quality of life, were described with the simple term of *la bonheur* or “the happiness” of the French population. While this notion expressed the ambition to transcend the simply quantitative provision of housing or facilities, it still lacked the specificity of the concept of lifestyle, more particularly its diversity, differentiation, and essentially, freedom of choice.⁶⁴⁴

Espace et loisir dans la société française d'hier et de demain, a two-volume study by sociologists Joffre Dumazedier and Maurice Imbert, was key in the development of lifestyle as a concern in French urbanism.⁶⁴⁵ While some parts of the study were inspired by American literature on outdoor recreation planning, the scope of its analysis remained firmly within the bounds of the French hexagon. The study took as its starting point Jean Fourastié’s optimistic outlook of massive economic growth and its direct consequence, the spectacular development of leisure culture - from the sales of pop music LPs and the popularity of *bricolage* (do-it-yourself) and *ciné-clubs* (movie clubs) to the advent of the *villages de vacances* (holiday resorts). While still indebted to a functionalist concept of the user and based on the idea of regulating their behavior through national *grilles d'équipement*, the authors understood this evolution of leisure as a radical expansion of users’ “needs and aspirations.” This, so they argued, prompted a rethinking of urbanism to encompass “the planning of the living environment in its entirety.”⁶⁴⁶ Most importantly, the study emphasized not just the expansion, but also the radical *diversification* that this process entailed: “More even that the massive increase of consumption, the growing diversification of demand appears to be one of the dominant characteristics of the

⁶⁴³ Jean-Claude Richez and Léon Strauss, “Un temps nouveau pour les ouvriers: les congés payés,” in *L'avènement des loisirs, 1850-1960*, ed. Alain Corbin (Paris: Champs / Flammarion, 1995).

⁶⁴⁴ *Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de Paris*.

⁶⁴⁵ Dumazedier and Imbert, *Espace et loisir dans la société française d'hier et de demain (vol 1)*; Dumazedier and Imbert, *Espace et loisir dans la société française d'hier et de demain (vol 2)*.

⁶⁴⁶ “C’est en définitive l’aménagement du cadre de vie dans son ensemble qui se trouve ainsi en cause par l’expansion des besoins en espaces et en équipements de loisir.” Dumazedier and Imbert, *Espace et loisir dans la société française d'hier et de demain (vol 1)*, 10.

evolution of needs and aspirations linked to the expansion of leisure in contemporary society.”⁶⁴⁷ Spurred by the social differentiation of the French middle classes, this process would ultimately bring about the prominence of lifestyle (*mode de vie, style de vie*) as a category in urban planning. By suggesting urban planning projects to be developed specifically around leisure - the recreational use of lakes for example - the authors of the study anticipated *villes nouvelles* projects like Cergy, for which the concept of a new urban yet recreational lifestyle was based largely on the transformation of a nearby river bend into a massive water sports and recreation park.

The explicit use of “lifestyle” in urbanism only really emerged in the course of the *villes nouvelles* program, and more particularly, during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the promotion efforts of the *Groupe Centrale des Villes Nouvelles* (GCVN), the new towns’ central think tank. These efforts express the conflation, in post-1968 France, of a number of previously distinct or even opposing approaches to the user: the initiatives of the GCVN entailed not only marketing and advertising campaigns to brand the new towns, but also novel ways to inform the general public about them, and attempts to elicit the participation of future inhabitants.

From its inception, the GCVN seemed to have been aware of the importance to inform the public about the planning process and especially, the future identity of the new towns. It was hardly the first time the French government had been the campaigner of its own urban interventions: the tradition of publicity and propaganda projects in the realm of urbanism went back at least as far as to Vichy France.⁶⁴⁸ Yet, state administrators at the time were well aware that the new towns offered an unprecedented challenge: “the new towns, in order to be supported by the nation, will need to be understood. This poses in a very acute way a problem that has never been sufficiently resolved in our country, and it is that of informing the public. In this respect, the new towns can be a privileged and necessary site of experimentation for the development of information in matters of urbanism and the introduction of new methods, notably audiovisual.”⁶⁴⁹

What was new about the *villes nouvelles* campaign was that it concerned not only promotion, but also “information.” Informing the user became a question of allowing choices, between different products and between different lifestyles.⁶⁵⁰ Such distribution of modern consumer information had to be wedded to the project of *branding* the new towns: “The ‘general public’ like the ‘specialized audiences’ of the developers or the employers are only marginally aware of the phenomenon of the ‘new towns,’ and similarly, their attitudes, reactions, and aspirations are

⁶⁴⁷ “Plus encore que l’accroissement massif de la consommation, la diversification croissante de la demande apparaît comme l’une des caractéristiques dominantes de l’évolution des besoins et des aspirations liés à l’expansion du loisir, dans la société contemporaine.” Ibid., 251.

⁶⁴⁸ See: Newsome, “The Struggle for a Voice in the City: The Development of Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in France, 1940-1968”, 184-234.

⁶⁴⁹ “On notera par ailleurs, que les villes nouvelles, pour être soutenues par la nation, devront être comprises. Ceci pose de manière très aiguë un problème qui n’a jamais été résolu de manière satisfaisante dans notre pays, et qui est celui de l’information du public. A cet égard, les villes nouvelles peuvent être un terrain d’expérience privilégié et nécessaire pour le développement de l’information en matière d’urbanisme et l’introduction de nouvelles méthodes, notamment audiovisuelles.” Rapport sur les villes nouvelles, Commission des villes - Groupe ad hoc “villes nouvelles,” 1969 (CAC 199110585/002).

⁶⁵⁰ Pourquoi une politique d’information? Note de la Direction Construction, Ministère de l’équipement et du logement, n.d. (CAC 19771142/046).

relatively unknown. In this context, it appears necessary to undertake an action of informing and promoting the new towns in order to develop amongst the general public and the interested audiences a real “brand” [*image de marque*] of the new towns that responds notably to the profound aspirations of today’s urbanites and that is susceptible to focus the interest and attention of the principal advertisers.”⁶⁵¹ An important part of the project was to attract new companies and employment opportunities. And to convince them of the advantages of industrial relocation to the new towns, the availability of a sufficiently large and diverse labor force was crucial. The logical counterpart to this was the attraction of new inhabitants, who needed to be similarly assured of employment opportunities. Urban planners were convinced that large firms like Renault and Banque de France would only consider relocating if they knew the “product” of the new towns and were convinced about its future.⁶⁵² Promotion campaigns were thus to be geared towards decision-makers as well as the general public. While this implied two different approaches, both were based on new marketing techniques as they were conquering France at this time.

Promoting new urban developments as harborers of a novel lifestyle was not only a priority in the official French new towns. Other French urban developments without the official “brand” of new town, like Villeneuve in Grenoble, were promoted in similar terms: as “veritable cities” ready to offer their future inhabitants the best of both worlds - the urbane experience of a compact city center and the modern comforts of new housing construction.⁶⁵³ This situation was of course not unique to France. The French planners followed a logic that was in fact remarkably close that of the private developers of American new towns built around this time, from Victor Gruen’s Valencia to James Rouse’s Columbia. In both countries the new towns reacted to widespread discontents with the existing suburbs: in France the boredom of mass housing estates, in the US the boredom of the generic tract housing of the Levittown kind. American developers were therefore keen to sell their developments as vehicles of a new urban lifestyle and, like their French counterparts, they incorporated social critiques in the planning of these developments. Just like racial integration became a key planning principle for Columbia, so were the French new towns portrayed as places of social mixing and animated street life.⁶⁵⁴

Despite the continuing role of the centralized state in French new town planning, planners increasingly adopted methods from the private sector. What is more, planners began to understand the government itself as a mere actor in the private market. In his study for the

⁶⁵¹ “Toutefois, le “grand public” comme les “milieux spécialisés” les promoteurs ou les offreurs d’emplois ne sont que très peu sensibilisés au phénomène “villes nouvelles”, de même les attitudes, les réactions, les aspirations du public sont mal connues. Dans ce contexte, il apparaît nécessaire d’entreprendre une action suivie d’information et de promotion des villes nouvelles afin de développer dans le public et dans les milieux intéressés une véritable “image de marque” des villes nouvelles répondant notamment aux aspirations profondes des citoyens d’aujourd’hui et susceptibles de polariser l’intérêt et l’attention des principaux acteurs de la promotion.” Letter of minister Raoul Rudeau (MEL) to Maurice Doublet, prefect of the Paris region, 29 November 1969 (CAC 199110585/004).

⁶⁵² Note de G. Salmon-Legagneur, 22 juillet 1970 & Note de Pierre Merlin, IAURP, novembre 1970 (CAC 19840342/391).

⁶⁵³ Grenoble-Echirolles, promotional brochure (Harvard Loeb vertical files NAC 5340 G 98).

⁶⁵⁴ See: William B. Piggot, “The Irvine New Town, Orange County, and the Transformation of Suburban Political Culture” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 2009). On Victor Gruen’s urban planning, see: Alex Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City* (Barcelona: Actar, 2005). On the new town of Columbia, see: Joseph Rocco Mitchell and David L. Stebenne, *New City Upon A Hill: A History of Columbia, Maryland* (Charleston: History Press, 2007).

GCVN, Jacques Tèze, a private developer, concluded that “the administration is confronted with the classic problem of any manufacturer who needs to sell his production and thus, needs to adapt it to his technical and financial means, certainly, but also and especially, adapt it to the needs and solvency of his clients, and if not to create new ones.”⁶⁵⁵ Throughout the SGCN campaign and the many that would follow, the principal point of reference was private sector development.⁶⁵⁶

The GCVN promotion campaign was based first of all on private market research. In December 1969, the Ministry commissioned a survey amongst inhabitants and local leaders in the Paris region. Directed by the public relations firm Société Promotion, the study revealed a lack of public awareness about the new towns: the overwhelming majority of French people did not know them or associated them the failure of the *grands ensembles*.⁶⁵⁷ Sarcelles, with its connotations of monotony, boredom, isolation, ugliness, and absence of urban facilities, appeared time and time again as the standard reference. Ten years after the first public outcries of the *grands ensembles*, the dislike for this kind of modern urbanism now seemed ingrained in public consciousness. The study thus strengthened planners’ conviction that changing public opinion was the first task for the *villes nouvelles* project.⁶⁵⁸

This awareness led planners to launch temporary information centers for the *villes nouvelles*. A first one was built in 1970 in central Paris, at the Quai de Passy where Ministry was housed. The center would be temporary, open for only seven months, and would eventually be replaced by a permanent center. The initiative was not unlike the British initiative of the Official Information Center, which opened in 1959 with an exhibition about the official British New Towns. Similar temporary information centers had been built in *grands ensembles* projects, like at Créteil (developed by the private developer SEMAEC), Val d’Yerres (developed by SCIC), and La Part-Dieu.⁶⁵⁹ Sarcelles in fact was one of the first large-scale residential developments to have a permanent exhibition hall, built around 1960 in its central park (see figure 3.11). In France, the Quai de Passy center did not remain the only one for the new towns. Many local *villes nouvelles* planning teams followed suit with local exhibitions, like at Evry in 1971. By the mid-1970s, they

⁶⁵⁵ “L’administration est confrontée au problème classique de tout producteur qui doit vendre sa production et, donc, adapter celle-ci à ses moyens techniques et financiers, certes, mais surtout l’adapter aux besoins et à la solvabilité de ses clients, quit à en susciter de nouveaux.” Aménagement foncier et logements dans les zones d’urbanisation nouvelles, Réflexions et proposition pour une stratégie, par Jacques Tèze, février 1970 (CAC 199110585/004).

⁶⁵⁶ For instance: “Comment progresser? La méthode utilisée avec le succès que l’on sait par le promoteur de Parly 2 est inapplicable: nous ne disposons pas des moyens publicitaires suffisants pour provoquer un flux de curieux vers chacune des villes nouvelles, lesquelles, de surcroît, sont encore difficiles à percevoir sur le terrain pour un public non préparé.” Relance de l’information sur les villes nouvelles, Note de Bernard Bacquet pour le préfet de la région parisienne, 8 janvier 1976 (CAC 19840342/388).

⁶⁵⁷ Executed at the end of 1969 by IFOP and SIGMA, the study was based on a sample of around 2000 people, see: Sondage sur les villes nouvelles, SIGMA, 1969-1970.

⁶⁵⁸ Despite the intensive marketing efforts, and the many positive reactions of new inhabitants to their new town, the committee came up with the exact same observations years later: the general public was still either ignorant or rather negative of the *villes nouvelles*. Their conclusion was thus that “the ‘product’ is good, but remains still little known.” See: Relance de l’information sur les villes nouvelles, Note de Bernard Bacquet pour le préfet de la région parisienne, 8 janvier 1976.

⁶⁵⁹ See: Journée d’études sur les halls d’information, 14 juin 1971, Antenne pédagogique expérimentale de Cergy-Pontoise (CAC 19840342/394).

were a standard ingredient for both private and state-led urban developments (figure 4.18). The initiatives were often cast as being more than information booths: by hosting exhibitions and events they meant to elicit the participation of future inhabitants.



Figure 4.18: Exhibition about the new town of Evry at the newly opened Agora, photo of around 1975 (CAA: Fonds Lecouteur 187 IFA 44/10).

At a series of round table debates held in 1971 at the IAURP, policy makers, private consultants, and architects - including notably Gérard Thurnauer, one of the architects of le Vaudreuil - discussed the nature of such *villes nouvelles* campaigns. They all agreed that first and foremost, the project should not just be a promotion campaign but a two-way exchange of information. A prominent discussant was Claude Neuschwander, the activist of Sarcelles who also worked for the public relations firm Publicis at the time. During the first meeting he declared: “We should not ‘slap’ a final product against the wall but seek a ‘feedback’ [he uses the English term] effect; the receiver needs to become in turn a transmitter. We need to directly associate the public and possibly modify the projects according to the reactions we obtain.”⁶⁶⁰ The other participants generally agreed. One responded: “The public needs to participate in the development of projects; we cannot recommence the unfortunate experiment of the *grands ensembles*.”⁶⁶¹ Another one said: “we need to imagine a participatory contribution of the public, without which we will continue to talk about ‘technocratic decisions.’ The people often have the impression of being ‘bullied’ by the elites. The new towns offer a possibility of choice, we need to make this known.”⁶⁶² Alain de Vulpian, from the consultancy firm COFREMCA, argued in similar terms that because the project was so vast and long term, any intervention would need to be equally long-term and strategic. Therefore, so he contended, rather than using ordinary publicity or marketing techniques, there needed to be a “real dialogue.”

The only concrete result from these interesting discussions however, was the creation of another commission of experts. A year later, in september 1972, the GCVN created an official mission to both study and influence public opinion about the *villes nouvelles*. The report it published the following year, known as the Bacquet Report, concluded that “the new inhabitants will gradually be the best propagandists of the new town or its most dangerous detractors, capable to elicit a movement of counter-publicity all the more active as the gap will be wide between the everyday reality and the image that has been projected.” Therefore, “informing citizens needs to be considered not as promotional information, but as information/participation, which implies an acceptance in advance of dialogue and contestation.”⁶⁶³ Its concrete proposals were a mix of public interventions: exhibitions, doors open days, information stands, local bulletins, public animation, urban signage, and so on.

⁶⁶⁰ “Il ne faut pas “plaquer” un produit fini mais rechercher un effet de “feedback”; le récepteur doit devenir à son tour émetteur. Il faut associer étroitement le public, et, éventuellement, modifier les projets selon les réactions obtenues.” At: Table ronde 20 janvier 1971: Promotion des villes nouvelles (CAC 19840342/390).

⁶⁶¹ “Le public doit participer à l’élaboration des projets, il ne faut pas recommencer l’expérience malheureuse des grands ensembles.” Ibid.

⁶⁶² “Il faut imaginer une contribution participative du public, sans qui on continuera à parler de “décisions technocratiques”. Les gens ont souvent l’impression d’être “truandés” par les élites. Les villes nouvelles offrent une possibilité de choix, il faut le faire savoir.” Ibid.

⁶⁶³ “Les habitants nouveaux seront progressivement les meilleurs propagandistes de la ville ou ses plus dangereux détracteurs, capables de susciter un mouvement de contre publicité d’autant plus actif que l’écart sera grand entre la réalité quotidienne et l’image qu’on aura pu faire miroiter [...] Il convient d’abord de tirer les conséquences de l’état d’esprit rappelé ci-dessus et de considérer l’information des citoyens non comme de l’information promotion mais comme de l’information/participation, ce qui suppose d’accepter par avance le dialogue et la contestation.” Orientations pour une politique d’information des villes nouvelles, diagnostic et propositions. Rapport Bacquet, Mission d’étude pour l’information des villes nouvelles, mars 1973 (CAC 19840342/389).

Whether or not they were successful in countering inhabitant contestation in the *villes nouvelles*, these efforts to engage the general public - always with an undercurrent of actually shaping that public's opinion - have since the 1970s become the standard accompaniment of urban planning projects quasi globally. In a 1976 article, an expert from one of France's foremost urban consultancy firms summarized such efforts as "urban marketing" and saw them as tools "for responding to the aspirations of the user [*utilisateur*] of the city."⁶⁶⁴ By that time, his view had become a standard one. An informed and participating user was now key to successful urban planning. The methods of marketing, animation, inhabitant consultation, and participation have remained closely allied in urban development ever since.

⁶⁶⁴ "le marketing urbain [...] un outil pour répondre aux aspirations de 'l'utilisateur' de la ville" Marketing et information des publics, par G. Martel - service statistique et actions promotionnelles du BETURE, 1976 (CDC/SCIC).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the shift in urban thinking embodied by France's official *villes nouvelles* project from the mid-1960s onwards. Launched as an official critique of and response to the policy of the *grands ensembles*, the project was a statement about the government's new ambition in the realm of the built environment. Housing provision, on its own, had proven inadequate; what was needed now were veritably new cities that would at once accommodate for the expected rapid urban growth, stimulate regional economic development and remedy France's problem-ridden suburbs.

On the one hand, the projection of the new town as anti-*grand ensemble* was part of an age-old strategy: the myth of newness, separated from the mistakes of the past, in this case the perceived and real failures of the *grands ensembles* to satisfy their inhabitants. The public, media and planners alike were confused about the distinction: *villes nouvelles* and *grands ensembles* were being planned at the same time, and became subject to similar problems and criticism. On the other hand, the *villes nouvelles* were products of a novel mindset: planning, still indebted to zoning and hygienicism, opened up to a different kind of modernism, focused on the modern consumer imbued with individual mobility and the right to choose.

Planning methods changed accordingly: no longer centered on the design of a singular master plan, planning was now redefined as the large-scale and flexible programming of functional zones in already existing urban development. This implied the intensive collaboration of professionals in multi-disciplinary planning teams. *Villes nouvelles* planning implied at once more freedom and more planning: it was intensely consumer-oriented yet more than ever closely directed by centralized state institutions.

The project of creating new towns at an unparalleled scale was at once made possible and further precipitated new relationships between the professions involved in the built environment. Urban sociology was often at the forefront of these changes. More than the direct insertion of sociological expertise in the planning process however, its role amounted to the development of a sociological sensibility in which architectural culture - spellbound by social critique and a devotion for sociological and theoretical concepts - did not remain at the sidelines. The development of state-led urban sociological and architectural research further contributed to this large-scale reorganization of urban expertise, for which the *villes nouvelles* planning served as a primary testing ground. Le Vaudreuil, one of the official new towns launched in 1965 and the first to be developed in architectural detail, was exemplary of how social concern with the user, heightened by sociological critique, entered into the planning process.

Urban lifestyle became the key to this changing nature of French planning. Spurred by the advent of French consumerism, economic liberalization, and the changing political climate after De Gaulle, planners realized that an intensive promotion campaign for the *villes nouvelles* was crucial in guaranteeing their success. After the events of 1968, concerns with "branding" the new towns were broadened to include attempts at dialogue with the public. Conflating participation, consultation, surveying, marketing and branding, the campaigns employed marketing and social scientific methods to convince future inhabitants as well as company managers for relocation to the new towns. Such initiatives shaped not only the urban imaginary of the new towns, but

ultimately influenced the very programming and architectural aesthetics that was to supply the framework for the new urban lifestyle, as we will see in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Megastructures in Denial

In a France gravely shocked by economic crisis, the opening in March 1975 of the urban center of Evry - one of France's official new towns in the southeastern suburbs of Paris - was the antidote to any call for austerity. Yet, more even than by the exuberant opening events, journalists seemed taken by the peculiar nature of the place itself. One newspaper commented without irony: "In a utopian landscape of plowed land spiked with pink and pistachio pyramids, just opened the commercial center and the agora, the stomach and brains of the new town. For ten days, there will only be games and spectacle in the enormous souk of 55,000 square meter, semi-open, semi-covered, partly amusement park, partly administrative and social center, where all the services of the city are gathered, like in the ancient agora."⁶⁶⁵

Whether they approached the complex from the elevated walkways that linked it to the surrounding housing areas, arrived by bus or train from underneath it, or left their cars on the vast parking lots surrounding it, visitors found an urban machine they had likely never experienced before. In this "oasis in the middle of the desert"⁶⁶⁶ as *Le Figaro* headlined, the newly arrived inhabitants of Evry and the suburban population of Paris were offered, under a single roof, the most unlikely smorgasbord of urban activities: a department store and a hypermarket, cafés, bars and restaurants, a bowling hall, a night club, a cinema, a skating ring, a sports hall and a swimming pool, a theater, a library, an information center, a family care center, a center for maternal and child protection, and a kindergarten, a meeting center, a ecumenical church, a broadcasting studio, a national employment agency, creative workshop spaces, a police station, and so on (figure 5.1, 5.2).⁶⁶⁷

While that of Evry remained the most iconic and elaborate, it was not the only new urban center in 1970s France bringing together a range of private and commercial amenities with public state-funded facilities. Many official *villes nouvelles* and other large-scale urban developments had planned their version of it. The widespread enthusiasm about this new (sub)urban type and its promise of creating an integrated concentrated kind of urbanity, gave the momentum to get these colossal new "palaces of the people" built. The moment was nonetheless short-lived: only a week after the opening of Evry's new center, newspapers already reported on its possible closure due to a lack of funding.⁶⁶⁸ By the end of the decade, such state-sponsored mega-projects had come to embody an urban hubris no longer affordable nor desirable. Many of the experts' and planners' crucial assumptions behind them now seemed as illogical and ill-founded as they had been rational and self-evident less than a ten years earlier.

⁶⁶⁵ "Dans un paysage d'utopie cerné de terres labourées, hérissé de pyramides roses et pistache, viennent d'ouvrir le centre commercial et l'agora, le ventre et le cerveau de la ville nouvelle. Pendant dix jours, ce ne seront que jeux et spectacles dans l'énorme capharnaüm de 55 000 m², mi-ouvert, mi-couvert, mi-Luna Park, mi-centre administratif et social, où sont rassemblés, comme dans l'agora antique, tous les services de la cité." In: "Evry: L'intendance a précédé," *Le point* 24 March 1975.

⁶⁶⁶ "Une oasis au milieu du désert," *Le Figaro* 27 February 1975.

⁶⁶⁷ "Des commerces mais aussi des lieux de rencontre: Une place à l'anciennce pour la ville nouvelle d'Evry," *Le Monde* 18 March 1975.

⁶⁶⁸ "Ferméra-t'on l'agora d'Evry? Le financement des investissements publics," *Le Monde* 20 March 1975.

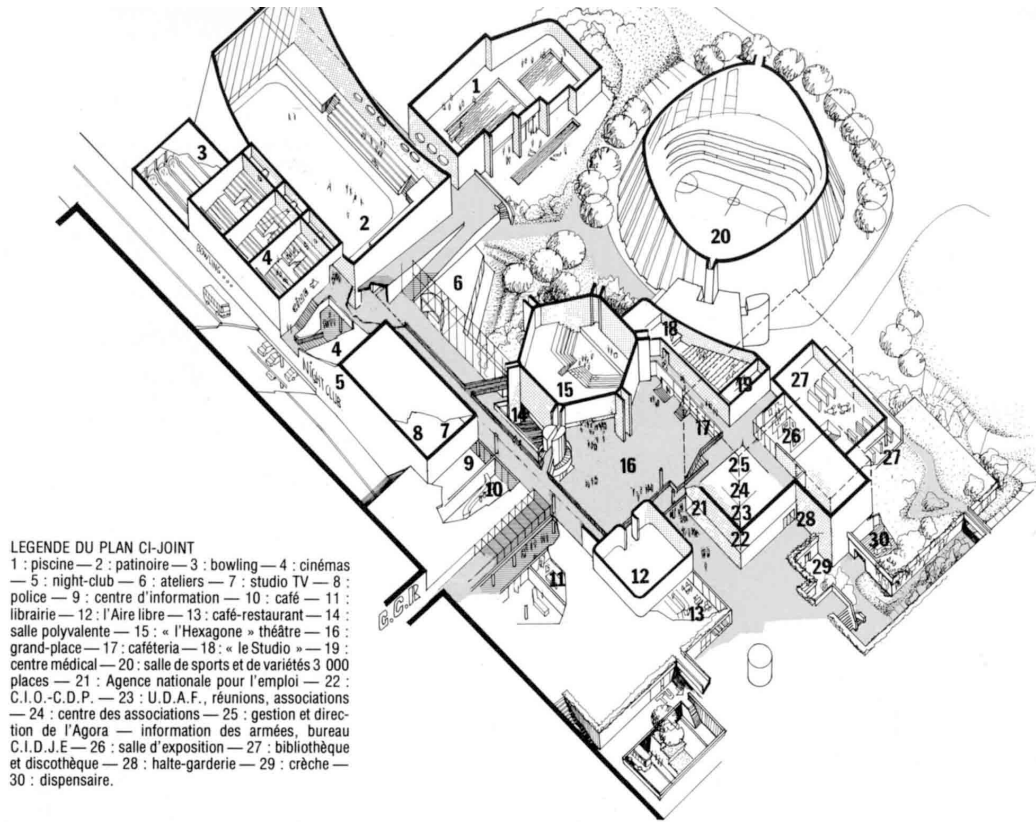


Figure 5.1: The diversity of functions at the Agora of Evry (Source: Darmagnac, André, François Desbryères, and Michel Mottez. *Créer un centre vile: Evry* (Paris: Editions du Moniteur, 1980): 87).



Figure 5.2: “Evry: an enormous crowd for the inauguration of the Agora,” article in *France Soir*, 21 March 1975 (Source: Darmagnac, André, François Desbryères, and Michel Mottez. *Créer un centre vile: Evry* (Paris: Editions du Moniteur, 1980): 88-89).

1. Modern Urbanism and The Question of the Center

During the planning of the *villes nouvelles* in the 1960s, under the bold leadership of Paul Delouvrier, one goal increasingly stood out from planners' ambitious list. More than by the creation of an expansive urban infrastructure system or employment opportunities in the suburbs, their project was shaped by the "willpower to regain a markedly urban character, which undoubtedly justifies the term of 'new town,' improper in other respects. The point is to substitute 'a city in pieces' with that which constitutes the soul of the city: the ordering of spaces and neighborhoods, the varieties of density, the landmarks for the inhabitant, mixing and integration of the 'urban functions' (housing, commerce, offices, culture, recreation, and so on), mobility and communication. This objective needs to be concretized in first instance by means of the creation of veritable urban centers that are dense, varied, attractive, and radiating onto a zone larger than the new town itself while giving the latter its individual character."⁶⁶⁹ How had this idea of the regional-scale urban center become such a central theme in French new town planning?

Just like in many other parts of Europe, the magnitude of postwar urbanization in France had thrown the hierarchy of the traditional city into question. On the other side of the Atlantic, suburbanization had run an older and more dominant course and many observers during the postwar considered its role in the dramatic decline of inner cities abundantly clear. In France, the upheavals were no less dramatic. The consequences of more than a decade of frantic construction in the suburbs of many French cities had begun to radically transform a country that had until recently understood itself as a predominantly rural society outside of Paris' walls.

Nevertheless, while postwar calls for decentralization had informed subsequent policies of industrial relocation - following Gravier's influential 1947 thesis that there was only Paris and beyond it "the French desert"⁶⁷⁰ - they had failed to effectively decentralize Paris. Until the late 1960s, shopping apart from the everyday necessities for any suburban housewife from suburban Gennevilliers to Créteil still required a lengthy excursion to the *grands boulevards* in the heart of Paris. Universities, hospitals and other public buildings were hardly to be found outside metropolitan city centers. Central Paris was still the prototype for all things urban in France, and in the French "urban system," large provincial cities like Bordeaux or Marseille were not more than miniature versions of the capital.⁶⁷¹ If centrality thus became a key concern for French planners during the 1960s, it was not because its validity was questioned - there was no Melvin Webber in France - but on the contrary, because it remained the yardstick for evaluating what two decades of unprecedented urbanization had led to.

⁶⁶⁹ "La volonté de retrouver un caractère urbain marqué, qui justifie sans doute l'appellation de "ville nouvelle", impropre à d'autres égards. A la "ville en miettes", il s'agit de substituer ce qui fait l'âme de la ville: hiérarchisation des espaces et des quartiers, variété des densités, points de repère pour l'habitant, mélange et intégration des "fonctions urbaines" (logement, commerce, bureaux, culture, loisirs, etc...) mobilité et communication. Cet objectif doit se concrétiser au premier chef par la création de véritables centres urbains, denses, variés, attractifs, rayonnant sur une zone plus vaste que la ville nouvelle proprement dite et donnant à cette dernière son caractère propre." In: Rapport sur les villes nouvelles, Commission des villes - Groupe ad hoc "villes nouvelles," 1969.

⁶⁷⁰ Jean-François Gravier, *Paris et le désert français* (Paris: Portulan, 1947).

⁶⁷¹ Bernard Lepetit, *Les villes dans la France moderne, 1740-1840* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988).

In contrast to the U.S., where the city center was often the problem and the suburbs the solution, postwar France increasingly deplored the state of its suburbs.⁶⁷² By the 1960s, large parts of the country had undergone chaotic suburban growth, leading to fragmented landscapes of collective housing estates in a sea of substandard single family home allotments divided by highway and rail infrastructure (figure 5.3). Many intellectuals, from their “bohemian” neighborhoods in central Paris, regarded this novel landscape with irony or condescension, underestimating the profound cultural shift it embodied in the way the French increasingly lived urban life. No longer the sediment of longstanding cultural traditions, cities were looking more and more like careless collections of disposable products. If one question preoccupied the planners who gathered around the *villes nouvelles* project in the 1960s and those concerned with the future of urban France more generally, it was how to avoid and reverse the dreariness of this suburban landscape.



Figure 5.3: Aerial photo of *grands ensembles* projects in the context of the southern suburbs of Paris, as they were studied by the geographer Jean Bastié in 1964 (Source: Jean Bastié, *La croissance de la banlieue parisienne* (Paris: PUF, 1964): 384).

⁶⁷² While the American white middle-class suburb was not generally problematized in and for itself, it became subject to critique and reform in the 1960s when a new generation of developers (Rouse, Gruen, Pereira et al) began to promote denser, more urban alternatives for the Levittown generation. See: Piggot, "The Irvine New Town, Orange County, and the Transformation of Suburban Political Culture".

The *villes nouvelles* were seen as tools for managing the uncontrolled suburban growth through the insertion of large-scale urban figures that would be able to structure the surrounding suburbs by giving it a focus, an identity, and a new form of concentration. The cornerstone of this strategy was of course the new regional-scale urban center. Despite the centralized decision-making apparatus, the new towns often had their own strategy of how the urban center would structure the overall scheme. For Evry, there was only one single “heart of the city.” For Cergy-Pontoise and some others there were two centers, which allowed to plan more carefully in function of time: a first center would be built to fit the needs of a new town still in development; a second larger center was then added when the whole development reached completion. At Marne-la-vallée, a linear sequence of four centers on the RER suburban rail line was needed to structure its vast outward development.

Sometimes simply called “the anti-suburb,” the urban center enjoyed such a great symbolic power at this time because it was understood as the answer to what the French suburbs were missing and as the antidote to their problems.⁶⁷³ To build the opposite of the *grands ensembles* meant first of all to create a place with a “soul”. And what could be more suitable for the existing sprawling suburbs than to give them a warm heart, a new urban center?

These hopes attached to the urban center were shaped by the negative consequences of modern state-led urbanism, which had so fundamentally transformed the country after WWII. Many planners, policy makers, social scientists and journalists had indeed pointed their finger at the *grands ensembles*, because these “dormitory estates” were often severely under-equipped and plunked down irrespective of their surroundings. The government’s sole focus on financing housing during much of this period had led to the neglect of other needs or urban programs. The simple economic reality that housing could be more easily financed than the urban facilities it required was certainly decisive for developers and architects; but the urban form of the *grands ensembles* themselves also played a role.

Whether architects were “anti-intellectual” and just too busy keeping up with their profitable commissions for large-scale housing projects, or just too embedded in an architectural culture dominated by Beaux-Arts composition and the dogma of the interwar CIAM, the idea of the urban center seemed discarded together with that of the traditional street.⁶⁷⁴ The Athens Charter’s four functions of living, working, recreation, and circulation certainly marginalized the innumerable activities of the traditional city center - shopping, civic functions, social encounter, strolling, symbolic representation, and so on.

In the postwar CIAM this orthodoxy had nevertheless lost ground. The 1949 meeting at Hoddesdon outside London, organized by Sert and the British MARS group, proposed a crucial correction to reigning CIAM functionalism. Despite Le Corbusier’s suggestion to develop a “Charter of Habitat,” the British suggested to focus on “civic centers” and “the core”, leading to

⁶⁷³ "Evry An II: Le coeur d'une ville se crée sous nos yeux," *La vie française* 22 October 1971.

⁶⁷⁴ Jean-Louis Cohen, "La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l'italophilie," *In Extenso*, no. 1 (1984).

the ultimately more catchy title *Heart of the City*.⁶⁷⁵ This theme was geared towards the Dutch, Swedish and British interests. The only French project presented at the meeting was Le Corbusier's plan for Saint-Dié. The fact that it was never built - and his *Unité d'habitation* became the key reference instead - only emphasized the French disinterest in new urban centers at this time (figure 5.4).⁶⁷⁶ At the end of the meeting, two key principles, which had been promoted by Sert and Giedion in particular, remained.⁶⁷⁷ First, the civic function of the center was its role in facilitating informal social encounters. Second, the core - with the principle of a single centralized core for each settlement unit - should be pedestrianized and secured from traffic. With its emphasis on a "sense of community" beyond the functional, the conference suggested an approach that would only compel the bulk of French architects and planners more than a decade later.

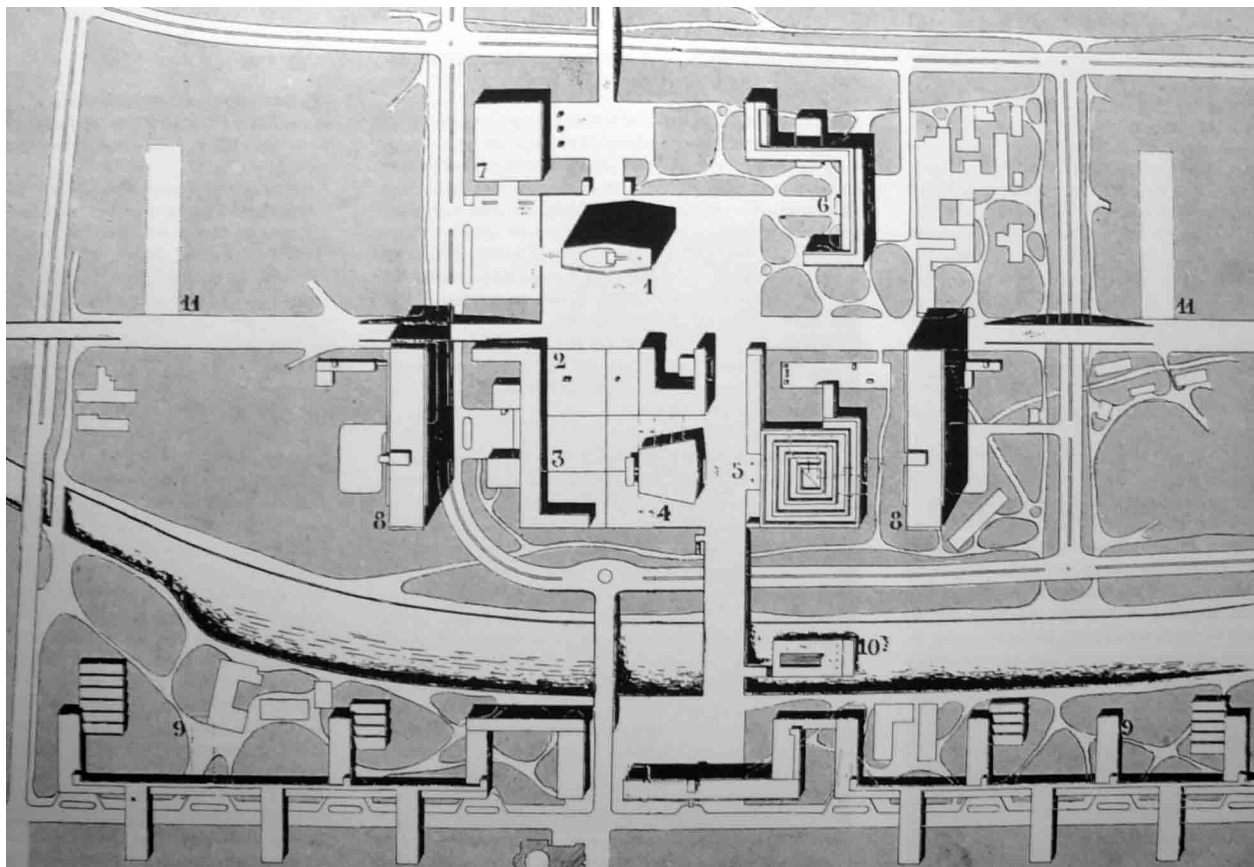


Figure 5.4: Le Corbusier's proposal for reconstruction of Saint-Dié, 1945 (Source: Boesiger W. (ed). *Le Corbusier/ Oeuvre complète, Volume 4: 1938-1946* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1999):139).

⁶⁷⁵ Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, 201-15.

⁶⁷⁶ Gilles Ragot and Mathilde Dion, *Le Corbusier en France: Projets et réalisations* (Paris: Moniteur, 1997), 284-89.

⁶⁷⁷ Tyrwhitt, Sert, and Rogers, *CIAM 8: The Heart of the City*.

The projects that inspired French urbanists in the 1950s - like Marly-les-Grandes-Terres or the Cité Rotterdam in Strasbourg - were based on urban de-concentration and negated the importance of an urban center. The first generation of *grands ensembles* were generally built with an idea of “ventilating” the city: low density, large green areas separating the housing blocks, and wide boulevards (*malls*) from which buildings took a distance. During the next CIAM meeting in 1953 held in Aix-en-Provence, housing retained all the attention and the human need for sociability was incorporated into the notion of “habitat.”⁶⁷⁸ The urban center was not a point of discussion at the meeting, as it would be in French urbanism more generally for the decade to come.

Yet, as much as the *villes nouvelles* planners saw their urban centers as diametrically opposed to the modernism of the *grands ensembles*, their conception was in fact directly embedded in the ideological and formal revisions of that modernism during the 1960s.⁶⁷⁹ Even Sarcelles, “exhibit A” in the condemnation of the *grands ensembles*, became proof of a slow but certain evolution towards the need for a different kind of urban thinking, in which centrality was paramount.

When the first overall plan for Sarcelles was drawn up around 1960, it was a schoolbook example of the *grille Dupont*.⁶⁸⁰ Each of the different neighborhood units was equipped with a small commercial center, and at the heart of the entire development a principal urban center would rise up (figure 3.5 c). Reminiscent of both Victor Gruen’s early malls around Detroit and Le Corbusier’s Saint-Dié center, it was initially conceived in relatively modest fashion.⁶⁸¹ The center featured an outside promenade sided by small shops ending into a large supermarket or department store on both sides. The center also included housing blocks, a municipal administration building and town hall, a church, a cultural center with cinema and theatre, and a social center distributed spaciouly over a pedestrianized plaza (figures 5.5). Funding delayed the execution of this project, and its plans were modified several times over subsequent years. The density of the center was continually augmented, and the center became increasingly constrained on its own plot (figures 5.6). As the *grand ensemble* grew, the need for a well-equipped principal center increased, and by the end of the 1960s, the project featured a large commercial center of regional importance, meant to serve the larger population of Paris’ northern suburbs. Baptized “Les Flanades,” this multifunctional complex was meant to transform the housing estate into a real city, in its own right (figure 5.7). Apart from commerce, it also contained a hotel, a restaurant, and luxury condominiums. It was finally built in the early 1970s.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ The presentation panel of Marly-les-Grandes-Terres at the conference did not even mention its public facilities.

⁶⁷⁹ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁸⁰ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁸¹ Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City*, 65-92.

⁶⁸² After 3 preliminary approvals, in 1963 a first building permit is submitted and approved for a scheme with a raised platform. Les Flanades was first inaugurated in 1972, but only completely finished in 1973. The office program was ultimately replaced by housing. What is ultimately built: 503 dwelling units, 141 shops, 9162 m2 office space, around 800 parking spaces, 1 hotel brasserie of 55 rooms, 1 supermarket (Prisunic). See: Dossiers permis de construire (AM Sarcelles).

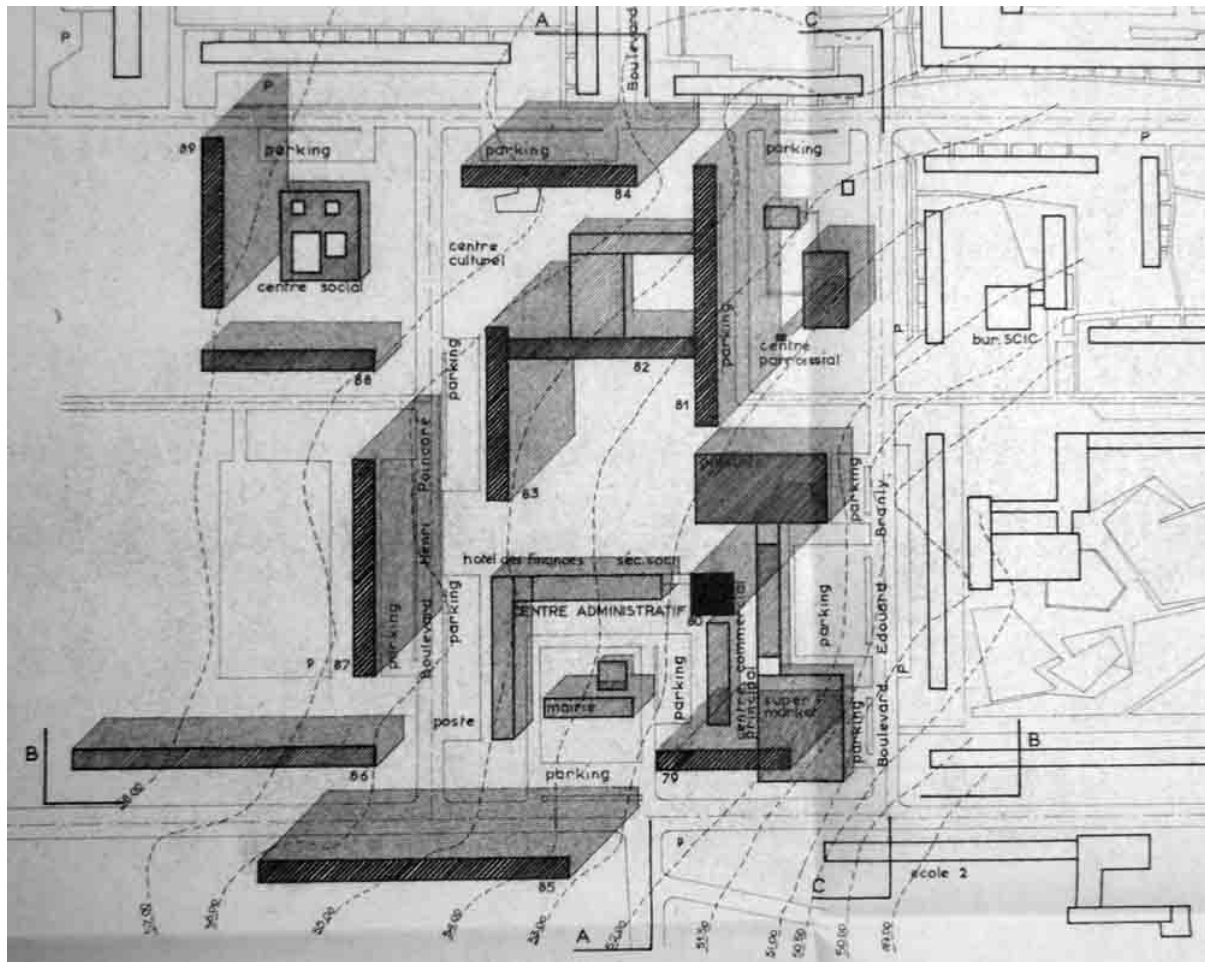


Figure 5.5: Plan by Roger Boileau and Jacques Henri-Labourdette for the principal urban center, submitted by SCIC for preliminary agreement in 1959 (Source: AM Sarcelles, Dossiers permis de construire).

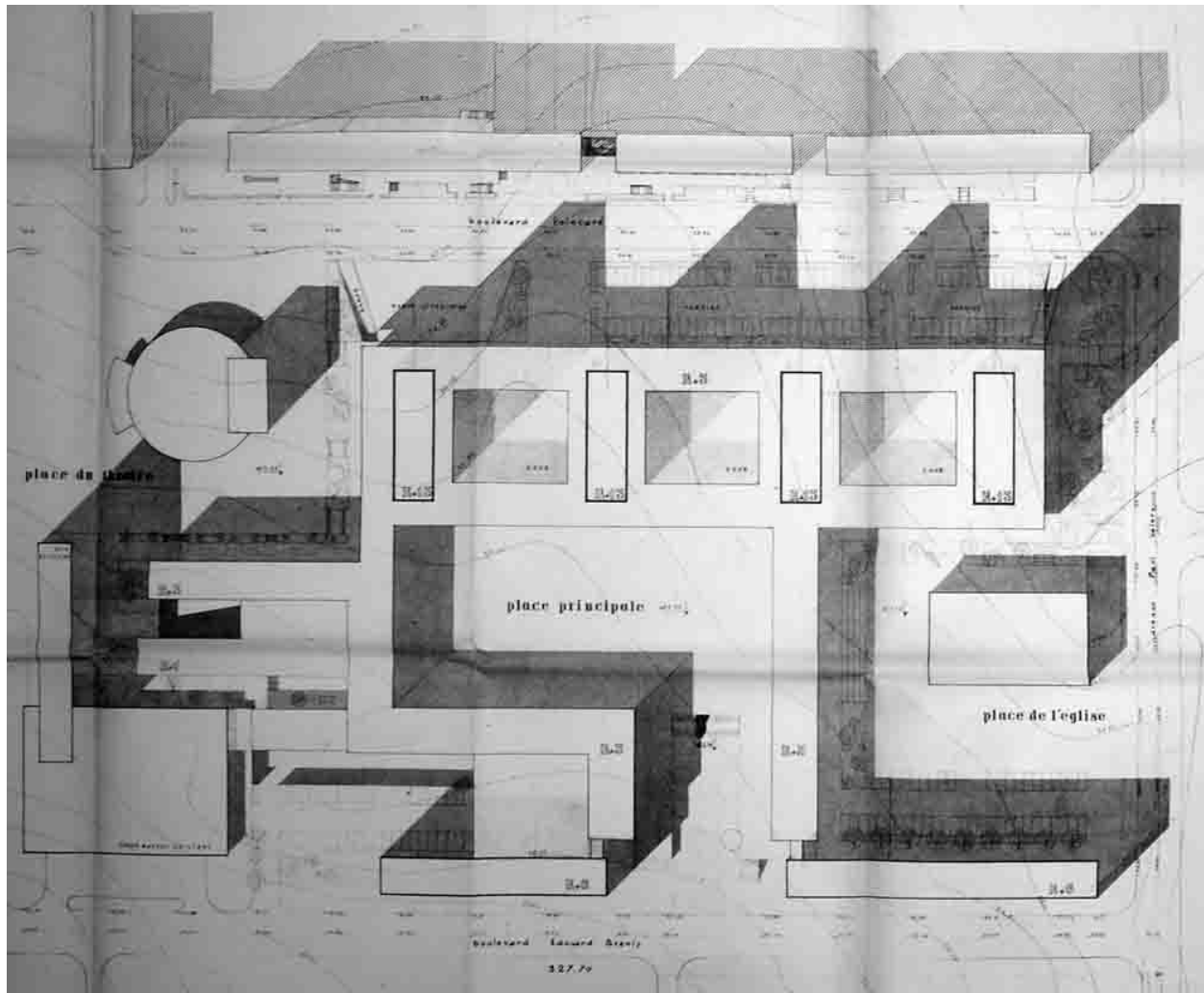


Figure 5.6: Plan by Roger Boileau and Jacques Henri-Labourdette for the principal urban center, submitted by SCIC for building permit in 1963 (Source: AM Sarcelles, Dossiers permis de construire).



Figure 5.7: Principal urban center at Sarcelles by Roger Boileau and Jacques Henri-Labourdette: Promotional renderings for the center, now called “Les Flanades,” early 1970s (Source: AD Val d’Oise, Bib D620, “Vos bureaux à Sarcelles”).

The most important new design feature of these proposals for Sarcelles’ urban center was the *dalle* or raised platform. It first appeared in the 1963 proposal. The complex that was eventually built offered several floors of parking space and a large covered marketplace underneath its central public plaza. By Raymond Lopez referred to as “vertical zoning,”⁶⁸³ the solution of the raised platform was indebted to interwar functionalism but became particularly popular during the postwar period when it was enthusiastically promoted by traffic engineers who needed to accommodate for the exponentially rise in car ownership and individual mobility.⁶⁸⁴ The raised platform essentially introduced the vertical separation of transportation and parking from other urban functions. This allowed planners to provide the large-scale pedestrianized public spaces first prescribed at CIAM 8.

During the 1950s and 1960s the raised platform became a basic solution for large-scale urban projects internationally. In 1960s France it was not only tested at Le Mirail, Maine-Montparnasse, and La Défense, but was employed in the urbanism of *grands ensembles* throughout the nation.⁶⁸⁵ One of the reasons for the success of the *dalle* in French urbanism was its potential to create controlled yet lively urban spaces. Condemning the deadening

⁶⁸³ See: Jacques Lucan, “Cinq cent mille hectares à reconquérir,” in *Eau et gaz à tous les étages. Paris, 100 ans de logements*, ed. Jacques Lucan (Paris: Picard, 1992).

⁶⁸⁴ Virginie Lefebvre sees the architecture of the “*dalle*” in direct lineage with interwar modernism, based on the theories of the Athens Charter. She also notes the importance of the British 1963 Buchanan report, which was translated by the *ministère des travaux publics* in 1965. See: Lefebvre, “Les origines de l’architecture sur dalle.”; Lefebvre, *Paris, ville moderne: Maine-Montparnasse et La Défense, 1950-1970*.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. See Chapter 2.

functionalism of an earlier modernism without abandoning its basic premises, architects counted on the integration of once-separated functions to accomplish this new kind of space.

The intention of providing an architectural structure that would foster social contact and urban interaction resonated with a generation of architectural visionaries in 1960s France. The “prospective architecture” and “spatial urbanism” collected and promoted by Michel Ragon might at first sight seem far removed from such “pedestrian” concerns with urban liveliness.⁶⁸⁶ If their visions did address the idea of the urban center, it was rather to render it irrelevant: an element of the past rather than their future of an all-pervasive urban complexity. These utopian projects nevertheless contributed - albeit indirectly and unexpectedly - to the reorientation of French state planning in the 1960s and embodied some of the architectural ambitions of the urban centers built in the 1970s French *villes nouvelles*. Well-known visionary depictions like those of Yona Friedman or David Georges Emmerich celebrate the advent of a new urbanized world in which freedom of movement, unlimited individual consumption and mobility, appropriation and urban spontaneity directly shape the built environment (figure 5.8). They can be read as reflections of a radically changing French society and as the modernist project of a new “total environment” in which traditional forms of urbanity have evaporated. These visions suggested ways in which a new mobile subject would produce a new kind of city. Yet, while celebrated for their apparent libertarianism, they in fact affirmed, in more than symbolic ways, the legitimacy of a strong welfare state in the production and consumption of the built environment. Many of the French utopian projects at this time left little doubt as to who was the singular, rational actor that would provide the overarching framework facilitating social life and individual appropriation.

⁶⁸⁶ See: Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970*; Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*.

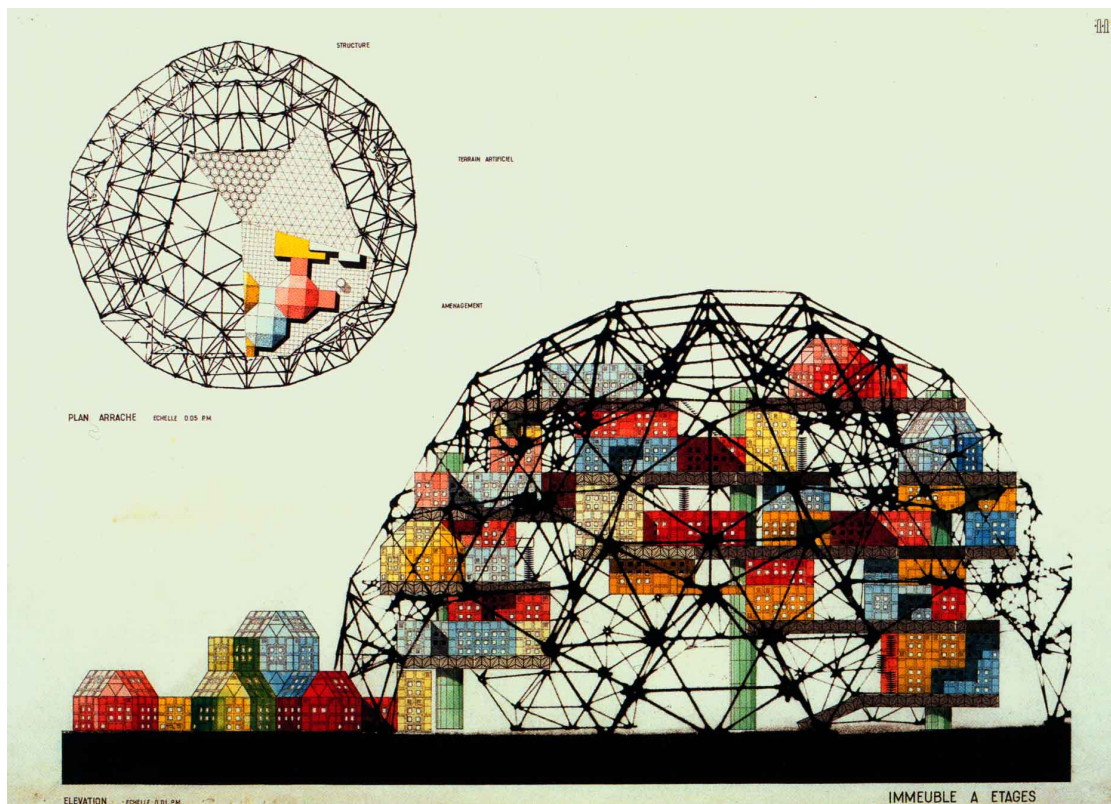


Figure 5.8: a) Yona Friedman, Spatial City (1958-1959), perspective (Source: digital image @ MOMA/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource. NY), b) David Georges Emmerich, Agglomeration (under a Stereometric Cupola) (Source: Larry Busbea. *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007): 14-15).

This peculiar blend of state provision and personal freedom was considered by many contemporaries as radically progressive, but fitted surprisingly well within the dominant modernization project of the Gaullist 1960s. During these years, visionaries and state planners were indeed not worlds apart - both understood the city through the lens of an optimistic future, made possible by technological progress - and were linked by a network of intermediaries like Jean Fourastié, Gaston Berger, and Michel Ragon.⁶⁸⁷ Despite the fact that most of these urban visions questioned the hierarchy of the traditional city center and the notion of centrality itself, they helped to expand the ambitions of modernist architecture while reorienting its stakes in the French built environment. Their focus on what Reyner Banham called “urban spontaneity” and Buckminster Fuller “ephemeralization” - new urban qualities represented in the work of the Situationist International and Archigram - mirrored planners’ confidence that urbanity was something that could be *produced*.⁶⁸⁸ Rather than shaping the spatial structures of social organization - as Robert Auzelle would describe the task of urbanism in the 1950s - it no longer needed to be just about order: urbanism could be about generating urbanity rather than merely providing its physical support.

As the concern with creating urbanity - whether in the messy suburbs around Paris or on virgin land in the provinces - became increasingly essential in the *villes nouvelles* project during the 1960s, planners built upon such visionary ambitions. Sometimes the inspiration was direct, like at le Vaudreuil, but more often it was implicit.⁶⁸⁹ For those in charge, the new towns were to become privileged sites for architectural and urban experimentation. Maurice Doublet, Paul Delouvrier’s successor, called them “a testing ground open to all innovations.”⁶⁹⁰ Experimentation was first of all to be focused on the new urban centers. To this end, numerous studies and debates were organized around the theme of the urban centers. Contributors to the themed issue on Centrality of the journal *Urbanisme* in 1970 emphasized the demise of the traditional city center, but they also analyzed what exactly its particular kind of urbanity consisted of and asked themselves how it could be reproduced.⁶⁹¹ Meanwhile, a series of conferences held by the different government bodies involved in new town planning established the basic options for the new urban center.⁶⁹² These revolved around the notion of integrating a variety of different urban functions. The integration was considered important on three levels: the combination of the commercial with the non-commercial program; the spatial integration of

⁶⁸⁷ Jean Fourastié, the first to coin the term *trentes glorieuses*, was a respected economist and state administrator but was also associated with the Parisian architecture scene. Gaston Berger was also well-connected with visionary artists and state policy makers alike. Michel Ragon was the main promotor of people like Schöffner and Friedman, but had close links with Paul Delouvrier. See: Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970*.

⁶⁸⁸ This point has been brought to my attention by Antoine Picon. See: Antoine Picon, *Digital Culture in Architecture: An Introduction fo the Design Professions* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).

⁶⁸⁹ The popularity of the space-frame roof in 1970s *villes nouvelles* architecture for instance embodies ideas of flexibility and the dissolution of inside and outside space developed in 1960s utopian visions.

⁶⁹⁰ “un banc d’essai ouvert à toutes les innovations.” In: Maurice Doublet quoted in: Jean-Eudes Roullier, “Les villes nouvelles et l’innovation,” *Revue 2000* (January 1973), 10.

⁶⁹¹ See in particular: Jean Labasse, “Signification et avenir des centres,” *Urbanisme* 120-121(1970): 8-17; Paul Rendu, “Rôle fonctionnel du centre,” *Urbanisme* 120-121(1970): 18-20.

⁶⁹² Conferences organized by the *Ministère de l’équipement et du logement*, the *Institut d’aménagement et d’urbanisme de la région Parisienne* (IAURP), the *Groupe centrale des villes nouvelles* (GCVN), amongst others.

the urban center itself understood as the mixing and opening up into a collective pedestrian space; and the blurring of the new urban center with its surrounding neighborhoods.⁶⁹³

While the *dalle* remained the main organizing principal for the first generation of urban centers in Evry, Cergy, and Marne-la-Vallée, the new town planners were keen on distancing themselves from a modernism they considered too brutal or alienating for the new French public that needed to be enticed. When the planners of Evry imagined their urban center, the first concern was how to create a more sociable, mixed-use urban space: “An important part of visiting the center is “non-functional” and responds to motivations that escape the notion of quantifiable services, amounting in particular to the need for animation, intensity of life, social affinity and cultural ubiquity, in short, sociability.”⁶⁹⁴ Maurice-François Rouge had in a 1967 article in *Urbanisme* already emphasized what he called “the logic of the non-quantifiable” of the urban center. He described its central aspect as being “social, esthetic, affective, in particular when it concerns memory and history.”⁶⁹⁵ In general, French urbanists were increasingly aware of the social and symbolic importance of the city center, transcending its simply functional role.

These changing ideas were clearly inspired by the traditional urbanity of France’s old city centers, Paris in the first place. The inspiration was necessarily ambivalent: during the 1960s traditional urban centers were at once in a period of crisis and one of rediscovery. While old neighborhoods like that around Place Italie in the 13th arrondissement of Paris were being torn down to make space for modern high-rise housing projects, other areas like the Marais were in the process of being revalued as the focus of historic preservation shifted from isolated monuments to entire neighborhoods.⁶⁹⁶ New town planners sought to specify the essential qualities of inner city Paris in order to make abstraction of them and reinsert them in their plans (figure 5.9). The director of Evry’s planning team, André Lalande, stated such a goal rather literally when he described the team’s ambitions as to make of Evry “a medium-sized Latin city that will be the beacon of a region.”⁶⁹⁷ “Latin” stood here for a series of desired urban characteristics usually associated with the traditional cities in southern Europe: urban density, social and functional mixing, an active street life during the day but especially in the evenings, and so on. According to Lalande, “Latin-ness” had in fact shaped the design of Evry’s urban center since its conception phase: “The dominant idea was to realize a center. Did it need to be

⁶⁹³ *Colloque Centres Urbains: Texte des conférences et débats, 2-3-4 juillet, 1969*, (Paris: Bureau des villes nouvelles, Direction de l’aménagement foncier et de l’urbanisme, Ministère de l’équipement et du logement) (CAC 19910585/010).

⁶⁹⁴ “Une part important de la fréquentation du centre est “non fonctionnelle” et répond à des motivations qui échappent à la notion de services quantifiables, résultant en particulier d’un besoins d’animation, d’intensité de vie, d’affinité sociale et d’ubiquité culturelle, en un mot de sociabilité.” *Ville nouvelle d’Evry, Brochure, Mission d’étude et d’aménagement de la ville nouvelle d’Evry, 1969* (CAC 199110585/009).

⁶⁹⁵ “social, esthétique, affectif, en particulier quand ils relèvent du passé et de l’histoire.” In: Maurice-François Rouge, “La logique du non quantifiable,” *Urbanisme* 99(1967), LIX.

⁶⁹⁶ On Paris urban renewal, see: Lucan, “Cinq cent mille hectares à reconquérir.” On the beginnings of urban rehabilitation, see for instance: Association pour la sauvegarde et mis en valeur du Paris historique, *Le Marais et ses abords, avant-projet d’un inventaire architectural et immobilier des troisième et quatrième arrondissements* (Paris: Association pour la sauvegarde et mis en valeur du Paris historique, June 1965).

⁶⁹⁷ Interview with Lalande in: “Une ville latine moyenne phare d’une région: Voilà ce que veulent réaliser les bâtisseurs d’Evry, mais cela ne va pas sans poser de sérieux problèmes...”, *Le journal du dimanche* 18 March 1973.

an integrated or a diluted center? We have chosen to make it a Latin center, very integrated with the [surrounding] residential neighborhoods.”⁶⁹⁸ The planners of Le Vaudreuil emphasized their overall goal in similar terms, namely to “reconcile the characteristics of scale and animation of a Latin city with the qualities of the contemporary world.”⁶⁹⁹

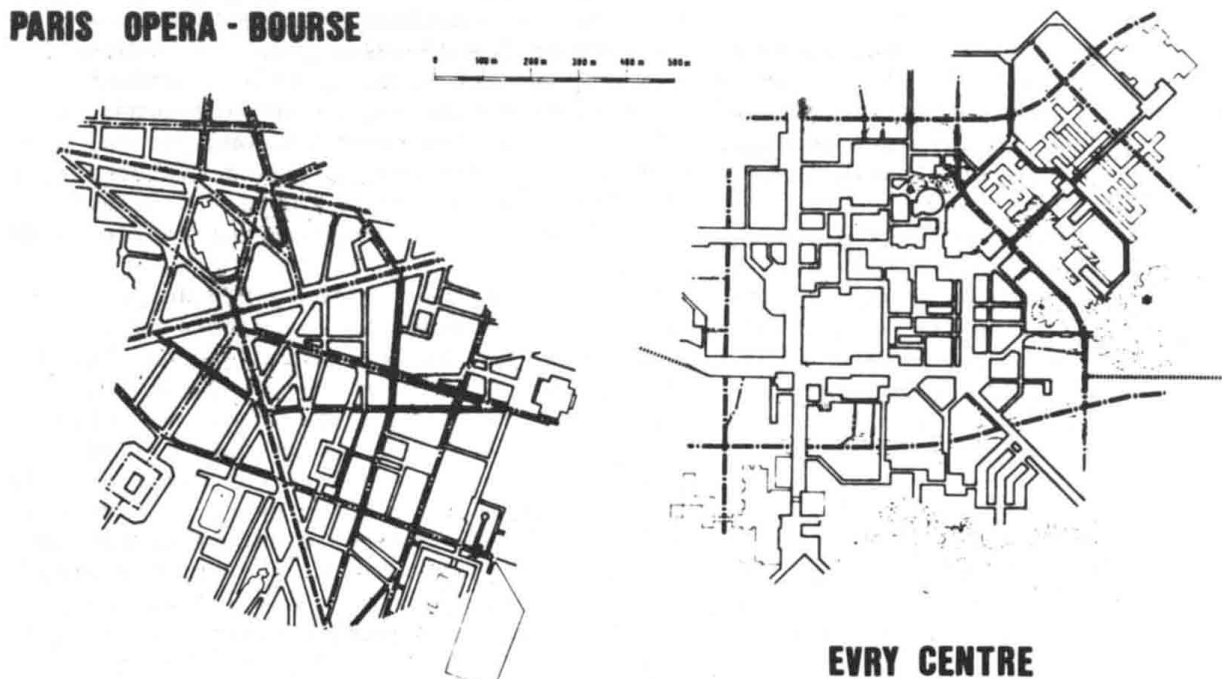


Figure 5.9: A comparison at the same scale of the new town of Evry and the central area of Paris around the Opera and the Bourse (Source: SGGCVN & Institut français du royaume uni, *Centre & Centralité dans les villes nouvelles françaises et britanniques* (Paris: CRU, 1972): 22. CAC 19840342/335).

What was meant to become the organizing principle in the conception of Evry therefore, was a pedestrian network of paths, squares, boulevards, and plazas - much like any traditional city plan. As one of Evry’s planners recounted about the conception of the new center, it was conceived first of all as a pedestrian experience filled with “possibility for exchange, for spectacle, permanently offered to all people.” Consequently, so he continued, “with the pedestrian being our guiding principle, our spatial organization, the placement of buildings, and the programs needed to depart from a pedestrian network. [...] Another point was that of accessibility. The center only has the possibility to function if its accessibility is the best of the whole surrounding

⁶⁹⁸ “L’idée dominante était donc de réaliser un centre. Fallait-il un centre intégré ou bien dilué ? Nous avons choisi de faire un centre latin très intégré aux quartiers d’habitation.” *Colloque Centres Urbains: Texte des conférences et débats*, 2-3-4 juillet, 1969.

⁶⁹⁹ Maze, *L’aventure du Vaudreuil: Histoire d’une ville nouvelle*, 98.

zone. It is thus necessary that the center is served by public transport and by car.”⁷⁰⁰ The new urban centrality meant complete pedestrianization - and was defended as the European, culturally superior response to the American car-dominated suburban space - yet it also had to be easily connected to the highway and public transport networks.

Many planners saw the integration of housing units in the new center as critical to the success of the new urban center. In a 1972 report on the urban centers for the GCVN and the Ministry, researchers wrote: “All urbanists insist on the absolute necessity to build housing in the urban centers in the nearby future, whatever their financial difficulties (higher price of infrastructure investments), juridical problems (renting and not reselling of the land), and technical issues (difficult provision of green space, underground parking, superposition of housing on top of collective facilities).”⁷⁰¹ In the case of Cergy-Pontoise, the center was not only meant to be a concentration of shops and collective facilities closed in the evenings; it was designed to become a lively residential neighborhood. The 1,500 planned dwelling units in “urban” collective housing typologies were understood to be essential to this. A similar rationale was at the basis of planners’ proposals to include a diverse array of night-time activities in the program. The desired ideal was the vibrant nocturnal atmosphere of Parisian boulevards and the obvious counter-image the deserted landscape of many collective housing areas after dinner time. That the French state would now actively plan for bars, cafés and even night clubs in new residential urban developments was not considered especially bizarre. Yet only a decade earlier, it would have been impossible to imagine even a brasserie that served alcohol many a *grand ensemble*.

The urban centers of the French new towns opened doors for architectural and urban planning experiments focused on the creation of street life, urban ambiance, and everyday liveliness. In their attempts, architects and planners were influenced at once by modernist visions testifying to an expansion of architecture to shape a “total” animated kind of environment, and by a desire for the urbanity of the traditional city center.

⁷⁰⁰ “Notre objectif était de faire en sorte que toutes les fonctions que nous avons annoncées puissent profiter des services communs qui se trouveraient situés dans le centre et qu’il y ait une possibilité d’échange, de spectacle, offerte en permanence à toutes les personnes, et nous sommes partis du principe que la rencontre était essentiellement piétonnière et que c’est au niveau des piétons que l’organisation urbaine doit se faire. (...) Le piéton étant notre fil directeur, notre organisation spatiale, la disposition des bâtiments, les programmes devaient de partir d’un circuit piétonnier. (...) Un autre point est celui de l’accessibilité. Le centre n’a de chances de fonctionner que si son accessibilité est la meilleure de toute la zone environnante. Il fallait donc que le centre soit desservi par les transports en commun et la voiture.” Journée d’études du 17 octobre 1973 sur les centres urbains (CAC 19840342/334).

⁷⁰¹ “L’ensemble des urbanistes insiste sur la nécessité absolue de construire à un stade très précoce des logements dans les centres urbains quelle qu’en puissent être les difficultés financières (coût élevé des investissements d’infrastructures) juridiques (location et non vente des terrains) et techniques (constitution malaisée des réserves d’espaces verts – parkings enterrés – superposition des logements et des équipements).” In: Americo Zublena, Patrice Noviant, and Xavier Triplet, *Les centres urbains des villes nouvelles françaises* (Paris: Ministère de l’Équipement / SGGCVN, 1972) (CAC 19840342/335).

2. The Integration of Facilities

While these ideas about centrality for the urban centers of French new towns were generally shaped by discontents with suburban life, they would be further developed in the context of a particular set of experiments in late 1960s and early 1970s France: under the banner of *équipement intégré*, or integrated facilities, French planners attempted to group together and reconfigure a already existing types of social and cultural facilities like social centers, youth centers, schools, cultural center, and local community centers.⁷⁰² These experiments would help shape the architectural conception of the French new town centers.

The idea was first experimented with in Britain in the context of school reforms, but the Community Colleges of Cambridgeshire soon inspired French experiments, one of the first of which was the Cultural and Educational Center of Yerres outside Paris. Launched by local politicians with the support of central state administrators and experts of what was called the “socio-cultural domain,”⁷⁰³ the project combined a secondary school, a sports center, art studios, a music and dance conservatory, a social center, and a library, all under one roof. This singular experiment incited the Ministry of National Education to launch an experimental program for ten such projects. These were all based on reforming the school into a larger facility for social and cultural development. After the success of these projects, an official doctrine for what was then coined *équipement intégré* took shape. The initiative came in the first place from the Ministry of National Education, but also brought together the Ministry of Planning and Housing, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and that of Youth and Sports.⁷⁰⁴ A *Commission interministérielle pour les équipements intégrés* (Interministerial Commission for Integrated Facilities) was established at the beginning of the VIth Plan in 1971.⁷⁰⁵

One of the basic convictions underlying these efforts was that the radical integration of collective facilities would result in a more effective policy of personal and community development. While some argued that “they constitute perhaps the only means to democratize culture,”⁷⁰⁶ the creation of integrated facilities transcended the cultural policies of André Malraux.⁷⁰⁷ His cultural centers, built during the 1960s, constituted an important institutional reform and also suggested a project

⁷⁰² On *équipement intégré* in French new towns, see: Korganow, "L'équipement socio-culturel, trajectoire architecturale d'un type contrarié d'édifice public à l'ère des loisirs, 1936-1975", 217-310; Alexis Korganow, Tricia Meehan, and Clément Orillard, *L'interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d'équipement socio-culturel intégré* (Paris: Atelier IV: Architecture, formes urbaines et cadre de vie, Programme interministériel d'histoire et d'évaluation des villes nouvelles françaises, 2005).

⁷⁰³ See Chapter 2.

⁷⁰⁴ The initiative was also connected to the *Fonds d'intervention culturelle* (FIC), created under the VIth Plan with the aim to organize initiatives between different ministries that would develop a concerted cultural policy, to make culture more accessible to a larger public, and to stimulate experimentation and innovation in the cultural sector.

⁷⁰⁵ The commission was instituted by a bill published in the *Journal officiel de la République française* on 2 October 1971. Subsequent legislation in 1972 and 1973 specified the programmatic possibilities of integration, the coordination between different state administrations, functioning and management of the facilities, and so on. The commission lasted until 1975.

⁷⁰⁶ “[...] ils constituent peut-être la seule voie pour démocratiser la culture.” In: Les équipements intégrés, La Documentation française, 1974. Foreword by Augustin Girard (CAC 19840342/191).

⁷⁰⁷ See Chapter 2.

of encouraging social cohesion.⁷⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the idea to integrate facilities took such ideas much further: it had a decidedly social and urban agenda. In a 1973 bill, the underlying ideal was summarized as “a veritable transformation of social relations and civic attitudes, offering each individual structures of animation that allow to better situate oneself in society and to participate more actively in community life; an approach of a new living environment by means of the creation of urban entities that are understandable and controllable by their inhabitants.”⁷⁰⁹ French state officials went as far as to cast *équipement intégré* as a means to combat “the crisis of the city.”⁷¹⁰

New integrated facilities were also cast as a cure for “cities without a soul” and thus as instruments in the creation of a lively urban life: “The integration of facilities needs to encourage the creation of veritable hearths of social life, playing the role in a certain sense, in zones of new urbanization, of the old village: the people need to encounter each other there, make contact, discuss, practice collective activities.”⁷¹¹ User participation in such facilities was assumed to be the guarantee of a larger form of *urban* participation beyond the bounds of the facility in question: “The integrated facilities encourage not only the participation of the population to artistic creation, but also (and especially) the participation in a real community life.”⁷¹² Individual and community development, user participation, and the creation of social life - particularly pertinent to new towns and neighborhoods - were thus intimately linked in the project.⁷¹³

These noble goals, which marked the intensification of French welfare provision during this time, went hand in hand with a rhetoric of efficiency. New integrated facilities promised to “increase the efficacy of state and municipal investments by reducing double use and dead time” and to “rationalize” their use and management.⁷¹⁴ With the same amount of investment, they

⁷⁰⁸ “la maison de la culture apparait comme la seule institution capable de maintenir une cohésion sociale sous le signe le plus noble de la connaissance et de la création.” Quote from 1961 by the *Commission de l'équipement culturel et du patrimoine artistique*, in: Nicole Chartier, *Les équipements intégrés* (Paris: Institut d'études politiques, n.d., around 1972) (CDU).

⁷⁰⁹ “une véritable transformation des relations sociales et des attitudes civiques, en offrant à chaque individu des structures d'animation lui permettant de mieux se situer dans la société et de participer plus activement à la vie de la communauté; une approche d'un nouveau cadre de vie par la réalisation d'unités urbaines appréhendables et maîtrisables par leurs habitants.” In: “Circulaire sur les orientations et procédures à suivre en matière d'intégration des équipements,” *Journal officiel de la République française*, 19 November 1973.

⁷¹⁰ *Les équipements intégrés*, La Documentation française, 1974. Foreword by Augustin Girard.

⁷¹¹ “L'intégration des équipements doit favoriser la création de véritables foyers de vie sociale, jouant le rôle en quelque sorte, dans des zones d'urbanisation nouvelles, de l'ancienne place du village: les gens doivent s'y rencontrer, faire connaissance, discuter, pratiquer des activités communes.” In: Agence d'urbanisme de l'agglomération grenobloise, *Les équipements intégrés, Rapport final. Agence d'urbanisme de l'agglomération grenobloise (8 fascicules)* (Paris: Ministère de l'éducation nationale / MATELT, February 1973), fasc. 1, 7.

⁷¹² “Les équipements intégrés facilitent non seulement la participation de la population à la création artistique mais aussi (et surtout) la participation à une réelle vie communautaire.” In: Chartier, *Les équipements intégrés*, 44.

⁷¹³ This is confirmed by: Korganow, “L'équipement socio-culturel, trajectoire architecturale d'un type contrarié d'édifice public à l'ère des loisirs, 1936-1975”, 263-68.

⁷¹⁴ “D'accroître l'efficacité des investissements de l'Etat et des collectivités locales par la réduction des doubles emplois et des temps morts; de rationaliser les conditions de réalisation des équipements, de leur emploi et de leur gestion.” In: “Circulaire sur les orientations et procédures à suivre en matière d'intégration des équipements,”

promised to allow more people to be served. They would increase accessibility to social and cultural “services” and thus a more intensive use of their physical infrastructure. In the context of a general move to open up the national administration to the public and offer it better welfare state services, they were also shaped by the idea - appealing at the time but only briefly so - of a better collaboration between different ministries.

Most importantly perhaps, the impetus of functional integration was inspired by a shift in the meaning of user need. Moving away from the functional, divisible, and quantifiable understanding of users’ needs, planning experts and state officials now made increasing reference to a vaguely defined “global social need.” This was understood as a mix of new “communication and social animation” needs.⁷¹⁵ The idea of integration thus went beyond efficiency or better state services. Encouraged by some of the critiques of May 1968, it was part and parcel of the desire for a more holistic conception of the individual, beyond its functional enumeration. Throughout the 1970s, these would be translated into the buzzword of “quality of life,” for which the built environment was the primary support. This explains the particularly *urban* agenda of the policies to integrate facilities. The new multi-functional facilities would be the antidote to the calculated dispersal of social, cultural and sportive amenities over the urban territory and particularly in the *grands ensembles*.

This changing notion of need implied a different kind of planning. The quantitative method of the *grille Dupont* and the studies of CEDER had now definitively fallen out of grace. The experiments with integrated facilities were in fact based in a larger shift in urban planning expertise, for which the multidisciplinary planning team and the notion of *programmation*, as discussed in previous chapter, became predominant. These new ways of working were taken on, and taken further, by a new wave of consultancy firms emerged that were specialized in collective facilities.⁷¹⁶ The Center for Institutional Studies, Research and Formation (*Centre d'études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles* or CERFI) was perhaps most remarkable, not just because of its subversive and critical approach, but because this approach did not keep them from contributing to new ways of planning collective facilities. Founded in 1967 by a movement of psychotherapists, pedagogues, architects and urban planners under direction of Félix Guattari, this group specialized in mental health and was commissioned for a series of studies on the collective facilities for the *villes nouvelles*.⁷¹⁷ Its members were armed with a formidable theoretical apparatus. Inspired by Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* and Guattari’s own collaboration with Deleuze which resulted in *Anti-Oedipe*, their critiques and

⁷¹⁵ “Aux besoins traditionnels, s’ajoutent des besoins nouveaux de communication, d’animation sociale; sur ce plan l’intégration des équipements est un moyen de poser et de résoudre ces problèmes.” In: Jean Chauchoy, “L’intégration des équipements collectifs urbains,” *Urbanisme* 125(1971): 14.

⁷¹⁶ Consultancy firms like BERU, SCOOPER, and CERFI. The experts who were involved in the Yerres project, Paul Chaslin and Augustin Girard, established their own Foundation for Cultural Development (*Fondation pour le développement culturel*) and a consultancy firm AREA (*Atelier de recherche sur les équipements et l’animation*). See: Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L’interaction ville-équipement en ville nouvelle: Réception et adaptation de la formule d’équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 11, 19-20.

⁷¹⁷ The director was Pierre-Félix Guattari, psycho-analyst. Amongst other members were Jacques Depusse, architect; Jean-Pierre Muyard, medical doctor; and Anne Querrien, sociologist.

proposals were based on a “genealogy of collective facilities.”⁷¹⁸ They analyzed the current way of programming such facilities, which was based on quantifying need by the number of housing units in the neighborhood, and then demonstrated that this kind of need was not a given but the result of deliberate social engineering by the state. Historically speaking, collective facilities were instruments of domination, so they argued: they constituted “the non-familial territory where the sovereignty of the State is directly exercised” and were “an instrument sustaining the existence of the conjugal family.”⁷¹⁹

Despite such fundamental critiques however, they also proposed new planning methods in collaboration with the state, and as such contributed to what they themselves called the “technocracy of the Left.” In their study about the programming of mental hygiene facilities for the new towns, they argued that planners needed to radically expand their definition of social demand.⁷²⁰ Instead of predefined calculations of user needs, they proposed a “global, integrated approach” based on the needs as they were veritably expressed by the population. By leaving “a margin of indetermination,” the practice of programming could be radically transformed: it would “not reduce itself to a technical activity, to a method of calculating need for facilities and their satisfaction.” They continued: “This is, in reality, a complex social function that does not depart from a social demand already given, but determines its formation.”⁷²¹ They illustrated their approach with a proposal for a child daycare center inside the urban center of Evry. After meetings with the official planning team, doctors and specialist care-takers, this proposal was taken into account and supplied to the interior architect of the complex in 1973.⁷²²

Meanwhile, the emphasis on complex user needs and on participation crossed over to architectural discourse, and became a central issue in the architectural conception of the integrated facilities.⁷²³ Joseph Belmont’s call for architecture as a collective creation was an important inspiration for some of the architects. Yet, beyond the by then tired assertion of the multi-disciplinary design team, his book *L’architecture, création collective* did not offer many concrete suggestions on how architecture could be collectively produced or how its creation

⁷¹⁸ CERFI, *Généalogie des équipements collectifs: Première synthèse* (Paris: COPEDITH, 1973) (CDU).

⁷¹⁹ “le territoire non-familial où s’exerce directement la souveraineté de l’Etat” and “un dispositif d’ensemble soutenant l’existence de la famille conjugale” Ibid., 72-73.

⁷²⁰ CERFI, *La programmation des équipements collectifs dans les villes nouvelles: Les équipements d’hygiène mentale* (January 1972) (AD Essonne 1523W/568); CERFI, *Programme général provisoire des équipements d’hygiène mentale de la ville nouvelle d’Evry*.

⁷²¹ “Celle-ci ne se réduit pas à une activité technique, à un mode de calcul des besoins d’équipements et de leur satisfaction. C’est, en réalité, une fonction sociale complexe qui ne part pas d’une demande sociale déjà donnée, mais détermine sa formation.” In: CERFI, *La programmation des équipements collectifs dans les villes nouvelles: Les équipements d’hygiène mentale*.

⁷²² CERFI, *Programme général provisoire des équipements d’hygiène mentale de la ville nouvelle d’Evry*. The group also established programs for Melun-Senart and Marne-la-vallée. See: Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L’interaction ville-équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d’équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 30-37.

⁷²³ See Chapter 4.

could be informed by its users.⁷²⁴ Architects' response to such intentions was less a matter of the planning process than one of formal innovation. Such experimentation was explicitly encouraged by the state: in a bill of 19 November 1973, the government prescribed that it would financially support experimentation "at the level of the general concept and the architecture, notably aimed at the polyvalence and integration of facilities."⁷²⁵

The user-oriented concept of *polyvalence* - polyvalence, multi-functionality and adaptability - was the number one principle for the architecture of new collective facilities. Particularly inspired by Dutch and British school architecture, not in the least Aldo Van Eyck's famous school in Amsterdam, *polyvalence* would find architectural expression in constructive modularity, spatial fluidity, and formal transparency.⁷²⁶ In contrast to the often stark modernism of French institutional architecture during the 1950s,⁷²⁷ the new facilities were to be architecturally complex. Collective facilities needed to be "closer to the citizen" and their architecture was instrumental in this respect. It should lower the psychological threshold for visitors and improve accessibility. It could no longer be cold or rigid, prestigious, luxurious, or removed from the everyday and the urban. Instead, it needed to be convivial, intimate, inviting and surprising. The community center or at Saint-Quentin en Yvelines by the architect Vénencie was only one of the many French projects that used an interlocking hexagonal structure to accomplish these new spatial qualities (figure 5.10). Such architectural and programmatic complexity came to signify social complexity, following the idea, as formulated by Henry Théry for example that "to the complexity and fluidity of the contours and interactions of economic and social life corresponds a complexity and fluidity of space."⁷²⁸

⁷²⁴ Joseph Belmont, *L'architecture, création collective* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1970). With collective creation, Belmont referred foremost to the need for multi-disciplinary design and planning teams.

⁷²⁵ "des solutions nouvelles de caractère expérimental seront développées sur le plan de la conception générale et de l'architecture, en vue notamment de la polyvalence et de l'intégration des équipements..." In: "Circulaire sur les orientations et procédures à suivre en matière d'intégration des équipements."

⁷²⁶ Francis Strauven, *Aldo Van Eyck: The Shape of Relativity* (Amsterdam: Architecture & Natura, 1998).

⁷²⁷ See for instance French school architecture in *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 72 (1957).

⁷²⁸ "A la complexité et à la fluidité des contours et des interactions de la vie économique et sociale, correspond une complexité et une fluidité de l'espace." Henry Théry, quoted in: Jean Chabanne and Philippe Cougnot, "Réflexions sur l'intégration des équipements," *Urbanisme* 125(1971), 22.

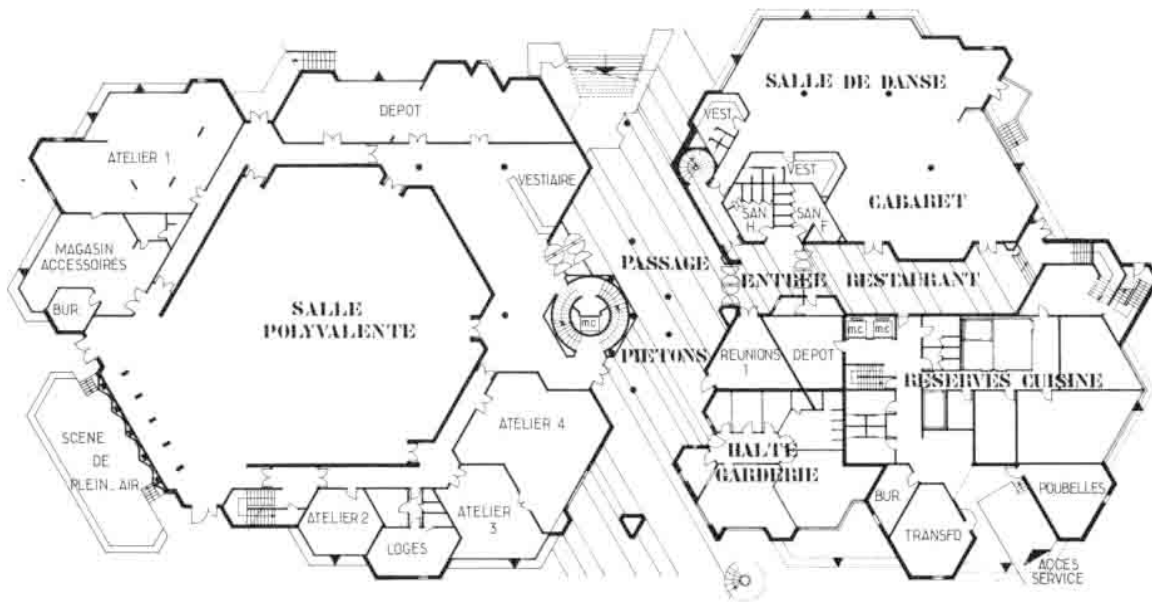


Figure 5.10: The center of “Les 7 mares” at Saint-Quentin en Yvelines, architect: Pierre Vénicienc (Source: “Ville nouvelle de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, Maison pour tous” in: *Recherche & Architecture* 35(1978): 40).

In the architectural discourse and conception of these new collective facilities, the proposals of radical movements like the International Situationists and Constant clearly reverberated.⁷²⁹ *Espace global polyvalent*, Ionel Schein’s book about the integration of facilities began with the famous Raoul Vaneigem quote “We do not want a world where the guarantee not to die of hunger is exchanged for the risk of dying out of boredom.”⁷³⁰ Despite the inspiration he found in contemporary commercial developments, he remained faithful to a certain utopianism in contending that “the real polyvalent space has not yet been materialized. Motive: it disrupts too many habits, it disorients those habituated to these habits; it implies the invention of new rhythms of life, it prevents routine, it prevents most of all the transformation of this routine in an act of construction.”⁷³¹ He declared his allegiance to Situationism as follows: “The global space, is it then an ANARCHIC space? In terms of the ideology of freedom: YES! In terms of appropriation: YES!”⁷³²

One project was key in shaping the architectural language of the French integrated facilities and it was not a French project. The Agora of Dronten, a large multi-functional community center in

⁷²⁹ On the critiques, proposals and urban conceptions of the Situationists, see: Sadler, *The Situationist City*.

⁷³⁰ “Nous ne voulons pas d’un monde où la garantie de ne pas mourir de faim s’échange contre le risque de mourir d’ennui.” Ionel Schein, *Espace global polyvalent* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal & Co, 1970).

⁷³¹ “Le véritable espace polyvalent n’est pas encore matérialisé. Motif: il bouleverse trop d’habitudes, il désoriente les habitués de ces habitudes; il implique l’invention de nouveaux rythmes de vie, il empêche la routine, il empêche surtout la transformation de cette routine en acte de construction.” Ibid., 9.

⁷³² “L’espace global est-il, alors, un espace ANARCHIQUE? En termes d’idéologie de la liberté: OUI! En termes d’appropriation: OUI!” Ibid., 13.

the Netherlands built by Frank Van Klingereren, appeared time and again in architecture journals and governmental reports about collective facilities in France.⁷³³ Finished in 1966, the project consisted essentially of a large hall that was transparent towards the outside and covered by a giant space-frame roof. The only specific functions in this large flexible open space were a theatre, a restaurant, and some office space (figure 5.11). The space could be used for an impressively wide range of cultural and sports activities, games and shows - from small gatherings to large public events. When the premier and the officials of the GCVN visited the center in 1968 they were particularly impressed by the participation of the local inhabitants in the decision-making and management of the center.⁷³⁴ Van Klingereren built more of such centers in the Netherlands, and was contributed several times to French planning conferences, for instance that on “Equipements intégrés dans les villes nouvelles” in 1972.

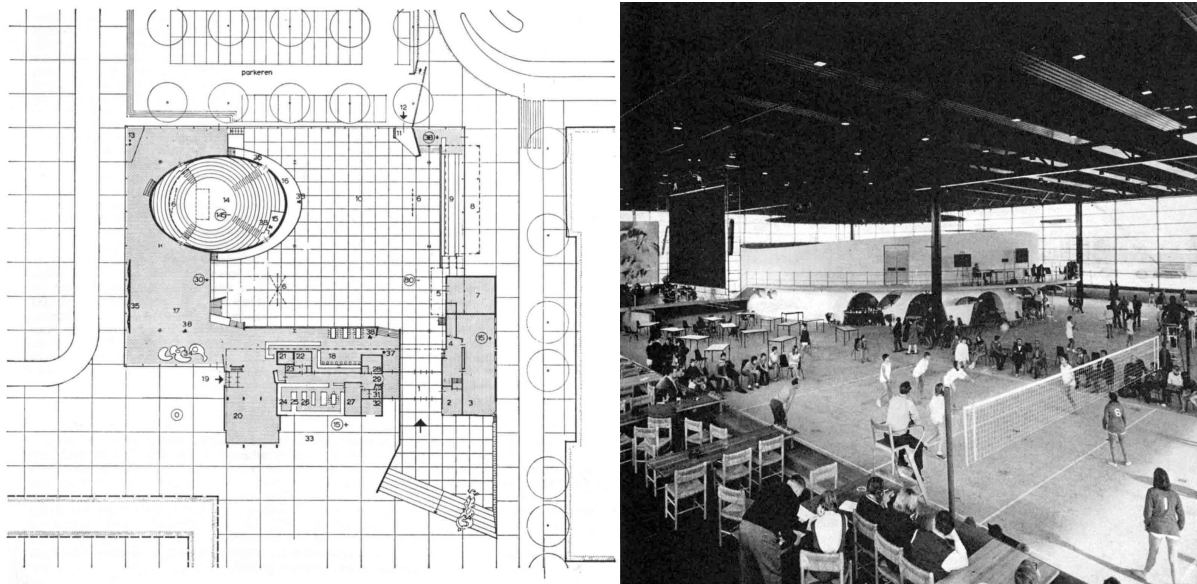


Figure 5.11: Agora in Dronten (Netherlands), architect: Frank Van Klingereren, 1966 (Source: Schein, Ionel. *Espace global polyvalent* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal et Co, 1970): 11, 17).

In his discussion of the building, Ionel Schein acknowledged its crucial role in his own conception of polyvalent space, but remained critical: “The Agora of Dronten, starting point of our study, needs to be considered like a first step towards a global-anarchic space. [That said] the intelligent and intelligible polyvalence of the volume of the Agora, while being flexible in its internal use, remains, in terms of urbanism, far too isolated. There is a separation between the internal dynamism and the exterior fixity: no organic link with the housing, the school, or the

⁷³³ See for instance: "Pays-Bas, espace polyvalent: Centres socio-culturels à Dronten et à Lelystad," *Techniques et Architecture* 32, no. 1 (1970): 36-41. See also: CAC 19840342/191.

⁷³⁴ Equipements publics et privés: Montage d'une cohabitation, bilan sur l'exemple d'Evry, André Darmagnac, n.d. (CAC 19840342/191).

work in the city, one has to come there!”⁷³⁵ His own ideal was more radical: “Polyvalence - this liberty of actions, functions, approaches, incidents, and so on - needs to be expanded to all of the urban space, to all its inhabitants, whatever their socio-professional category.”⁷³⁶

This was a clear allusion to the radical de-institutionalization called for after 1968 and so cogently formulated by Ivan Illich: the existing institutions needed to be demolished in order for the street to become the place of direct action and animation.⁷³⁷ Such ideas reverberated in architectural culture at the time: *l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, in its 1970 issue entitled “The places of spectacle” emphasized the everyday life of the street and the square as forms of theater. It presented analyses of the scenographic qualities of urban spaces, and of the temporary architecture of markets, processions, festivals, street fairs, and mobile theatre performances. It also mapped urban spectacles and protests, including these of 1968 themselves, as well as the new cultural facilities planned for the *villes nouvelles*.⁷³⁸ If there was one message to the publication, it was that just like culture and social life needed to be diffused, everywhere available and accessible, so could the architecture that facilitated them be mobile, flexible, and adaptable. This idea suggested a radical blurring of the distinctions between exterior public space and internal institutional space. In order for the architecture of collective facilities to be integrated in the everyday lives of inhabitants, it needed to be “molten in its surroundings” and “in osmosis with the animation of the street.”⁷³⁹ In many cases however, the architecture of new facilities remained in tension between the will to exert a certain architectural symbolism and monumentality, and the desire for total flexibility, openness and communication.⁷⁴⁰

The concept of integrating facilities prove to resonate strongly with the architectural and urban concerns of *villes nouvelles* planners during the early 1970s.⁷⁴¹ Because they were the number-one statement for the creation of a better living environment in 1970s France, the *villes nouvelles* were home to many of the experiments with *équipements intégrés*.⁷⁴² Just like the new towns themselves, these facilities were cast as social restructuring devices for the anarchic urbanization

⁷³⁵ “L’Agora de Dronten, point de départ de notre étude, doit être considérée comme un premier pas vers un espace global-anarchique. [but nevertheless:] La polyvalence intelligente et intelligible du volume de l’Agora - s’il est souple dans son utilisation interne - reste, en termes d’urbanisme, beaucoup trop isolé. Il y a un divorce entre le dynamisme intérieur et le figé extérieur: aucune liaison organique avec l’habitat, l’école ou le travail de la ville, il faut y venir!” Schein, *Espace global polyvalent*, 14.

⁷³⁶ “La polyvalence - cette liberté des actes, des fonctions, des démarches, des incidents, etc - doit s’étendre à tout l’espace urbain, à tous ses habitants, de quelque catégorie socio-professionnelle que ce soit.” Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ivan Illich was a standard reference for the French post-1968 generation. See for instance: “Dans le laboratoire des villes nouvelles: Faire coïncider la vie quotidienne avec les structures,” *Le Monde* 3 June 1976.

⁷³⁸ “Les lieux du spectacle,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 152(October - November 1970).

⁷³⁹ Chartier, *Les équipements intégrés*, 70.

⁷⁴⁰ “les dangers d’une polyvalence généralisée” *Les équipements intégrés*, La Documentation française, 1974. Foreword by Augustin Girard.

⁷⁴¹ A first conference entitled “*Équipements intégrés et villes nouvelles*” took place on 24 October 1970 under direction of Paul Delouvrier. Conference proceedings in: “Équipements intégrés et villes nouvelles,” *Pour*, no. 23-24 (October 1971).

⁷⁴² Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L’interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d’équipement socio-culturel intégré*.

of postwar France and as beacons for a new urban lifestyle, alternative to the dreariness of French suburban life.

For new town planners, the integration of facilities was first of all appealing as a programmatic element. They promised to integrate socio-cultural facilities in a larger urban plan that would transcend the rigidity and the shortcomings of the *grands ensembles*. Secondly, they provided a concrete strategy for developing the much-needed animation and social life in the new towns, by bringing together different activities and a mix of program.⁷⁴³ The integration would hence not only be architectural - by combining different functions and spaces - but also social - “the intermingling of generations and social groups” - and urban - by making them part of every life through careful implantation in the neighborhood.⁷⁴⁴

But the idea of integrating facility was more than a programmatic element of the new urban center: in some cases, it also shaped the very conception of urban centers in new towns. While this was most pronounced at le Vaudreuil, where the Atelier de Montrouge had employed the idea of integration for the overall urban concept,⁷⁴⁵ it was also clear in other new towns. The idea to integrate a wide range of urban functions on the *dalle* at Cergy and to fuse interior and exterior spaces was followed earlier, already built examples of integrated facilities.

The integrated facilities of the *villes nouvelles* made up a “second generation,” in which the school was no longer necessarily the primary programmatic element assuring integration. The center of the *ville nouvelle* needed another mix of program and the cultural and commercial center would be a more appropriate programmatic basis. The urban center of Evry presents one of the clearest examples of this type of integration. A 30.000 m² state-sponsored complex of social, cultural, sports and recreation facilities - baptized as the “Agora” after the Dutch projects by Van Klíngeren - was to become one of the two fundamental elements of the new urban center. The other was “regional commercial center” of no less than 70.000 m². This unlikely marriage was the result of a decade of suburban commercial development, and planners’ inevitable attraction of the shopping mall.

⁷⁴³ “Les villes anciennes se construisaient lentement, par sédimentation. Aujourd’hui, elles ne se bâtissent plus, on les bâtit, et très rapidement. Le résultat en est qu’il faut y créer de toutes pièces un processus d’animation qui n’avait pas besoin jadis d’être mis en oeuvre puisqu’il existait spontanément.” Quote on inside cover of: *Les équipements intégrés*, La Documentation française, 1974. Foreword by Augustin Girard.

⁷⁴⁴ “[...] le brassage des génération et des milieux sociaux.” Chartier, *Les équipements intégrés*.

⁷⁴⁵ See Chapter 4.

3. The shopping mall fascination

In 1960s France the most prominent suburban phenomenon generating the liveliness and crowdedness of something like a traditional city street was the shopping mall. The success and proliferation of suburban commerce in 1960s France vexed the new town planners as much as it fascinated them. They were aware that this experience of shopping was crucial for their new town plans. The big box stores and malls popping up at the outskirts of Paris and other large French cities generated the crowds they needed to attract to their urban centers. The many state-commissioned reports on the new urban centers acknowledged the central role of commercial development: “It is true that the commercial function is a driving force of the urban centers because it generates a considerable inflow of people (clients) of which the presence assures liveliness (movement) and serves as a pretext, in a fluid way, for extra- or para-commercial events (exhibitions, shows, fashion shows, and so on). [...] We can consider that the commercial center is an anchor point from which we can envisage different planning programs.”⁷⁴⁶ In the design and construction of the new urban centers shopping was thus more than a simple programmatic element. While some intellectuals denounced the shopping mall as a tasteless product of Americanization that could destroy the French way of life, it nevertheless became a crucial object of inspiration for the new urban centers. Formally and programmatically therefore, a history of the new urban centers in France would mean nothing without that of the shopping center.

The first suburban self-service supermarkets in France emerged in the second half of the 1950s. Small in quantity and size, they modestly inaugurated a U.S.-inspired consumer modernity to the French household.⁷⁴⁷ At the same time, neighborhood-sized commercial centers were being planned in the first generation of *grands ensembles*, following the *grille Dupont* that detailed the required amounts and kinds of amenities per housing development.⁷⁴⁸ In those cases where they were actually built - often only years after the housing blocks finished - these centers remained very small: a clustering of rarely more than ten shops, focused on everyday necessities - a grocery, a bakery, a laundrette, the odd café, and at times a small supermarket (figure 5.12). Both these planned centers and the stand-alone privately developed supermarkets catered to a local, mainly pedestrian clientele.

⁷⁴⁶ “Il est vrai que la fonction commerciale est un élément moteur des centres urbains car elle suscite un afflux considérable de personnes (clientèle) dont la présence assure l’animation (mouvement) et sert de prétextes, d’une façon continue à des événements extra- ou para-commerciaux (expositions, spectacles, présentation de modes, etc...). [...] On peut considérer que le centre commercial est un point d’ancrage à partir duquel on peut envisager différents programmes d’aménagement.” Zublena, Noviant, and Triplet, *Les centres urbaines des villes nouvelles françaises*, 17.

⁷⁴⁷ De Grazia mentions that the first self-service supermarkets were opened by Henry Toulouse of the food chain Paridoc, in the late 1940s. She does not specify whether these were urban or suburban, see: De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe*, 382. Another source dates the emergence of self-service supermarkets around 1955, see: “Les centres commerciaux péri-urbains: Difficultés d’une adaption,” *CDC*, no. 62 (1973): CDC/SCIC.

⁷⁴⁸ By means of the *grille Dupont*, government officials aimed to ensure each housing development had the right amount and kinds of shops (see Chapter 2). Additional legislation in 1961 aimed to further ensure a balance of commercial amenities in housing developments: it proposed a typology of commercial equipment, stipulated a quantified norm of 1.5-2 square meter of commerce per housing unit, and required a preliminary market study in order to obtain a building permit for housing projects of more than 1000 units. See: *Ibid.*

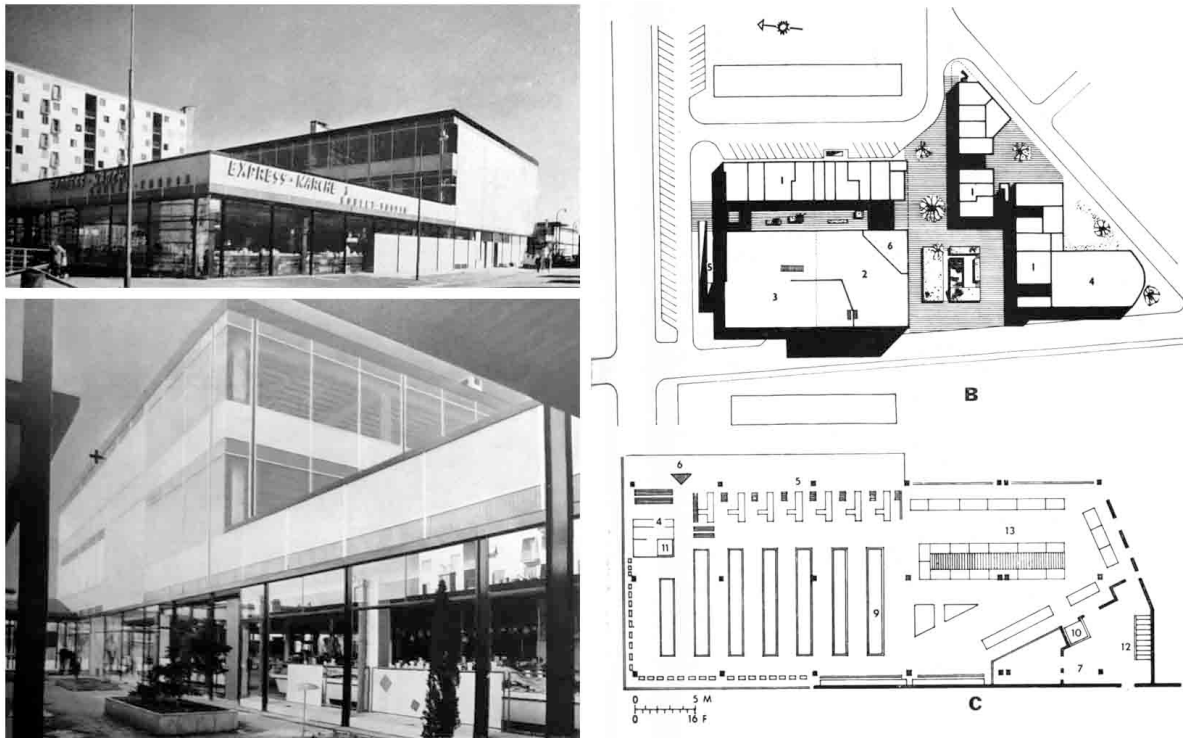


Figure 5.12: One of the larger planned commercial centers built during the late 1950s. This one is for Reuil (near Paris) by Sonrel and Duthilleul with Claude Parent (Source: *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, no. 83 (1959): 32-33).

When the first *hypermarché* or hypermarket was opened by Carrefour on 15 June 1963 in Saint-Geneviève-des-Bois, a suburb of Paris, it constituted not only a French shopping revolution, but more importantly, a suburban one.⁷⁴⁹ With its 450 parking places and total surface of 4,000 square meter - four times the size of a normal French supermarket - its adjacent gas station, and its offer of non-alimentary products in addition to the conventional supermarket products, “all under the same roof” and at prices often 20 % lower than other supermarkets, it was a huge success. Attracted by cheap land at a considerable distance from Paris, its French developers were inspired by American sales method as espoused by Bernard Trujillo, then the world’s supermarket guru to which the developers had made their obligatory visit.⁷⁵⁰ As a type, the hypermarket nevertheless remained a French invention: while U.S. big box malls were in essence chain stores specialized in specific products, the French hypermarket formula kept the diversity in offer of the supermarket but added more products and services to it.

⁷⁴⁹ See: Jean-Marc Villermet, *Naissance de l'hypermarché* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991); Christian Lhermie, *Carrefour ou l'invention de l'hypermarché* (Paris: Vuibert, 2003); Jacques Marseille, ed. *La révolution commerciale en France: Du “bon marché” à l'hypermarché* (Paris: Le Monde-Éditions, 1997); René Péron, *La fin des vitrines: Des temples de la consommation aux usines à vendre* (Paris: Cachan / Éditions de l'ENS, 1993); Solange Jungers, “L'invention de l'hypermarché,” in *Les Années ZUP: Architectures de la croissance 1960-1973*, ed. Gérard Monnier and Richard Klein (Paris: Picard, 2002).

⁷⁵⁰ Villermet, *Naissance de l'hypermarché*, 125-29.

In France, the hypermarket was the first type of shopping development that was exclusively suburban. Its development was premised on the assumption that customers would travel large distances by car to buy much more than their daily necessities. Thanks to the widespread democratization of the car and the refrigerator, that is exactly what young suburban households did as they replaced their grocery bags with their car trunks. Eager to consume and to save money and time by doing all their groceries in one and the same store, the new consumers of the baby boom generation make the hypermarket an immediate and gigantic success. Competitors rapidly imitated the new formula, and during the rest of the 1960s similar malls proliferated across the country (figure 5.13).⁷⁵¹ To limit investment and offer cut-throat prices, they were often not more than cheaply built hangars on cheap land.⁷⁵²



Figure 5.13: Carrefour hypermarket in Annecy near Genève (Source: Etienne Thil, “Les magasins aux champs” *Urbanisme* 108-109 “Echanges” (1968): 116).

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 148-49.

⁷⁵² France had more than 1000 supermarkets by 1969, and 26 hypermarkets (of more than 2500m²). See: “L’équipement commercial doit être un facteur d’urbanisme,” *CDC* (March 1969): CDC/SCIC.

The hypermarket, which enraged France's declining number of small shop owners for the decades to come, deeply affected U.S. and European commercial development.⁷⁵³ More importantly, its proliferation during the 1960s meant a sea-change for the French suburbs and soon rendered the planned commerce of the *grands ensembles* irrelevant. In the mid-1960s, there were around 600 planned commercial centers in France. Most of them were small in size and located in the middle of new housing estates. Only one in five actually contained a supermarket.⁷⁵⁴ Despite their bold claims to rational and efficient planning, they were never very successful: customers continued to complain of exorbitant prices and shop owners of poor business.⁷⁵⁵ Commercial distribution experts were the first to recognize the problems with these centers and instead suggested larger shopping malls directly at highway intersections - something that was unacceptable to the makers of the *grille Dupont* and many French urbanists. State officials with an eye on rationalized commerce however, considered the larger commercial developments like the hypermarket as the key to a more efficient mass production and distribution system.⁷⁵⁶ By the end of the decade, the approach to link commercial facilities directly to housing development was officially abandoned, as was the *grille Dupont* itself.⁷⁵⁷

A second revolution in French suburban shopping - equally important for the new towns but rather short-lived - was the introduction of the American dumbbell mall. The opening in 1967 of Parly 2, coined "the first regional commercial center in France," marked its arrival.⁷⁵⁸ Located at a major highway intersection, this private development contained several hypermarkets and supermarkets in addition to more than a hundred boutique stores, banks, a movie theater, a gas station, an art gallery, a travel agent, and so on. Most importantly, it also featured the first suburban outposts of Parisian department stores like Printemps and BHV. The developer emphasized the unique architecture of the complex: the stores all benefited from the spectacular ambiance of the mall itself, its careful management of collective provisions, and the promotion of their collective identity (figure 5.14). The ambition of Parly 2 was to offer an alternative to the commerce offered by existing city center. This explained the "2" in its brand name. More centers

⁷⁵³ Between 1960 and 1970, there was a decline (of 4.5 %) in the number of shops in France despite the economic growth and the proliferation of supermarkets, hypermarkets, and shopping malls during this period. See: "Les centres commerciaux péri-urbains: Difficultés d'une adaptation."

⁷⁵⁴ See: Centre commercial de Parly 2, brochure, n.d. (CAC 199110585/011). The information in the brochure was based on a research rapport by CECOD entitled "Les commerçants des nouveaux centres" for the Ministry of Finance.

⁷⁵⁵ The dominant idea in the early 1960s was that commerce was better "planned rationally and not located empirically." See: L'équipement commercial des ensembles résidentiels: Réalisation des centres commerciaux, M. Le Besnerais, INEP Marly-le-Roi, 1961. See also Chapter 2.

⁷⁵⁶ See: Commissariat général du plan d'équipement et de la productivité, *Rapport général de la Commission du Commerce, IVe Plan, 1962-1965* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1962), 118 (CAC 19780633/001).

⁷⁵⁷ In 1968, Hervé Martin wrote that the small commercial centers of housing estates in France, the Netherlands, and Sweden were generally recognized as a mistake. See: Hervé Martin, "Dix ans d'urbanisme commercial ou les leçons d'un échec," *Libre-Service Actualités*, no. 286 (1968). A bill in 1969 abandoned this idea and with it, indirectly overruled the urbanism of the *grands ensembles*. See: "Place de l'équipement commercial dans le développement urbain," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 27 August 1969.

⁷⁵⁸ See: Jean-Louis Solal, "Le centre commercial région de Parly 2," *Urbanisme* 108-109(May - June 1968): 111-13; "Centre commercial régional de Parly 2," *Urbanisme* 114(June 1969): 56-59.

soon followed, and with names like Grigny 2, Vélizy 2, and Rosny 2 they all claimed to offer a second, interiorized city center, even better than the real one.⁷⁵⁹



Figure 5.14: Rendering of Parly 2, late 1960s (Source: CAC 199110585/011: Brochure “Centre commercial de Parly 2”).

Parly 2 was recognized as an unabashedly American export product.⁷⁶⁰ Designed by the American architect Lathrop Douglass,⁷⁶¹ the project was developed by the commercial developer *Société des Centres Commerciaux (SCC)* with help of the famous American consultancy firm of Larry Smith. This was the economist who Victor Gruen had worked closely together with since the early 1950s and with whom he had written *Shopping towns in U.S.A.*, a book that by the mid-1960s had become the bible for commercial developers in France and elsewhere.⁷⁶² At the

⁷⁵⁹ Other centers by the same developer were Velizy 2 (1972), Rosny 2 (1973), Ulis 2 (1974), Evry 2 et La Part-Dieu (1975), Villeneuve 2 (1977), Rouen Saint-Sever (1978), and also Bobigny 2, Boissy 2 and Grigny 2. In Brussels, the company developed City 2, which won a prize in 1977 from the *Conseil international des shopping centers (ICSC)*.

⁷⁶⁰ This was emphasized by observers at the time, see: Michel Sauquet and Pierre Di Meglio, *L'expérience d'implantation des centres urbains nouveaux de la région parisienne* (Paris: CERAU-BETURE / Université Paris IX, Dauphine / UER Sciences et organisations, July 1971) (CAC 19840342/335).

⁷⁶¹ Lathrop Douglass was a specialist shopping mall designer, who realized over 70 shopping malls including Tyson's Corner (Washington), Fashion Center (NJ), Cross County Shopping Center (NY), Ruhr Park (Germany), and Elysée 2 (France).

⁷⁶² Victor Gruen and Larry Smith, *Shopping Towns U.S.A.* (New York: Reinhold, 1960). For its reception in France, see for instance: Sauquet and Di Meglio, *L'expérience d'implantation des centres urbains nouveaux de la région parisienne*, 65.

head of SCC stood Jean-Louis Solal, who had met Gruen during his studies in the United States and was the first Frenchman to join the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC).⁷⁶³ He emphasized that his development was not only the creation of an isolated shopping experience, but that the mall would also function as the center of a new residential neighborhood of over 5000 dwelling units. Located at a mayor highway intersection in the municipality of Le Chesnay, the large-scale development drove up land prices in the surrounding region and contributed to its accelerated urbanization.⁷⁶⁴ Many of his other commercial center projects also had an extensive program in addition to commerce. Rosny 2 featured four office towers at the corners of the site, and also encouraged the further urbanization of the surrounding suburbs (figure 5.15).⁷⁶⁵ Like many other commercial entrepreneurs, Solal believed in a radical liberalization of commercial development and found little reason to concert with government planners.

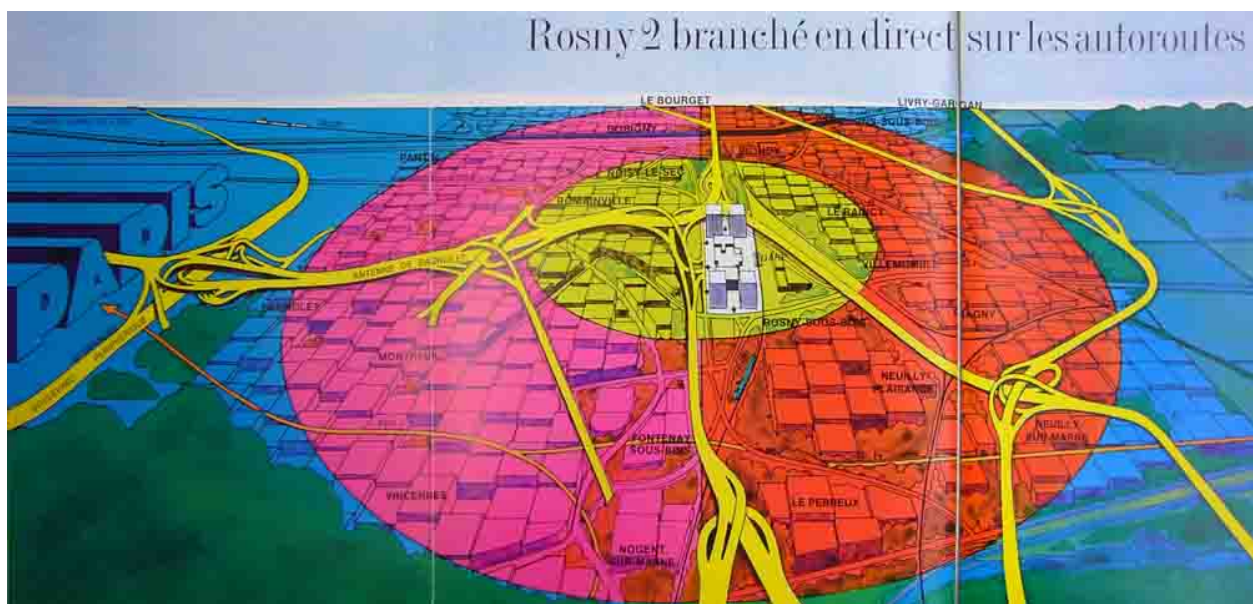


Figure 5.15: The strategic location of Rosny 2, sketch late 1960s (Source: CAC 199110585/011: Brochure “Centre commercial de Rosny 2”)

Consequently, state planners perceived such developments as completely “wild.” Local and central government officials had little grip on the actions of the private commercial developers

⁷⁶³ See: Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L'interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d'équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 91. Jean-Louis Solal had also organized study trips to the USA for his firm, to closely study American examples like Cherry Hill (opened in 1961 in Philadelphia, designed by the Rouse Company), Plymouth Meetings (Philadelphia), York Dale (Toronto), and so on.

⁷⁶⁴ See: Centres urbains AREAUR, Etudes de P. Dimeglio: Memento de la journée d'études du 23.10.1973, organisé par une groupe etude et recherche, DAFU (CAC 19840342/335).

⁷⁶⁵ Rosny 2 also had a typical American dumbbell layout, designed by American architects with help of Larry Smith & Co. The four office towers surrounding the mall were designed by Lods, Depondt and Beauclair, together with Engineers Collaborative, an American company specialized in office towers. See: Centre commercial régional Rosny 2, brochure, n.d. (CAC 19840342/335).

that imported this American model.⁷⁶⁶ They often found themselves running behind. The official 1965 plan for the Paris region did not contain many specifics on the planning of commercial development, but later that year the IAURP published a separate report on the planning of “regional and inter-municipal commercial centers” in the Paris region.⁷⁶⁷ This constituted one of the first attempts to plan on large scale for what planners now officially coined the regional commercial center. Adopting the shopping mall as the basic unit of development, they proposed a locational strategy that confirmed the crucial role of both commerce and of the new centers in restructuring the suburbs. However, Parly 2 and other such developments that were mushrooming around Paris at this time did not at all correspond to the plans of the IAURP.⁷⁶⁸

They called for direct consultation with commercial developers in order to “rationalize” the location and urban planning of their development project.⁷⁶⁹ That planners’ prescriptions were not necessarily rational to the developers of these malls, nor to many of their prospective customers, and that what they saw as “chaotic” development actually had its own logic, was rarely considered. The large semi-public developer SCIC warned that these shopping malls “killed urbanism” because they were impossible to integrate into their surroundings and encouraged uncontrollable urban growth.⁷⁷⁰ Similarly, French architects and government officials were quick to criticize them for their “anti-urban” character. Yet while such air-conditioned boxes surrounded by large parking surfaces did isolate their clientele from the surrounding urban fabric, they still tended to function as the *de facto* urban centers of their rapidly urbanizing and often ill-equipped suburbs.

Following the judgements of Parisian intellectuals, state officials tended to react with a mixture of fascination and condemnation. For Jean Baudrillard, commercial centers like Parly 2 confirmed the advent of a new type of society, based on individual consumerism. It was based on the dominance of a new type of space, the essential characteristics of which he saw manifested in the *drugstore*. This typically French anglicism was imbued with meanings of modernity and American-style consumer culture (figure 5.16).

⁷⁶⁶ See: Anne Fournié, "Planification et production des centres commerciaux régionaux en France de 1965 à 1981" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Université Paris 12, 1982).

⁷⁶⁷ Serge Goldberg and Guy Edouard, *Programmation des centres commerciaux régionaux et intercommunaux en région parisienne* (Paris: IAURP, 1965).

⁷⁶⁸ Parly 2 for instance was located on the west side of Paris, the richer part, whereas IAURP planned more commerce on the east side, less rich and less populated.

⁷⁶⁹ See: "Les centres commerciaux péri-urbains: Difficultés d'une adaption."

⁷⁷⁰ See: *Ibid.*, 19.



Figure 5.16: The drugstore as central programmatic element in this rendering of a future phase of collective housing at Garges-lès-Gonesse, featured in a promotional leaflet around 1969 (Source: Roth, Catherine and Muriel Barret-Castan, “Grands ensembles et circulations” in: *Patrimoine en Val de France* 3 (2005): 18)

However, the French phenomenon did not exactly correspond with the American drugstore, which was basically a pharmacy selling toiletries and soda drinks. Most importantly, the French *drugstore* was essentially an imaginary type. Apart from the two or three real *drugstores* in central Paris, located in busy pedestrian areas like the Champs-Élysées or Saint-Germain where they could be open day and night, they simply did not exist (figure 5.17). In spite, or rather because of its quasi in-existence, the type of the drugstore would earn mythological status in French postwar culture.



Figure 5.17: The *drugstores* of central Paris (Source: Bleustein-Blanchet, Marcel. “L’animation des centres urbains et la publicité” in *Urbanisme* 108-109 “Echanges” (1968): 39).

Featured in Tati’s 1967 *Playtime*, the imagined type of the French *drugstore* not only sold medical drugs, cosmetics, tobacco, candy and nicknacks, but also included a bar and fast food restaurant, and sometimes even a dance and meeting hall, all of which were often day and night. In the introduction to his 1970 landmark critique of consumer society, *The Society of Consumption*, Baudrillard began his analysis of the new society with a description of this ideal-type space:

“The synthesis of abundance and calculation is the drugstore. The drugstore (or the new commercial centers) realize the synthesis of consumer activities, the least of which is shopping, flirting with objects, playful wandering, and combinatorial possibilities. [...] it does not

*juxtaposes categories of goods, it practices the amalgam of signs, of all categories of goods considered as partial fields of a consumerist totality of signs. [With the drugstore,] the cultural center becomes integral of the commercial center. [...] The drugstore can become an entire city: this is Parly 2, with its giant shopping center, where 'the arts and leisure mix with everyday life,' where each group of inhabitants gathers around the swimming pool club that becomes its node of attraction. [...] We are at the point at which 'consumption' encompasses all of life, where all the activities link up to the same combinatorial mode, where the channel of satisfactions is traced in advance, hour per hour, where 'the environment' is total, totally climatized, designed, culturalized."*⁷⁷¹

According to Baudrillard, the shopping center in and by itself incorporated some of the critiques of mass consumption that had erupted with May 1968: with its many promises and designed conviviality, it channeled novel desires that had been left unexplored in two decades of rational state-led modernization. The image of one of Parly 2's luxuriously decorated interior atriums published in the book was captioned with the phrase: "On these beaches without paving stones, the class A and non-class A people will come to get tanned in the sun of commodities."⁷⁷² This was an ironic allusion to one of the famous catchphrases of 1968, "under the paving stones, the beach."

The architects and planners of the new towns did not escape from this complex cultural constellation. Many were aware that contemporary commercial space was a programmatic "must" for any large-scale urban development. For others it was more than an obligation, and served in fact as a fertile source of architectural inspiration. Ionel Schein, in his efforts to develop a "polyvalent global space" for the new urban centers that being planned at this time, went as far as to turn the *drugstore* into an architectural manifesto: "The *drugstorian* space, as it has evolved in Paris and only in some points of high socio-cultural density, like the Champs-Élysées and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the Opéra, and Saint-Lazare, is a first approach to a polyvalent [adaptable, multi-purpose] space, based only on the exploitation and encouragement of consumption and founded only on commercial profitability. The drugstorian space only takes on the formal principle of polyvalent space, but the experiment is interesting on the social level, because it is the quality of the space - by means of the conglomeration of functions that it contains - that has provoked the social density of these places and their commercial

⁷⁷¹ "La synthèse de la profusion et du calcul, c'est le drugstore. Le drugstore (ou les nouveaux centres commerciaux) réalise la synthèse des activités consommatrices, dont la moindre n'est pas le shopping, le flirt avec les objets, l'errance ludique et les possibilités combinatoires. [...] il ne juxtapose pas des catégories de marchandises, il pratique l'amalgame des signes, de toutes les catégories de biens considérés comme champs partiels d'une totalité consommatrice de signes. Le centre culturel y devient partie intégrante du centre commercial. [...] Le drugstore peut devenir une ville entière: c'est Parly 2, avec son shopping-center géant, où 'les arts et les loisirs se mêlent à la vie quotidienne,' où chaque groupe de résidences rayonne autour de la piscine-club qui en devient le pôle d'attraction. [...] Nous sommes au point où la 'consommation' saisit toute la vie, où toutes les activités s'enchaînent sur le même mode combinatoire, où le chenal des satisfactions est tracé d'avance, heure par heure, où 'l'environnement' est total, totalement climatisé, aménagé, culturalisé." Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: S. G. P. P., 1970), 21-24.

⁷⁷² "Sur ces plages sans pavés, les A et les non-A viendront bronzer au soleil de la marchandise." Ibid., 27.

profitability.”⁷⁷³ As an example, he mentioned the Europa-Center, a newly-built shopping mall inserted in the 19th century urban fabric of Berlin, as an example of polyvalent space for the city center.

The *villes nouvelles* planning teams often had an ambivalence towards the commercial center. They were fascinated by its ability to create such a dense kind of urbanity, but at the same time, they decried the “anti-urban” character of these “*shopping-centers à l’Américaine*.” Accepting that the large shopping center was an inevitable development, set themselves the goal of incorporating them as primary programmatic elements in their urban centers. They believed such malls could be adjusted to fit their ideals of a new urban center.⁷⁷⁴ Their attitude was perfectly summarized in prime minister Chaban-Delmas’ famous dictum, “We need to master the society of consumption by supplying it with an extra of bit of soul!”⁷⁷⁵ By this time, planners had also understood that their projects needed to take into account the forces of private development and their only chance was to work with rather than against it. Yet, how these “wild” private developments could be curbed into a carefully planned new urban center was less clear.

A perhaps unexpected response to this French question came from Victor Gruen. Embodying the international character of these mall developments, the Austro-American architect and urban planner was grappling with similar questions on the other side of the Atlantic and his spatial concepts ultimately influenced French planners. While the shopping center as a new suburban type originated in the 1920s, Gruen’s famous Detroit malls of the 1950s fundamentally re-envisioned them as “regional commercial centers.” After meeting Larry Smith in the early 1950s, he found in him the perfect partner to further develop of the shopping mall model.⁷⁷⁶ This collaboration allowed Gruen to directly test his architectural models in terms of economic profitability. The duo soon became the leading experts in shopping mall development, a status that culminated in the enormous success of their 1960 *Shopping Towns USA*. This book offered a solid theory of the new type that would influence shopping mall development in the United States and elsewhere over the next decade. In the course of a decade, Gruen had transformed the shopping mall from an outside strip of shops to an interior world of gallerias and interior plazas.

For Gruen nevertheless, the mall was not about shopping alone. On the contrary, it was only the basic program that would allow a whole series of civic functions to develop around it. As Gruen loftily declared in the prologue to his 1960 classic: “By affording opportunities for social life and recreation in a protected pedestrian environment, by incorporating civic and educational

⁷⁷³ “L’espace *drugstorien*, tel qu’il a évolué à Paris et seulement dans les points de forte densité socio-culturelle: Champs-Élysées et Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Opéra, Saint-Lazare, est une première approche pour un espace polyvalent, basée sur la seule exploitation d’incitation à la consommation et fondée sur la seule rentabilité commerciale. L’espace *drugstorien* ne revêt que formellement une attache de principe avec l’espace polyvalent, mais l’expérience est intéressante sur le plan social, car c’est la qualité de l’espace - par l’agglomération des fonctions qui y sont contenues - qui a provoqué la densité sociale de ces lieux et sa rentabilité commerciale.” Schein, *Espace global polyvalent*, 5-6.

⁷⁷⁴ See for instance: Mottez, *Carnets de campagne: Evry 1965-2007*, 61.

⁷⁷⁵ “Il s’agit de maîtriser la société de consommation en lui apportant un supplément d’âme!” quoted in: Baudrillard, *La société de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures*, 298.

⁷⁷⁶ See: Jeffrey M. Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

facilities, shopping centers can fill an existing void. They can provide the needed place and opportunity for participation in modern community life that the ancient Greek Agora, the Medieval Market Place and our own Town Squares provided in the past.”⁷⁷⁷ With a rather romantic view of the sociability of traditional European cities in mind, he provided interior plazas to facilitate civic events in the mall. And to a certain extent the malls he built allowed for these: fashion shows, holiday celebrations, community events, and public spectacles were not uncommon during their first decades.

Gruen’s interests soon expanded to urban planning. During the 1960s, he got involved in projects for privately developed new towns which tried to provide homebuyers with alternatives to the perceived ills of American suburban sprawl.⁷⁷⁸ At the same time, he continued with mall development but became increasingly frustrated with the way developers adopted his ideas and marginalized his conception of the mall as a community center.⁷⁷⁹ Towards the end of the decade, coinciding with his move from the United States back to Europe, Gruen distanced himself from shopping mall development and criticized some of his own ideas and earlier projects. He began to develop models for a center that would play a more involved public or civic role and would be better integrated with its surroundings.

In 1967 then, Gruen began working as an external consultant on the French *villes nouvelles*. His proposals were based on the - at this time rather tired - formula of a hierarchical cellular structure, in which each cell was a neighborhood with public facilities in its center, combining to form “village centers” separated by green belts. The city center would contain all other urban functions. It would be entirely pedestrianized but easily accessible by means of multi-storied parking structures on its periphery.⁷⁸⁰ Recalling some of his earlier projects like that for Fort Worth, this planning proposal was not particularly successful with the French planners.

On the conception of the new urban centers Gruen would nevertheless have a definitive influence. As a consultant at the decision-making table of the IAURP, Gruen also participated at its 1969 “Centres Urbains” conference. The conference was organized in order to find concrete solutions to the urgent problem of the urban centers for the nine new towns that were being built at this time. Gruen’s presence at the conference and as a consultant at the decision-making table of the IAURP soon led to the accusation that Gruen’s ideas were no longer fresh, and more importantly “too close to the American shopping mall idea.”⁷⁸¹ Nevertheless, his ideas remained very close to those of French planners at this time. In his presentation at the conference, he confirmed the need for planners to engage with private developers, but also warned to keep developers’ power at bay by resisting their standard recipes. That is exactly the position French

⁷⁷⁷ Gruen and Smith, *Shopping Towns U.S.A.*, 23-24.

⁷⁷⁸ See: Piggot, "The Irvine New Town, Orange County, and the Transformation of Suburban Political Culture".

⁷⁷⁹ Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City*; Victor Gruen, "The Sad Story of Shopping Centers," *Town and Country Planning* 46(1978): 350-52.

⁷⁸⁰ Report by Victor Gruen for IAURP, August 1968 (CAC 19840342/337). On the cellular metropolis idea, see: Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities: The Urban Crisis, Diagnosis and Cure* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), 266-96.

⁷⁸¹ See: Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L'interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d'équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 94-98.

planners would find themselves in when they tried to convince mall developers to include other non-commercial program into their project. His emphasis on the civic nature of the urban center was identical to that of many French planners. His high-density plan for Valencia's city center, proposed around the same time but never built, bore in fact a remarkable resemblance to initial plans for Cergy-Pontoise. And perhaps most importantly, the IAURP decided to employ the socio-economic expertise Gruen had been tapping into for over a decade: just like the commercial mall developers, they hired Larry Smith & Co for economic studies in several of the new towns - Evry, Marne-la-Vallée, St-Quentin-en-Yvelines and so on.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸² Ibid., 86.

4. Fragile Megastructures

The construction of such large-scale urban centers would prove to be far from self-evident. In their search for a suitable developer, the *villes nouvelles* planning teams faced hurdles that would seem remarkably pertinent today. They first created a global conception for the urban center and then submitted it for tender to large-scale developers. The idea was that because much of the land for the urban center was state owned, the planners could exert direct influence over the developer's choices. Yet, according to a 1971 planning study comparing current urban center projects, the developers prevented planners from coming up with creative solutions to the design of the urban centers: "Finally, the similarities we can observe between the five projects [of the study] derive from the exigences of the private developers much more than from the exchanges between planners, or even from their referencing to common models. The developers are in fact almost totally set on the American reference (of the Shopping Center in particular) outside of which there is no other option."⁷⁸³

Planners were faced with a poor track record when it concerned coordinating private commercial development. Mall developers usually worked behind the backs of government. Only in exceptional cases could planners exert control on their developments. At Bures-Orsay, a suburb of Paris, they tried to convince the developer to divert from their preferred location - at a highway exit - and instead to build the center in the middle of the new housing development that was planned at this time.⁷⁸⁴ The architects, Prieur and Camelot, proposed a compromise between the planners and the developer, but the center was ultimately located at the edge of the housing estate, as close as possible to the highway.⁷⁸⁵ For the new large-scale urban development of Créteil - not an official *ville nouvelle* but one of the first concerted efforts to avoid the *grand ensemble* model and create a "real" new town with an urban center - planners did find a private developer willing to build a shopping mall in the center of the development.⁷⁸⁶ During the planning process, the shopping mall was considered the central "node of attraction," albeit a consciously temporary one: the supermarket giant Carrefour signed a contract with the developer to exploit the mall for a period of only ten years, after which it would be demolished.⁷⁸⁷ Les Flanades, the new urban center of Sarcelles, represented one of the most successful efforts of integrating a commercial mall into a veritably new urban center (figure 5.7).

⁷⁸³ "Finalement, les similitudes que l'on peut observer entre les cinq projets viennent beaucoup plus des exigences des promoteurs privés que d'une concertation entre aménageurs, ou même de références de ceux-ci à des modèles communs. Les promoteurs sont en effet acquis dans leur quasi-totalité, à la référence américaine (Shopping Center en particulier) hors de laquelle il n'y a pour eux point de salut." Sauquet and Di Meglio, *L'expérience d'implantation des centres urbains nouveaux de la région parisienne*, 8-9.

⁷⁸⁴ The ZUP had been planned since 1960. The highway construction was decided after Prieur and Camelot's plan published in: "ZUP de Bures-Orsay."

⁷⁸⁵ See: Parvu, "Du territoire à la ville, histoire d'une limite."

⁷⁸⁶ The initiative for the new development came from the municipality and the department. There was already a *grand ensemble* at Mont-Mesly by SCIC, separated from the existing village. The new town was to mend both. See: "Pose de la première pierre de la ville nouvelle de Créteil," *Le Figaro* 2 April 1969.

⁷⁸⁷ The temporary character of the shopping center was understood as rational and American, and this was expressed in the design of the facade, which featured a large kinetic art projection. See: Jungers, "L'invention de l'hypermarché," 166.

Another challenge *villes nouvelles* planners faced during the construction of their multi-functional urban centers was that its funding and management depended on ever so many ministries and state institutions. Not only the Ministry of Planning and Housing, but also that of Health, Social Action, Cultural Affaires, and Youth and Sports were involved. Newspaper articles warned that “the compartmentalization between the ministries” prevented “the polyvalence and the regrouping of facilities.”⁷⁸⁸ For the ambitious and elaborate program of the new urban centers this situation was only intensified, and it was because of the existence of centralized institutions like the GCVN that this complex financial coordination could be overcome.⁷⁸⁹

Yet planners’ most formidable challenge was undoubtedly how to combine the commercial mall development with the rest of their program. Like elsewhere, the planners of the urban center of Cergy-Préfecture refused to accept developers’ concept of the commercial center as a self-enclosed entity. Instead, their main objective was to embed the mall more firmly in its urban surroundings and integrate it with the other activities of the center. To the pedestrian, strolling the plaza’s and streets of this novel urban environment, inside and outside should ideally be blended, they contended, and previously distinct urban functions needed to be merged into each other. While the initial plans for Cergy’s center presented a unified whole in which the commercial program was not separated from the other functions, this conception changed during the planning and execution process. Planners needed to find a compromise with the developers. One of the planners commented that “the center seems to have a conservative style according to many architects, but seems revolutionary in the eyes of the commercial developers. Following the theory of the two ‘magnets’ in the United States the air-conditioned complex is surrounded by parking lots on four sides. At Cergy the choice of parking lots on two sides only already seemed revolutionary.”⁷⁹⁰

In the end, the division between “civic” functions and commercial development was more clearly articulated than planners had initially hoped. Nevertheless, the eventual project was still based on a single urban center on a raised platform separating pedestrians from the main road and railway station underneath it. This central pedestrianized heart was intensely urbanized: it was dotted with small various socio-cultural facilities, shops and cafés, offices and governmental buildings. On its north-western side this complex was flanked by a large L-shaped shopping mall, which the pedestrian zone gradually spilled into. On the back side of the mall, away from the urban center were the necessary parking lots, directly visible and accessible from the highway running next to it (figure 5.18). On its south-eastern side of the center, the urban center blended into the surrounding office neighborhood and the urban park. Pedestrian connections and bridges on all sides linked the urban center to the surrounding neighborhoods (figure 5.19).

⁷⁸⁸ See: "Révolution administrative et financière nécessaire pour créer de véritables centres urbains dans les villes nouvelles: Le cloisonnement entre les ministères empêche la polyvalence et le regroupement des équipements," *Le Figaro* 27 October 1970.

⁷⁸⁹ The GCVN functioned as intermediary between the central administration and the individual *ville nouvelle* planning teams.

⁷⁹⁰ “Le Centre de PONTOISE paraît d’un style conservateur à de nombreux architectes mais semble révolutionnaire aux yeux des promoteurs commerciaux. Dans la théorie des deux “magnets” aux Etats-Unis l’ensemble climatisé est entouré de parkings sur quatre côtés. A CERGY le choix de parkings sur deux côtés seulement a paru révolutionnaire.” *Colloque Centres Urbains: Texte des conférences et débats, 2-3-4 juillet, 1969*, 10.



Figure 5.18: Diagrams for the urban center of Cergy, drawn in 1972 by the architect Aymeric Zublena, showing how car circulation and parking defined position and integration of shopping mall with other functions, with construction phased over time (Source: Amercio Zublena, Patrice Noviant, and Xavier Triplet. “Les centres urbains des villes nouvelles françaises,” (Paris: Ministère de l’Equipement / SGGCVN, 1972): 22-23 (CDU)).

Cergy thus combined the logic of the car - easy access from the highway and ample parking space - with that of the pedestrian. In other words, it combined the logic of the mall developers with that of the planners. Or, most importantly, it combined the rationale of the suburbs with that of the city. At Cergy-Préfecture, the mall became an integral part of the urban fabric. Not only had the mall become part of its urban fabric, but, as some critics argued, the center itself was actually of conceived in terms of the mall.

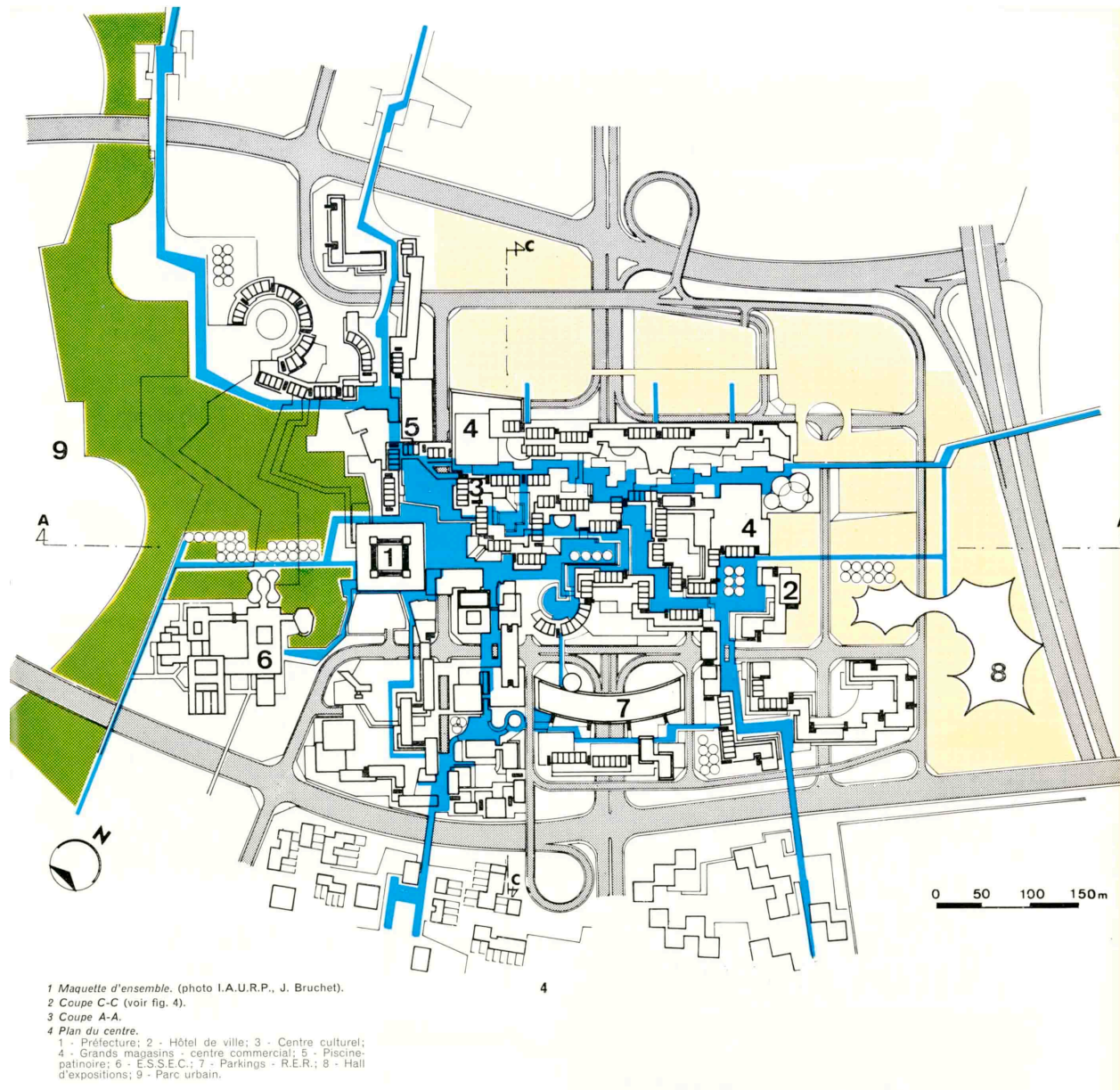


Figure 5.19: Plan for the urban center of Cergy Préfecture in 1970 (Source: *Techniques et Architecture* 32(5) “Villes nouvelles de la région Parisienne” (1970): 55).

For the new center of Evry, perhaps the most significant of such projects in France at this time, the integrated facilities of the Agora promised to offer a more serious counter-weight to the shopping mall. André Lalande, director of the local planning team,⁷⁹¹ nevertheless admitted during the construction of the urban complex that “if there would not have been the commercial

⁷⁹¹ André Lalande was named director of the Evry planning team in 1966. He made his career at the Ministry of Planning and Housing, and was involved in the planning of the *grand ensemble* of Massy-Antony. The planning team included Michel Mottez, an architect-urbanist from the Ivory Coast, and Elio Cohen-Boulakia, a Tunisian geography and history professor recommended by Pierre George. More urbanists, sociologists and geographers were added over time. See: Guyard, *Evry Ville Nouvelle 1960-2003: La troisième banlieue*, 43; Darmagnac, Desbryères, and Mottez, *Créer un centre ville: Evry*.

center, there would not have been the Agora.”⁷⁹² Planning began soon after the publication of the SDAURP. The earliest proposals by the IAURP in 1966, before the local planning team got involved, featured a conglomerate of buildings and courtyards structured by a main pedestrian boulevard and surrounded by parking lots and a ringroad (figure 5.20). Three large stores were included in this program and the compound was dotted by office towers and housing. In many respects this project was indebted to some of Gruen’s city center projects like for Valencia (California) as well as to European shopping centers like the NordWestZentrum near Frankfurt that was being built at this time.⁷⁹³ Yet, the inclusion of housing into the commercial and office program was rather unconventional. Moreover, the fact that the main boulevard also connected to civic amenities situated outside of the circular road demonstrated the will to transcend the idea of an entirely enclosed center.⁷⁹⁴

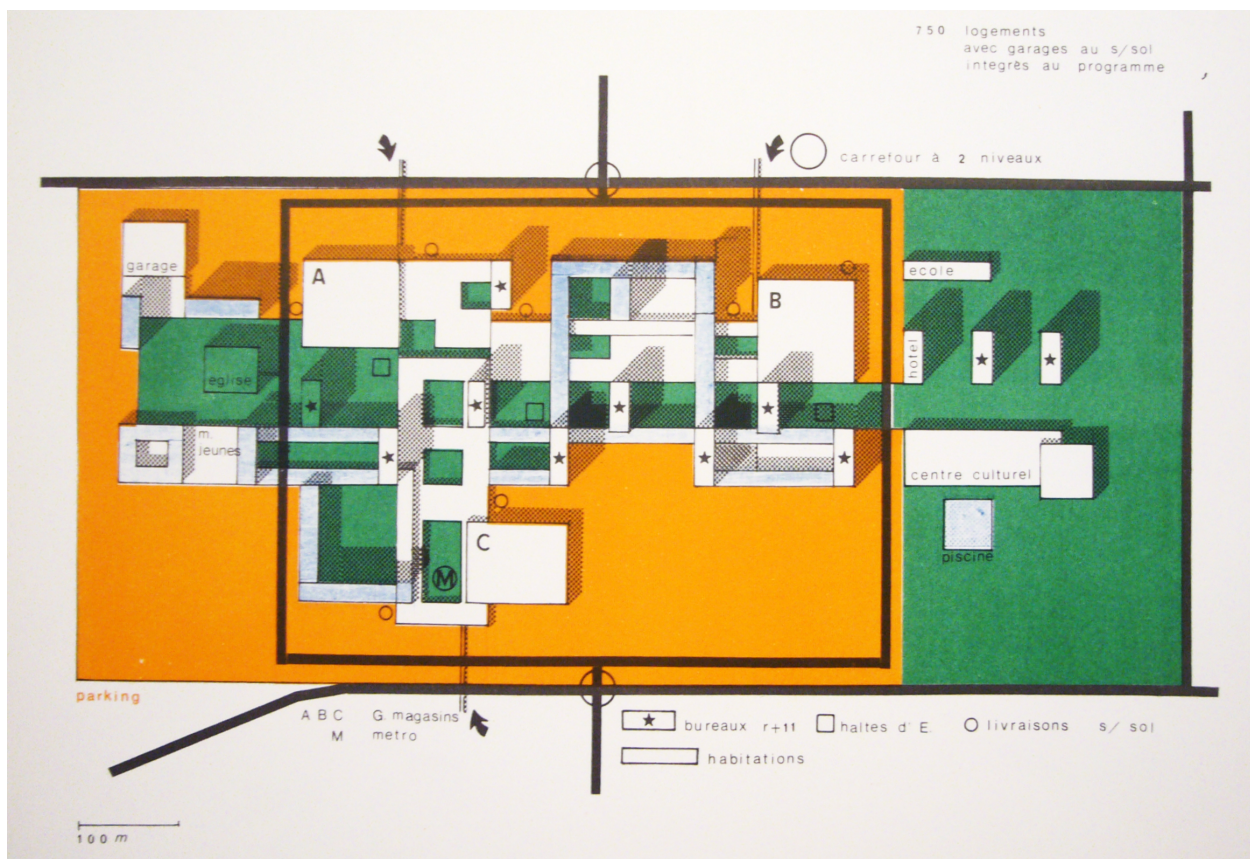


Figure 5.20: An early proposal for the urban center of Evry by the IAURP (together with SERETES) in 1966 (Source: AD Essonne 1523W/638).

⁷⁹² “S’il n’y avait pas de centre commercial, il n’y aurait pas eu l’agora.” Journée d’études du 17 octobre 1973 sur les centres urbains.

⁷⁹³ See: “Nordweststadt,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 146 (1969): 72-73. On Valencia city center, see: Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City*, 216.

⁷⁹⁴ AD Essonne 1523W/638

Soon after the establishment of this initial plan, the local planning team took over. Around the same time, the IAURP found out that Printemps, the Parisian department store, had plans to branch out into the suburbs. Parly 2 was to be their first project, but more suburban locations were envisaged. The planners of Evry were keen on seizing this opportunity for their development, in spite of commercial studies which had suggested Grigny as the perfect location for such a commercial endeavor. In fact, planners faced a constant threat of other commercial developments close to the new town, threatening to detract from the new center's liveliness and commercial profitability. André Lalande later recounted the following about the encroaching developments: "We had a some good hypermarkets around, we were certain to have one at one or two kilometers of the center, hence the permanent anxiety we had to realize the commercial center as soon as possible. Since we are there, there has been the construction of a big Carrefour at Chilly en Bière, a big Inno at 4 kilometers of the regional center, an Euro-marché on the route to Orly, at 4 or 5 kilometers, and a commercial center at la Belle Epine. There was but one risk left and that was the construction of a Carrefour of 40,000 m² on the terrain of M. Bouygues, which would have been catastrophic. It was thus high time that our commercial center was built."⁷⁹⁵

Including a department store like Printemps into their program however implied a substantial modification of the urban concept, as planners later recalled: "The logic of the department store was to be inscribed in a larger commercial complex, of which they served as the 'magnet' ['locomotive']."⁷⁹⁶ Despite their enthusiasm to include such commerce, the planners criticized suburban malls like Parly 2. They believed that their designs could be tweaked and improved to fit into their new urban center: the new center of Evry was to be "an embryo of an Urban Heart and therefore to avoid the American-style shopping-center, anti-urban by its very nature, with its desolate facades and sea of parking space."⁷⁹⁷

The Evry planning team then hired the architect Jean Le Couteur to draw plans that could be used to submit for tender in order to find a suitable developer.⁷⁹⁸ The program was drastically revised from the initial IAURP plans: while it still featured a single megastructural development, it now contained two clearly defined elements: a "regional commercial center" - adapted from the type of the American-style dumbbell mall despite planners' aversion - and a civic center, soon baptized the "Agora." Only one pedestrian connection linked the two parts. In its most basic

⁷⁹⁵ "Nous avons quelques bons hypermarchés autour, on était certain d'en avoir à un ou deux kilomètres du centre, d'où cette inquiétude permanente que nous avons eue de réaliser le plus vite possible le centre commercial. Depuis que nous sommes là, il s'est construit un grand Carrefour à Chilly en Bière, un grand INNO à 4 km du centre régional, un Euro-marché sur la route d'Orly, à quelques 4 ou 5 km, un centre commercial à la Belle Epine. Il n'y avait plus qu'un risque, c'est qu'il se construise un Carrefour de 40.000 m² sur le terrain de M. Bouygues, ce qui aurait été la catastrophe. Il était donc grand temps que le centre commercial arrive." Journée d'études du 17 octobre 1973 sur les centres urbains.

⁷⁹⁶ "La logique des grands magasins était de s'inscrire dans un complexe commercial plus vaste, dont ils étaient la 'locomotive'" Mottez, *Carnets de campagne: Evry 1965-2007*, 61.

⁷⁹⁷ "[...] un embryon de Coeur Urbain et pour ce faire d'éviter le shopping-center à l'américaine, anti-urbain par nature avec ses façades désolantes et sa marée de parkings." Pour une expérience pilote d'action sur l'environnement urbain: La ville nouvelle d'Evry et la mis en oeuvre d'une politique de l'environnement, 1970.

⁷⁹⁸ Le Couteur was chosen by André Lalande and the Minister of Culture, according to: Mottez, *Carnets de campagne: Evry 1965-2007*, 64.

form, the plan looked like a *grand ensemble* community center stuck onto a dumbbell mall (figure 5.21).

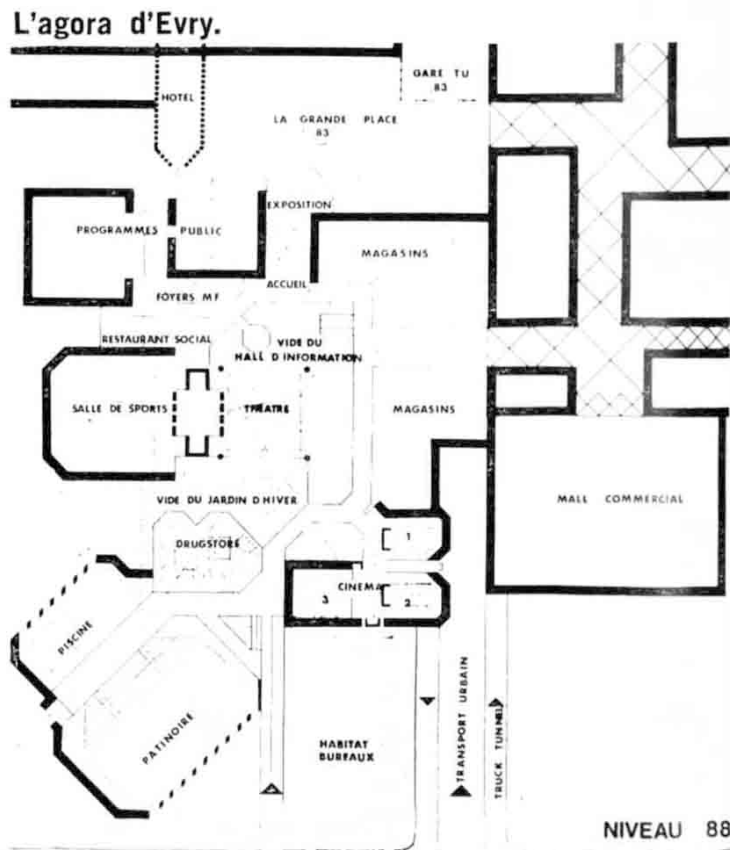


Figure 5.21: Early proposal for the Agora of Evry by the architect Le Couteur in 1970 (Source: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 152 “Les lieux du spectacle” (1970): 40).

During their negotiations with developers, planners were confronted with some unshakable convictions. In the developers’ eyes, the American example had proven that only an isolated, internally integrated mall worked. Moreover, the logical implantation of any commercial center would be adjacent to a mayor highway intersection, not in the center of a new town that was only at the beginning of its development. As André Lalande recalled during a 1973 conference: “the first developers of commercial centers confirmed to us that one could only build a commercial center at Evry in the form of an American shopping center and they contested in the beginning even the location itself of the regional center, saying that the real commercial center needed to be at Grigny, at the highway intersection of the A6 and the G5. We thus needed a lot of discussion to make them understand that we would not come back on our location of the commercial center

[...].”⁷⁹⁹ Lalande also described how developers almost loathed the idea to integrate the shopping center with the social and cultural facilities of the Agora.

The discussions were based on two entirely different pools of expertise and forms of rationality. Private developers based their convictions on the studies of American economic consultancy firms like Larry Smith & Co. Their rationality was that of the market: action radii, accessibility, and the socio-economic characteristics of target populations essentially defined profitability. Despite their open attitude towards contemporary commerce, planners’ ideas were based on the diametrically opposite conviction that only the state could guarantee the public good, and therefore, was to rationally guide the actions of the market. In the eyes of developers however, the state was just an actor - and a slightly “irrational” one at that - in a market otherwise defined by private interest. Moreover, they proposed a clear model, as opposed to the sometimes vague and lofty ambitions of state planners. In a sense, planners’ attempt to freeze commercial development in a fixed urban center was a sign of their inability to deal with the essentially dynamic nature of commercial development, and an important aspect of postwar urbanity itself.

Despite the opposing ideologies, a temporary symbiosis emerged. A common enemy proved useful in this respect. During the 1960s, private mall developers faced fierce competition from hypermarkets. Despite their markedly different audience - developments like Parly 2 often included fancy Parisian department stores and boutiques that were much more upscale than the hypermarkets, whose discounted products catered to a more working-class clientele - they competed for the same available land at highway exits and intersections close to middle-class suburbs. Planners preferred to work with mall developers like SCC rather than hypermarkets who often acted as direct developers and were less reliable. Their elite middle-class bias undoubtedly played in favor of prestigious suburban malls rather than cheap big box stores.⁸⁰⁰ Most importantly, the official policy for the new towns was to attract a large number of middle class people, a comforting fact for the mall developers. Planners and developers thus found a common enemy in the hypermarkets.

After lengthy negotiation, the planning team decided in 1970 to go into business with the developer COREDIS-SACC.⁸⁰¹ The planners suggested that “to preserve the unity in the conception,” Le Couteur work closely with the developer’s architects Jankovic-Hardion.⁸⁰² The

⁷⁹⁹ “[...] les premiers promoteurs des centres commerciaux qui nous ont affirmé que l’on ne pouvait réaliser un centre commercial à Evry que sous la forme d’un shopping center américain et qui ont contesté au départ l’implantation même du centre régional en disant que le véritable centre commercial devait être à Grigny au confluent de l’autoroute A6 et de la G 5. Il nous a fallu beaucoup discuter pour faire comprendre que nous ne reviendrions pas sur l’implantation du centre commercial [...]” Journée d’études du 17 octobre 1973 sur les centres urbains.

⁸⁰⁰ For instance in the words of Michel Mottez: “Il y en avait de monstrueux autour de New York, plus ils étaient grands plus ils étaient sales et par certains côtés vulgaires., mais ce commentaire est le reflet de mon éducation bourgeoise. Parly 2 était d’une grande classe et il y avait plus à apprendre chez nous qu’Outre-Atlantique.” Mottez, *Carnets de campagne: Evry 1965-2007*, 63.

⁸⁰¹ The planning team of Evry wanted a developer that would build and manage both the commercial center and the Agora. There were two candidates remaining in the final round. One was COREDIS-SACC, relatively new but enthusiastic about also building the Agora, The other one was SCC, which had more experience but was less interested in the Agora part of the project. See: Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L’interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d’équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 101.

⁸⁰² Around this time, IAURP proposed that the team work with Victor Gruen. While the EPEVRY team was not too fond of his ideas, which it considered “too American,” they needed to work with him because the department stores had his confidence.

developer was on board with planners' emphasis on the role of the Agora vis-à-vis the commercial program, but it ultimately failed to attract the big chain stores and department stores.⁸⁰³ Realizing this would mean the end of the urban center, the planners hired another developer in 1972.⁸⁰⁴ The demands of this new developer were specifically and solely geared towards the commercial center.

Against the predominance of the commercial program therefore, the planners focused their attention on - and attached their hopes to - the new integrated facilities of the Agora. They saw the Dutch examples as proof that this kind of complex could be strong enough to offer a counterweight to the commercial center. For their own socio-cultural complex therefore, planners came up with an elaborate list of functions in six categories: the "library function" (including books, music, video, and so on), the "studio function" (creative workshops, youth meetings, and so on), offices (including for the various local associations), the "information function" (exhibitions and so on), the "shows and recreation function" (including the sports hall and swimming pool), and finally, the social services like childcare.⁸⁰⁵ The Agora was seen as the central element that would bring together all the urban functions and would make the center a veritably urban place.

It became increasingly clear however that both programs needed some form of spatial autonomy.⁸⁰⁶ This was an evolution not only due to developers' demands. Planners had their own anxiety about commercial development encroaching onto the public services and functions of the Agora. State officials went out of their way to dispel fears that a far-reaching integration of commerce would mean a commercialization of public functions: "To accept the existence of commercial activities linked to the cultural activities does not mean that we accept a 'commercialized' culture. In short, it is a matter of making the socio-cultural and sports facilities, which suffer from under-utilization, benefit from the more spontaneous trips of the population to the commercial centers."⁸⁰⁷ Instead of the Agora becoming the overarching spatial concept, as planners had initially hoped, it should simply avoid not being swallowed by the commercial center: during the planning process, the developer had even proposed to brand the urban center as "Evry 2" after the success of malls like Parly 2.⁸⁰⁸

Throughout the design process, the planners advocated for an integration of the different facilities not only within the Agora itself, but also with its surroundings. This led the architects to increase the transparency and communication of different facilities with the central public atrium (figure 5.22). It also led them to move away from the Agora as a single, monolithic volume. The

⁸⁰³ Centre Commercial Régional: Rapport au Conseil d'Administration, EPEVRY, 20 juin 1972 (AD Essonne 1523/W358).

⁸⁰⁴ See: Journée d'études du 17 octobre 1973 sur les centres urbains.

⁸⁰⁵ "Avec la préfecture 'l'Agora' constituera le coeur de la ville nouvelle d'Evry," *Le Croix* 9 May 1971.

⁸⁰⁶ Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L'interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d'équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 101.

⁸⁰⁷ "Accepter l'existence d'activités commerciales liées aux activités culturelles ne signifie pas que l'on accepte une culture "commercialisée". En résumé, il s'agit de faire profiter les équipements socio-culturels, sportifs qui souffrent de sous-fréquentation, des déplacements plus spontanés de la population vers les centres commerciaux." *Les équipements intégrés*, La Documentation française, 1974. Foreword by Augustin Girard.

⁸⁰⁸ Guyard, *Evry Ville Nouvelle 1960-2003: La troisième banlieue*, 76.

architectural articulation of different function - in particular the swimming pool and the sports hall - allowed a certain blending between exterior and interior space (figure 5.23, 5.24) The architectural gesture of the cantilevered space-frame roof, which reached out over the main entrance at the public square, was part of this strategy.⁸⁰⁹ The vast parking lots required for the commercial center nevertheless remained the main obstacle for this kind of integration with the surrounding neighborhoods. The planners pushed to have these lots either underneath the center or stacked in multi-storied parking structures surrounding the urban center. In the end however, three sides of the center were surrounded by parking lots (figure 5.25).



Figure 5.22: Interior plaza of the Agora of Evry. Photo taken around 1975 (Source: CAA Fonds Le Coureur, 187 IFA 44/10). Space-frame roofs like these were common features of the public architecture of French new towns during the 1970s.

⁸⁰⁹ AD Essonne 1523W/614

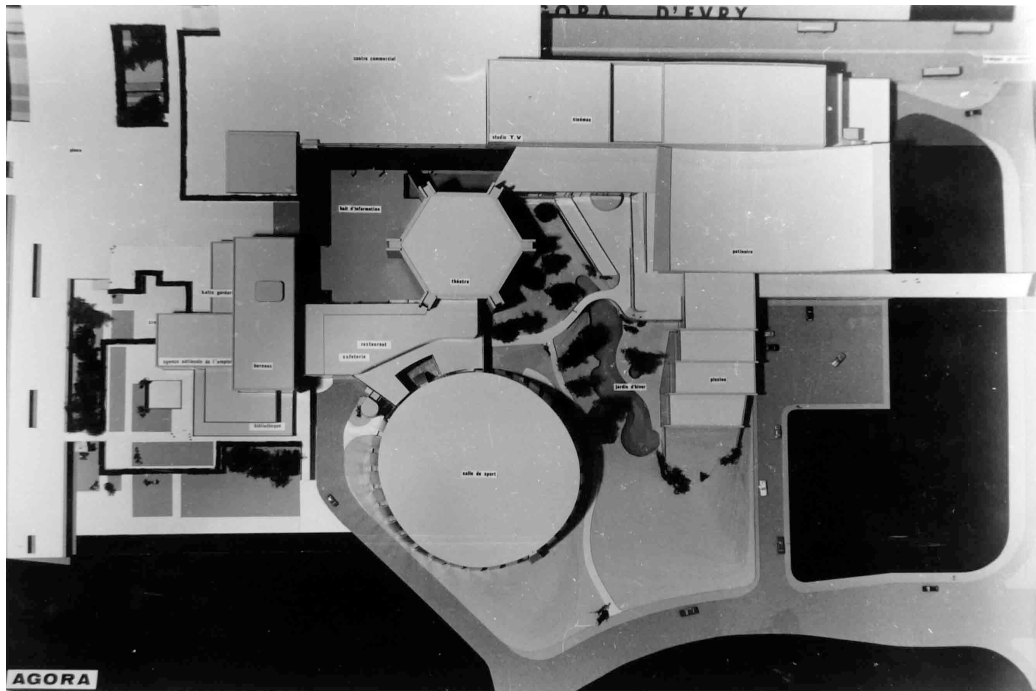


Figure 5.23: Model of final project for the Agora, by Lecouteur (Source: CAA Fonds Le Couteur, 187 IFA 44/10). Its volumetric articulation attempts to avoid the impression of a single, monolithic building.



Figure 5.24: Exterior view of the Agora, photo of around 1975 (Source: CAA Fonds Le Couteur, 187 IFA 44/10). The experience of a certain blurring between inside and outside is achieved here by decomposing the program architecturally into distinct sculptural objects.



Figure 5.25: Aerial photo of around 1975 of the new urban center of Evry, with the Agora in the middle (Source: CAA Fonds Le Couteur, 187 IFA 44/10).

The final product of this intensive planning process was ultimately a megastructure in denial. Unified by a raised platform underneath of which parking and public transport was organized, the elements of the program were far more imbricated than Le Couteur's initial plan suggested. For the visitor, the experience of this mix of functions was certainly overwhelming if not disorienting. At the same time, there was a clear architectural distinction between Agora and commercial center: the contact between commercial and non-commercial program was clearly controlled in the plan (figure 5.26), and the sculptural volumes and formal expression of the Agora contrasted with the simple big box of the mall.

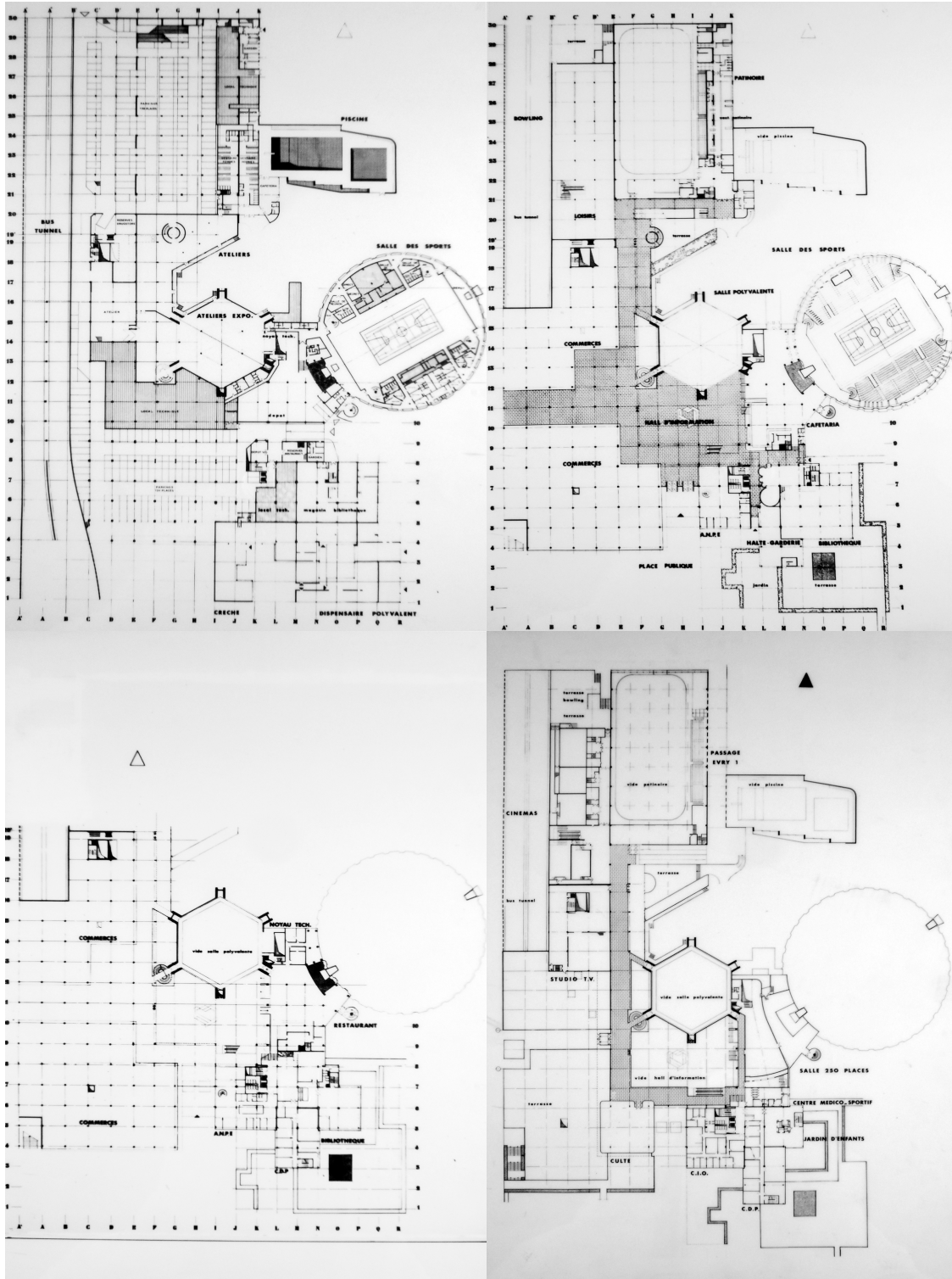


Figure 5.26: Final project plans of the Agora, by Le Couteur (Source: CAA Fonds Le Couteur, 187 IFA 44/10).

The Agora first opened in 1974, the commercial center followed festively in March 1975, accompanied by triumphant newspaper reportage.⁸¹⁰ A year later, those same newspapers reported on the very mixed feelings inhabitants had with their brand-new super-facilities. Praised as the definitive instrument to give Evry a “real urban heart,” journalists suggested that despite these promises its inhabitants might still be merely *hoping* not to live a suburb. In general, visitors seemed content with the Agora. But inferring from interviews with inhabitants, everyday life in Evry was remarkably similar to that in Sarcelles two decades before: women complained of boredom, the participation in local decision-making was practically inexistent, and taxes, well, they were too high.⁸¹¹

When it opened, the central plaza and two superposed covered walkways of the Agora had the status of public streets and were open day and night. Inhabitants soon complained about the presence of homeless people and drug addicts who “had a negative impact on the popularity of the Agora with families.” In the 1980s then, one of the walkways was eliminated and the interior secured and closed off at night.⁸¹² A similar downward spiral befell such urban centers elsewhere in France and abroad. Cumbernauld Town Center - one of Britain’s most truthful realizations of the urban center megastructure - was finished in 1967. Enthusiasm declined ever since it opened. The center was dramatically neglected in the Thatcherist 1980s and surrounded by big box malls in the 1990s.⁸¹³

Despite their sturdy looks, the life of of these megastructure urban centers was often as fragile as the planning process that had given rise to them. Their historical moment was a brief one. Economically, the centers simply lost out against the big box stores and in France especially the hypermarkets. While some hypermarket or discount stores tried to insert themselves into dumbbell malls as one of their magnets, their “discount” identity generally clashed with the image of “luxury” the latter aimed to exude.⁸¹⁴ Instead, the hypermarket adopted some of the strategies of the dumbbell mall - like the inclusion of independent boutiques - but with a decidedly less upscale character. While the commercial mall was a risky and complex undertaking, these second-generation hypermarkets were directly developed by the chain stores themselves. They were better adjusted to the social make-up of the French suburbs and their profitability was thus practically guaranteed. And with the dumbbell malls, so waned the new urban centers based on them.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹⁰ "Des commerces mais aussi des lieux de rencontre: Une place à l'anciennce pour la ville nouvelle d'Evry."

⁸¹¹ "Evry ou l'espoir de ne plus être une banlieue," *Le Monde* 3 February 1976.

⁸¹² Guyard, *Evry Ville Nouvelle 1960-2003: La troisième banlieue*, 77-80.

⁸¹³ Designed by Geogrey Copcutt, the project's first phase was finished in 1967, but would never be built as actually planned. Subsequent phases included an indoor Woolworth shopping mall (1975). See: Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*; "<http://www.ablab.org/cumbernauld/>."

⁸¹⁴ Like at Sarcelles, and also the Agora, where one of the two magnets was a discount store and the other a department store.

⁸¹⁵ The department stores also realized this: soon after their initial expansion into the suburbs, they retreated again to focus solely on city center commerce. See: Péron, *La fin des vitrines: Des temples de la consommation aux usines à vendre*.

The mid-1970s also marks the end of the paradigm of integrated facilities. Critiques about their contradictory nature ran parallel to their development, but were often smothered by Agoromania. Already in 1973, expert reports concluded that “the stubbornness of the planners to realize from day one complex spatial organizations is a purely static and unrealistic view. We even ask ourselves if in certain cases, it is not contradictory to the goals they envisage, namely the appropriation of facilities and everyday environment by its users. We can show, and it is not the famous and often-invoked example of the Agora in Dronten (in the Netherlands) that will allow to prove the contrary, that the heavier the investments, the more complex the organization, and the more the operation eliminates the users, together with their ability to invent and appropriate.”⁸¹⁶ Throughout the experiment, their management and coordination, which involved a multitude of state institutions, was a key obstacle. The disparity between the needs of local users and the complex and the often monumental institutions of integrated facilities became increasingly clear. By 1976, their official promotion machine, the Inter-ministerial Commission for Integrated Facilities (*Commission interministérielle pour les équipements intégrés*) was already dismantled.⁸¹⁷ During the economic crises of the mid-1970s, such welfare state extravaganzas seemed ill-considered if not simply economically impossible. The rescaling of the welfare state and the growing importance of political decentralization and local government suggested other kinds of facilities. By the end of the decade, the model to follow was that of a distributed network of facilities, rather than their integration or super-sizing.⁸¹⁸

Was the quick demise of these urban centers a sign of a lost belief in architecture’s social agency as is so often assumed with the postmodernism that followed it? French “urban postmodernism” or neo-traditionalism will certainly not lose all hopes of creating a better quality of life. The view that architecture can serve as a direct instrument in the creation of a certain kind of local social life however will lose its credibility together with the popularity of the megastructural urban centers.

In 1976 then, Reyner Banham confirmed the changing mindset and proclaimed that the “megastructure movement” as he called it was part of history, “a fossil future that was not to be,” together with “‘Modern’ architecture as we have known it.”⁸¹⁹ In his eyes, what was at stake in the global movement of megastructure projects during the later 1960s and early 1970s was to reclaim the importance of architecture for the contemporary city - a theme running through

⁸¹⁶ “L’entêtement des aménageurs à vouloir réaliser dès aujourd’hui des organisations spatiales complexes est une vue purement statique et irréaliste. On se demande même si dans certains cas, elle n’est pas contradictoire avec les objectifs qu’ils mettent en avant, à savoir l’appropriation des équipements et du cadre de vie par les usagers. On peut démontrer et ce n’est pas l’exemple célèbre et souvent invoqué de l’agora de DRONTE (en Pays-Bas) qui permettra de prouver le contraire, que plus les investissements sont lourds, plus l’organisation est complexe, et plus le fonctionnement élimine des usagers, en même temps que leurs capacités d’invention et d’appropriation.” Centres urbains AREAUR, Etudes de P. Dimeglio: Memento de la journée d’études du 23.10.1973, organisé par une groupe étude et recherche, DAFU. This was confirmed in a subsequent report: Les équipements intégrés, La Documentation française, 1974. Foreword by Augustin Girard.

⁸¹⁷ Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L’interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d’équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 5. The political change of 1977 brought the left to power and they dismissed the socio-cultural facilities as a product of the technocratic state. But this was beating a dead horse: the idea of a large megastructure simply did no longer stroke with the altered economic condition.

⁸¹⁸ For instance Philippe Jarry et the group TRAME. See: Ibid., 62.

⁸¹⁹ Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*, 9-10.

modernism but dramatically lost in the chaos of postwar urbanization - while addressing a new kind of user, spontaneous, mobile, and creative. This total architectural environment was to transcend the uncontrollable nature of the city, or, in Banham's words, promised "to resolve the conflicts between design and spontaneity, the large and the small, the permanent and the transient."⁸²⁰

While Banham presented the megastructure movement as essentially an *academic* pursuit - especially in France for which he limited the discussion to the 1960s paper projects championed by Ragon - the proliferation and exuberance of French new urban center mega-projects during the 1960s and 1970s proves otherwise. The many megastructures in denial of the postwar French city are its widespread "banal late modernisms" just like the *grands ensembles* were the banal products of an earlier modernism less than two decades earlier.

⁸²⁰ Ibid., 10.

Conclusion

The contemporary visitor of the urban centers of Evry or Cergy can be the archaeologist of an urban past that is very recent and seems familiar, but that is at the same time so incomprehensibly different that it could have been built by another civilization altogether. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, French planners created new urban centers of unprecedented scale and complexity, with the aim to transform suburban life by supplying users with a new, animated kind of environment guaranteed of liveliness and urban atmosphere.

Offering a counterpoint to the postwar suburban condition and to perceived failures of an earlier modernism embodied by the *grands ensembles*, planners aimed essentially to satisfy new user needs and aspirations. The enormous success of suburban commercial development - pilgrimage sites for a new consumer culture - was both a lightning rod and eyesore. Planners' urban centers embodied the desire for an improved consumer and welfare society: a play garden for creative consumers but also a even more intricate web of social-democratic engineering and provision.

Their plans reflect a late-modern urbanism that was faithful to the nature of the French welfare state while incorporating both the social critiques of modernism and the new ethos of private development. On the one hand, these projects were thus intensely user- and market-oriented: planners took as the basis of successful urbanism the freedom and satisfaction of its users and this translated "naturally" into profitability for the developers it engaged. On the other hand, they can be read like a post-order catalogue of ultimate mega-projects instigated by a centralized French state.

The urban center of Evry was a poster child of this far-reaching integration of private commercial development and public services and facilities. While it remained in many respects a unique experiment, it nevertheless bears witness to the systematic experimentation with such new urban centers in France at this time. Although their success was of short duration, they did in fact constitute a radical urban "megastructural" environment featuring the most unlikely combinations of state-sponsored amenities.

The urban centers of Evry, Cergy, and other French new towns were the first generation of interiorized "total environments" in which so much of contemporary urbanity now takes place. These are still cast today as the sole product of neoliberal private development. The French urban centers however demonstrate that the late welfare state had its own stake in the creation of such environments. As modern public services and facilities were to speak the language of consumerism - accessibility, availability, efficiency - so they could converge with private commercial developments in the creation of a megastructural urbanity in which architecture was elevated to become the main social animator. While that role was soon no longer ascribed to it, the architecture of the urban centers still bears witness to the unique entanglement of citizenship and consumerism in postwar French society.

Chapter 6: The Complexity of Dwelling

The fuss about the public opening of Evry's Agora in 1975⁸²¹ left its adjacent residential development in the shadows. Equally remarkable however, this housing project would turn out to be of equal, if not greater importance to understand the urban landscape of 1970s France. Simply coined "Evry I" as it was the new town's first neighborhood, the project had recently been completed after a national architecture competition. Its organizers had projected it as the prototype of a new kind of urban residential environment for the French suburbs. Connected to the Agora via a pedestrian overpass, the project featured a series of conspicuously-shaped pyramids of stacked housing units. Cross-planned to allow access and light, the pyramids provided each dwelling unit with a large room-sized terrace on top of the floor below. While it recalled the famous 1967 Montreal Expo project by Moshe Safdie, the design was more than an ode to complexity or a modernist reinterpretation of the mediterranean village. Its spatial mix of dwelling units - including luxury condos - was meant to encourage the intense mixing of different social groups. And its integration of public amenities within the housing blocks as well as its attention to a carefully designed public realm would facilitate social life unlike the mass housing projects that preceded it.

The project was perhaps the most iconic of its kind but it was hardly the only one. During the 1970s, the French suburbs were inundated with housing developments just like it. Despite their diverse provenance and formal characteristics, the crucial thing they had in common was that they attempted, above all, *not to be grands ensembles*. Because of the public critiques of what the state was held responsible of producing in the French suburbs over the past decades, that same state had decided to encourage these new kinds of projects. Under the header of the *Plan Construction*, it launched an ambition state agency in 1971 to sponsor scientific research, innovative models, and experimental projects in the realm of mass housing construction.⁸²²

Much of the architecture coming out of the *Plan Construction* - and out of 1970s France by extension - combined an older ambition to create entirely industrially produced, affordable housing with novel attempts to create dwellings that would flexibly adapt to inhabitants' diverse and changing needs and desires. Why did the state subsidize architectural innovation and industrialized construction methods? How exactly was state-sponsored experimentation with alternative housing types believed to entice future inhabitants? Did it in fact? Why did so many of the prototypes present exceptional architectural forms? And what were the hopes such an ostentatious architecture embodied?

In architecture, planning, and government circles the increasing social critique of state-led urbanism - only fueled by the contestations of May 1968 - had engendered a new ethos centered on the user. "Quality of life" and its corollary notion of lifestyle were the central political concerns in the realm of housing and urban planning, and would remain so throughout the

⁸²¹ See Chapter 5.

⁸²² This state agency produced an abundant body of literature on its own creation, operation, and development, which this chapter makes use of.

1970s.⁸²³ Without giving up centralized planning - and actually expanding its ambitions to shape everyday life - the state channeled these preoccupations, which soon informed architectural and urban production. State officials were well aware that the French public wanted a different architecture than what had been produced so far. Abhorred by the aesthetic uniformity of the *grands ensembles*, interviewees of sociological surveys spoke explicitly of their desire for a “beautiful and varied architecture.”⁸²⁴ The architectural production of the 1970s responded to these hopes for a better quality of life through its emphasis on formal complexity, the accompaniment of sociological research, and new methods of industrialization to diversify housing production. All of these took place under the aegis and sponsorship of the government as it meant to increase satisfaction about French housing production. Because they were the national test benches for innovation, experimentation took place first of all in the *villes nouvelles*.

⁸²³ See: Monique Dagnaud, *Le mythe de la qualité de la vie et la politique urbaine en France: Enquête sur l'idéologie urbaine de l'élite technocratique et politique, 1945-1975* (Paris / La Haye: Mouton, 1978). Dagnaud interprets “quality of life” as an “urban ideology” and contrasts it with a previous one that situated housing and urban planning in a field of health and morality. See also Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.

⁸²⁴ Rapport provisoire de motivations sur les villes nouvelles, sondage SIGMA, mars 1970 (CAC 19840342/391).

1. A Changing Housing Reality...

The 1960s was the decade of the *grands ensembles*. By this time, their legislative, financial and construction machinery was well-oiled and they were built all over France at a rate unprecedented and unparalleled since. Of the more than 500,000 dwelling units created each year, a large portion was due to the construction of collective housing estates - not only massive ones like Sarcelles but also a multitude of smaller ones inserted into the suburban fabric. And yet, despite being the heyday of the *grands ensembles*, the 1960s also gave rise to entirely new residential trends that would to a large extent define the radically changing landscape of housing production during the 1970s. These trends were shaped in essence by two concurrent forces: the surge in individual homeownership, and the advent of the modern single-family home.

The brief but intense enthusiasm for the *grands ensembles* - their celebration as primary vehicle of national development, panacea for the French suburbs, and beholders of modern living - had caused an equally brief and categorical eclipse of the single-family home. Between the mid-1950 and mid-1960s, the single-family home was hardly discussed in France, neither in professional and policy-making circles nor in the popular press. And when mentioned, it was often in association with the undesirable housing of the interwar period located in what were called *lotissements défectueux* or decayed allotments. Most importantly, almost no modern single-family homes were constructed during this time. In the exceptional cases they did get built, like at La Haie Bergerie (figure 6.1), the developer went through substantial efforts to distinguish his project from the shunned housing of the suburbs: “There is no suburban cottage [*pavillon de banlieue*] in the common sense of the term at la Haie Bergerie but individual homes [*maisons individuelles*] which is not the same thing.”⁸²⁵ In general, there was little market demand, many procedural obstacles, and almost no construction industry experience of building new single-family homes. In 1964, while in the US 61 % of new housing construction consisted of modern individual home developments, in France the total portion of single-family home construction was only 21%, half of which consisted of traditional construction in rural areas.⁸²⁶

⁸²⁵ “Il n’y a pas de ‘pavillon de banlieue’ au sens commun du terme à la Haie Bergerie mais des ‘maisons individuelles’ ce qui n’est pas la même chose.” Jacques Riboud, *La maison individuelle et son jardin dans la ville nouvelle: Un récit sur la création de La Haie Bergerie à Villepreux (Yvelines)* (Paris: Editions Mazarine, n.d.) (CAC 19840342/229).

⁸²⁶ The following decade, 1965-75, the percentage of individual homes would rise spectacularly, from 29% to 43% See: ADROS (Association pour le développement de la recherche sur l’organisation spatiale), *Les nouveaux villages* (Paris: RAUC (Centre de Recherche d’architecture et d’urbanisme et de construction)), 2 (CAC 19840342/324).



Figure 6.1: The single-family home development of La Haie Bergerie (Source: J. Riboud, *La maison individuelle et son jardin dans la ville nouvelle. Un récit sur la création de La Haie Bergerie à Villepreux (Yvelines)* (Paris: Mazarine, n.d.). CAC 19840342/229).

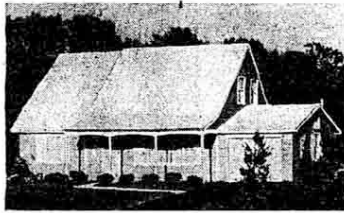
Yet, that same year, attracted by the conspicuous “gap in the market” as he saw it, William Levitt ventured into France to expand the business that had earned him titles like “the father of modern American suburbia” and “the Henry Ford of the construction sector.”⁸²⁷ Kaufman & Broad, another American home builder, followed soon after. These entrepreneurs understood that in an increasingly prosperous France, despite the lack of a proper legal framework for consumers and prohibitively high loan deposits, more and more middle class families would be able to purchase individual homes. Their desire for suburban living was not a question for the Americans. Since the 1940s, opinion polls had already been used to demonstrate the supposedly deep-rooted desire of the French to live in a single-family home.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁷ See: “France: A Lesson from Levitt,” *Time* 10 December 1965.

⁸²⁸ Girard, *Une enquête par sondages: Désirs des Français en matière d’habitation urbaine*. See also Chapter 1.

Coined “new villages,” Levitt’s first French subdivisions were a huge success. The homes were modeled on their American counterparts but incorporated some “typically French” styles and a more intricate overall layout that attempted to take into account some aspects of the local context (figure 6.2).⁸²⁹ Higher land prices and the absence of an inexpensive production method like in the U.S. made them affordable only to the upper echelon of the French middle class.

Voici la Maison en France à la Levitt--Tres Americaine



One of 70,000 houses built by William J. Levitt in the United States. The Cape Cod frame house bears a family resemblance to a tile-roofed, masonry model in France.

French Translation of Levittown, U.S.A., Is Offered by Big Housing Developer

By HENRY KAMM
Special to The New York Times

LE-MESNIL-SAINT DENIS, Oct. 30—More people flocked into this village of less than 2,000 inhabitants last Sunday than anyone recalls ever having seen here before. They stopped counting after 2,400 cars.

They came to see whether they might want to live here, in the first “Levittown” in Europe. And after less than a week since the opening of the model houses, Levitt officials here feel that an encouraging percentage of those who came to look remained to buy.

So far, 270 persons have opened bank accounts with

\$100 deposits in their names. Under French law, the builder is not allowed to accept a binder until the house is erected.

So under the Levitt scheme the prospective buyer opens a bank account as a token of his earnestness. When the house is nearly finished, the sales contract is concluded with payment of 5 per cent of the price.

Officials of Levitt & Sons believe that 50 to 75 per cent of those who put up the \$100 will actually buy a house. The pleased reaction of house hunters on the site make the optimism credible.

Many Americans living in France are among the lookers. They find little to make them feel that they ever left home. There are five model houses, a playground to keep the children out of them and acres of wilderness. The new road stops at the last model house.

5 Rooms for \$22,000

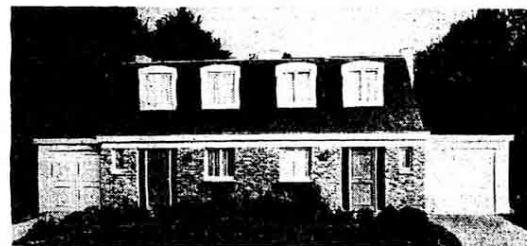
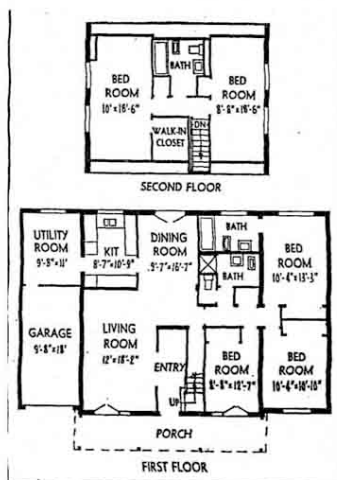
The five models are named as romantically as they would be on Long Island, but with a French flavor to reflect their setting in the rolling forest of the Chevreuse Valley west of Paris.

They range from the Dampierre (five rooms for the equivalent of \$22,000) to the Barbizon (seven rooms, \$32,700). In between are the Chevreuse.

Continued on Page 12, Column 8



The Barbizon, most expensive of the Levitt houses in France at \$32,700, has seven rooms, including five bedrooms. Five models are offered in 650-unit development.



Dampierre, at \$22,000, is five-room town house with brick facade. Like other Levitt homes in France, it is of masonry because frame homes are deemed fire hazard.

Figure 6.2: The first French Levitt development featured in the New York Times in 1965 (Source: “Voici la Maison en France à la Levitt - Très Américaine” *New York Times*, 31 October 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times).

⁸²⁹ Levitt’s first project of around 500 homes in Le Mesnil-Saint-Denis, a suburb of Paris, was sold as “*Les Résidences du Château*,” and was adapted to the French context. On smaller lots, but meant for a more upper class segment of the market, the homes were sold as “French” modern lifestyle with references to French historic architectural styles. See: Gournay, “Levitt France et la banlieue à l’américaine: Premier bilan.” See also: “Levittown France: U.S. Floor Plans in Gallic Garb,” *House and Home* December 1965; “French Home Buyers Pleased by a ‘Levittown’ Outside Paris,” *New York Times* 29 January 1967; “Levitt Starts Second French Project,” *New York Times* 8 October 1967.

Around the same time American homebuilders set up shop in France, the government became interested in the single-family home - independently and for different reasons. In 1964, the District of Paris organized a competition to encourage designers to focus on dense single-family home typologies. Its rationale was “to increase the possibilities” for the French public to choose this kind of dwelling.⁸³⁰ This competition was only the beginning of what would become a tradition of state-sponsored initiatives aimed to encourage individual home-ownership based on consumer choice - and by extension, on the single-family home ideal.

The Villagexpo exhibition of 1966 was perhaps the most important, as it was the first to bring the issue to national attention (figure 6.3). The exhibition featured an entire “new village” built in the suburbs of Paris, to showcase a variety types of homes constructed by internationally selected builders. Some of the prototypes would be subsequently endorsed by the state for national production. In contrast to the private developments of Levitt - who participated in the competition but was excluded from endorsement because his project surpassed cost limits⁸³¹ - the state focused on affordability. Moreover, the goal of “democratization” had to be accompanied by some form of urbanism: the government aimed to regulate the proliferation of single-family homes and to rationalize their spatial organization by grouping them in carefully planned developments with the necessary collective amenities.⁸³² In his inauguration speech, the director Roland Nungesser referred to the single-family home as an “instrument of social mobility,” assuming of course that it implied ownership and not rental units. Rational industrialized production, so he contended, would guarantee affordability for the lower classes. In his eyes, the modern single-family home was not the antidote but rather a complement to the *grands ensembles*, which still dominated French policy: “The single-family home, inserted in new urban developments associated with collective housing, breaks the monotony of the *grands ensembles*, allows to air and model its architecture, and diversify the ways of life. The single-family home regrouped in small centers and associated with small collective [housing estates] restitutes the life of the small town and village.”⁸³³

⁸³⁰ “En marge de ces discussions, les faits sont évocateurs: interrogée, la population de la région de Paris opte en majorité (66%, source: IFOP, 1963]) pour l’habitat individuel; depuis 1955, on a construit 84% d’immeubles collectifs. Ce concours n’exprime pas une prise de position du district en faveur de l’habitat individuel contre l’habitat collectif. Il implique simplement la volonté d’accroître les possibilités de choix.” Paul Delouvrier and Roland Nungesser in: “Villages urbains: Concours ‘Habitat individuel’ organisé par le District de la région de Paris,” *Urbanisme* 82-83(1964): 121.

⁸³¹ See: Gournay, “Levitt France et la banlieue à l’américaine: Premier bilan,” 171.

⁸³² See: Anne Meistersheim, *Villagexpo* (Paris: Dunod, 1970).

⁸³³ “La Maison familiale introduite dans les urbanisations nouvelles, associée aux immeubles collectifs, rompt la monotonie des grands ensembles, permet d’aérer et de modeler les partis architecturaux, de diversifier les modes de vie. La Maison familiale regroupée dans de petits centres et associée à de petits collectifs restitue la vie du bourg et du village.” Inauguration de Villagexpo, discours de Roland Nungesser, Secretariat d’Etat au logement, septembre 1966 (CAC 19771142/019).



Figure 6.3: Modern single-family homes at Villagexpo (Source: Anne M. Meistersheim, *Villagexpo* (Paris: Dunod, 1970): 170-171).

With the political liberalism of Minister Albin Chalandon after 1968, the single-family home began to take a more central position in national policy.⁸³⁴ In 1969, Chalandon organized an ambitious international competition for the single-family home with the idea that “a home needs to be able to be a consumer good like a car,” in other words, a product “keys in hand.” At the same time, he stressed the need for flexible homes, which buyers could customize depending on changing needs - an extra room for the children, a garage for the car, a hobby room, and so on - because “it is necessary that everybody can occupy, non just a house, but his or her home.” The individual home could thus be at once a ready-made consumer product and an essential part of buyers’ identity and lifestyle.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁴ Chalandon cast himself as the advocate of a new, direly needed liberalism: “Non à l’urbanisme technocratique... complexé... restrictif... et médiocre [...] Oui à l’urbanisme rentable... libéré... et réaliste.” See: Une nouvelle politique de l’urbanisme: Place et rôle de la maison individuelle. Conférence de Monsieur Albin Chalandon à Paris, Chambre de commerce et d’industrie, 7 mai 1969 (CAC 19840342/171).

⁸³⁵ “une maison doit pouvoir être un bien de consommation comme une voiture,[...] clés en main. [...] il faut que chacun puisse occuper, non pas une maison, mais ‘sa’ maison.” Concours international de la maison individuelle, brochure, n.d. (CAC 19840342/229).

The competition ultimately led to the construction of 65.000 individual homes, coined Chalandonnettes. Their population was as homogeneous as that of the private more up-market developments, but instead of managers and businessmen they housed young French families of employees and laborers. Initially received with enthusiasm, the Chalandonnettes were soon criticized because of their small surfaces and bad construction.⁸³⁶ Many of them nevertheless remained popular alternatives to collective housing. Perhaps their most important impact however was on the construction sector itself: the competition promoted a new kind of developer that would master all parts of the production process - financing, marketing, conception, and construction - similar to what U.S. builders had already been doing for decades.⁸³⁷ Other competitions followed,⁸³⁸ but by the mid-1970s it was clear already that the single-family home needed no further encouragement; it had become the new norm for modern French living.⁸³⁹

Like communicating vessels, the embrace of the single-family home was directly linked to the social problematization of the *grands ensembles*. Standard critiques of inhabitants and the general public had been that their density was too high and their apartments too small, that they had terrible sound and thermal insulation, and lacked communal spaces and collective amenities. Yet, a growing concern of experts and policy-makers in particular was their role in engendering social segregation. Françoise Choay had been amongst the first to voice such a concern when she wrote in 1959 that the *grands ensembles* were “governed by a principle of discrimination: to the poor, poor and ugly housing.”⁸⁴⁰ While they initially housed the middle classes and Alain Touraine could even label them as “petit-bourgeois” environments, residential mobility patterns during the 1960s would confirm her precocious analysis.⁸⁴¹

This evolution was increasingly understood as an acute problem. With the slogan “no to the deportation,” the removal of the working classes out of Paris - partly the result of urban renewal projects that forced them to be rehoused in social housing estates on the periphery - had become a theme during the protests of May 1968.⁸⁴² The sympathies of bourgeois youth with the working classes ultimately led them to condemn the government for its complicity with the longstanding

⁸³⁶ Une nouvelle politique de l’urbanisme: Place et rôle de la maison individuelle. Conférence de Monsieur Albin Chalandon à Paris, Chambre de commerce et d’industrie, 7 mai 1969.

⁸³⁷ The winners of the competition were large companies, often groups of developers, social housing organizations, and construction companies. One of them was SCIC, which was extending its market to individual home construction. See: *Ibid*.

⁸³⁸ In 1972 another such initiative was organized under the name “jeu de construction.” In 1975 regional competitions for individual homes were organized in order to diversify typologies for individual home developments. See: CAC 19840342/330; C. Damery, P. Vetter, and G. Weil, “Une maison 'jeu de construction',” *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 296 (December 1973).

⁸³⁹ ... albeit not in the orderly groups envisaged by the state. Of the 148,000 homes built in 1968, only 13,500 were built in groups or planned developments; the large majority was built isolated and by small companies using mainly artisanal techniques of construction. See: *Concours international de la maison individuelle*, brochure, n.d.; *L’habitat individuel dans le Bassin parisien: situation et évolution du marché en 1976*, IRCOM, décembre 1976 (CAC 19840342/330).

⁸⁴⁰ “régis par un principe de discrimination: au pauvre, logement pauvre et laid.” Françoise Choay quoted in: Study by Ballardur and Prieur analyzing the first public critiques of the *grands ensembles*, *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*, 1959.

⁸⁴¹ Perhaps paradoxically, the policy around the *grands ensembles* had made reference to the ideal of social mixing from the start, as Pierre Sudreau had emphasized in a key note in 1958: Note relative à l’optimum démographique et social des grands groupes d’habitation, *Commission de la vie dans les grands ensembles*, n.d. (CAC 19770816/004).

⁸⁴² Interview of the author with Anne Querrien, 25 February 2008.

trend of displacing the poor out of Paris, and thus, for them, out of sight. In an internal report, the Ministry's urban sociology think tank addressed the problem of the *grands ensembles* in similar terms, deploring "the increasing difficulties of everyday life for the 'exiles to the suburbs' that need to resolve tiresome problems of transport and isolation."⁸⁴³ The imaginary of urban crisis was never far away. Propelled by a love-hate relationship with Americanization, the first reference for French commentators was often the crisis of the American inner city. And of course, in the eyes of planners the emergence of what were coined "little Chicagos" in France needed to be avoided at all cost.

Quoted abundantly in the report was an academic article published that year by sociologists Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Madeleine Lemaire, entitled "Spatial proximity and social distance: The *grands ensembles* and their inhabitants."⁸⁴⁴ A landmark for the changing perception of the *grands ensembles*, the article demonstrated - against the utopian assumptions and spatial determinism underlying the bulk of existing sociological studies on the *grands ensembles* - that the spatial proximity of social classes in the *grands ensembles* in no way guaranteed social mixing.⁸⁴⁵ The article exposed the community ideals that guided not only their conception - the neighborhood unit - but also the dominant sociological readings of these environments once built. As a war machine against what they called the "populist utopia" of Chombart de Lauwe, the article incited planners and policy makers to let go of the idea of the "social melting pot" of the *grands ensembles*. The study was widely read by planners and policy-makers and made them aware of the social polarization and conflicts the *grands ensembles* had given rise to.

Race continued nevertheless to be conspicuously absent from sociological analysis. On paper, it had been practically inexistent and would remain so for the time being. The absence of detailed census data on racial and ethnic background, implicitly part of the French citizenship ideal, contributed to this state of invisibility. The demographic studies that did mention race did so in the inappropriate terms of foreign citizenship or class. If cloaked terminology was any indication, planners and policy-makers were well aware of growing racial tension in the *grands ensembles*. Analysis was often normative: social segregation was the problem, local integration the solution. The line of reasoning was simple: if there were too many foreign workers - North Africans in particular - in a given neighborhood, there would be racial tensions. Thus, they needed to be integrated in "local society" in order to create a "sociological balance" of French middle classes and foreign populations - per definition assumed to pertain to the lower economic classes.⁸⁴⁶

Whether social segregation was in fact the reality or not is not the question. Observers were acutely alarmed by the issue, and reports decried that "the expulsion of the 'rehoused' to the

⁸⁴³ "l'accroissement des difficultés de la vie quotidienne pour les "exilés des banlieue" qui ont à résoudre de pénibles problèmes de transport et d'isolement." Note sur la ségrégation, GRECOH, septembre 1970 (CAC 19771142/036).

⁸⁴⁴ Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Madeleine Lemaire, "Proximité spatiale et distance sociale: Les grands ensembles et leur peuplement," *Revue française de sociologie* 11, no. 1 (January - March 1970): 3-33.

⁸⁴⁵ See: Amiot, *Contre l'Etat, les sociologues: Eléments pour une histoire de la sociologie urbaine en France, 1900-1980*, 209-16.

⁸⁴⁶ Jean-Marie Reinert, "La présence des étrangers dans les zones d'habitation," *CDC*, no. 62 (1973): 40-43. Jean-Marie Reinert was in charge of urban sociology at the large semi-public developer SCET.

periphery of cities can lead to a fundamental social instability.”⁸⁴⁷ As such, social segregation became the dominant reality to policy makers and Parisian academics and intellectuals. The diversity of everyday problems in the lives of French suburbanites was increasingly gathered under the rubric of segregation. Yet, the notion was more than a register of perception; it set in motion a range of initiatives for reforming suburban life, leaving its imprint on the built environment of the 1970s.

⁸⁴⁷ “le rejet des “relogés” vers la périphérie des villes peut entraîner un déséquilibre social fondamental.” Rapport final, groupe du long terme, Commission de l’Habitation, CGP, 1970 (CAC 19771142/036).

2. ... A Different Housing Policy

When Minister Oliver Guichard,⁸⁴⁸ in his famous bill of 21 March 1973, delivered the death sentence to the *grands ensembles*, he did so explicitly in terms of their role in engendering social segregation⁸⁴⁹: “In reality, the *grand ensemble* is the child of the easy option and of the modern taste for gigantism. [...] The *grand ensemble* tends to destroy the urban architectures into which or next to which it is nestled. [...] The city and the society, like life, are diversity. The *grand ensemble* opposes the social diversity of the city. It is the physical aspect of a policy that tends to organize the social segregation in our cities.”⁸⁵⁰ The minister used sociological expertise to legitimize his decision of abandoning the *grands ensembles* as a model for urban development. Fighting social segregation through housing, so he explained, found its political parallel in fostering local democracy. What bound these together for him was one of Henri Lefebvre’s key notions, the “right to the city:” “At the basis all the reasons that inspire the change in policy that I propose revolve around what has rightly been called ‘the right to the city.’ Right to the city because the city is a value, because the city, work of civilization, is civilizing in return. Right to the city rather than to the four walls of a dwelling: that is to say right to a certain type of social life where the exchange is richer. Right to the city for all, because the urbanization is a generalized phenomenon that incorporates the rural world. Right finally to be responsible of his or her city.”⁸⁵¹

In his speech accompanying the bill, Guichard did more than criticize past policies; he also formulated concrete principles for future policy guided by what he called a shift from quantity to quality.⁸⁵² He prohibited the construction of *grands ensembles* by quantitative thresholds: maximum 1000 units per development in cities less than 50.000 inhabitants, and 2000 for larger cities. He also supported the encouragement of the individual home and city center revitalization. But most importantly, he specified measures for the government to become directly involved in promoting architectural quality. While his speech sounded almost revolutionary in tone, the bulk of his proposals had already been launched by policy-makers in the two preceding years.

⁸⁴⁸ The Ministry was at that time called *Ministère de l’aménagement du territoire, de l’équipement, du logement et du tourisme* (MATELT)

⁸⁴⁹ "Déclaration sur les orientations de la politique urbaine, par Olivier Guichard à l'Assemblée nationale."

⁸⁵⁰ “En réalité, le grand ensemble est l’enfant de la facilité et du goût moderne pour le gigantisme. [...] Le grand ensemble tend à détruire les architecture urbaines dans lesquelles ou à côté desquelles il se plaque. [...] La ville et la société, comme la vie, sont diversité. Or le grand ensemble s’oppose à la diversité sociale de la ville. Il est l’aspect physique d’une politique qui tend à organiser la ségrégation sociale dans nos villes.” Olivier Guichard décide d’interdire les grands ensembles, Note 21 mars 1973, distribué 26 mars 1973 (CAC 19840342/023).

⁸⁵¹ “Au fond toutes les raisons qui inspirent le changement de politique que je propose tournent autour de ce que l’on a justement appelé le “droit à la ville”. Droit à la ville parce que la ville est une valeur, parce que la ville, oeuvre de civilisation, est civilisatrice en retour. Droit à la ville plutôt qu’aux quatre murs d’un logement: c’est-à-dire droit à un certain type de vie sociale où l’échange est plus riche. Droit à la ville pour tous, puisque l’urbanisation est un phénomène généralisé qui englobe le monde rural. Droit enfin à être responsable de sa ville.” Press release of Guichard’s speech at the National Assembly on 17 May 1973. (CAC 19840342/023).

⁸⁵² “D’une façon générale on peut dire que l’urbanisme français a été pauvre, et donc appauvrissant pour l’homme. (...) Les blocs d’habitation se sont alignés; blocs sans beauté, alignements sans vie. On a fait du fonctionnel, en oubliant presque toujours la beauté du décor quotidien est aussi une fonction que l’architecture doit assurer.” Ibid.

What is in fact most striking about the auto-critique of state-led urbanism after 1968 is the way its adherence to leftist sociological theories - Lefebvre being only the proverbial tip of the iceberg - dovetailed with liberal, right-wing approaches to the user-as-consumer.⁸⁵³ Undoubtedly fueled by the political liberalism of Pompidou and Chalandon, this ambivalence nevertheless transcended the politics of the moment and would guide urban policy-making during the 1970s. Its key stone was individual home-ownership: after two decades of direct investment in construction in a France lacking the necessary private capital, the government could now mobilize the savings of an increasingly prosperous French middle class.

In 1970, the Ministry's urban sociology think tank pointed out the increasing social distinction between renters and homeowners as one of the main mechanisms creating social segregation.⁸⁵⁴ What exemplified this was the growing social stigma of public rental housing, whose architectural characteristics were believed to only exacerbate the trend. The rapidly decaying facades and aesthetic homogeneity that ignored the expression of individuality of the first *grands ensembles* became the symbolic carriers of social degradation. Not surprisingly, the report noted that "the socio-demographic studies on the population of new housing show that because of mobility, the oldest buildings gather little by little the fraction of the population of which the income is lowest."⁸⁵⁵ Often, as a subsequent report by the CGP noted, the differences in social housing categories were visible in the facades.⁸⁵⁶ Because of their dwelling types, mass housing estates excluded single men and women, young households and the elderly. This led to the conclusion that in general, state-aided housing was an important factor of social segregation.⁸⁵⁷

Apart from better maintenance and reform in attribution policies, the report stipulated specifically *architectural* solutions. First of all, it proposed "new architectural forms and collective spaces capable of expressing the individuality and the diversity of the social groups in the same housing group."⁸⁵⁸ The underlying idea was that architectural differentiation would stimulate sociological diversity.⁸⁵⁹ Secondly, it encouraged architects and planners to "take into

⁸⁵³ Lefebvre scholars like Laurent Devisme and Jean-Pierre Garnier have shown how his theories became appropriated in state planning and urban policy during the 1970s. See: Laurent Devisme, *Actualité de la pensée d'Henri Lefebvre; La question de la centralité* (Tours: Maison des sciences de la ville / CNRS-UMS / Université de Tours, 1998); Jean-Pierre Garnier and Denis Goldschmidt, *La comédie urbaine* (Paris: Maspéro, 1970); Jean-Pierre Garnier, "La vision urbaine de Henri Lefebvre," *Espaces et sociétés*, no. 76 (1994). Lukasz Stanek has subsequently argued that the danger of recuperation by state planning was addressed in his theories themselves. See: Lukasz Stanek, "Productive crisis: Henri Lefebvre and the European city after the welfare state," *Haeceity Quarterly Architecture Essay* 3, no. 3 (2008).

⁸⁵⁴ Note sur la ségrégation, GRECOH, septembre 1970.

⁸⁵⁵ "les études socio-démographiques sur la population des logements neufs montrent que par le jeu de la mobilité, les immeubles les plus anciens regroupent peu à peu la fraction de la population dont les revenus sont les moins élevés." Ibid.

⁸⁵⁶ For instance, PSR for the lower and HLN for the upper echelons. See: Rapport général, Commission de l'habitation, CGP, mars 1971 (CAC 19771142/035).

⁸⁵⁷ "l'aide au logement est un facteur de ségrégation sociale." Ibid.

⁸⁵⁸ "nouvelles formes architecturales et espaces collectifs capables d'exprimer l'individualité et la diversité de groupes sociaux au sein d'un même ensemble d'habitation." Ibid.

⁸⁵⁹ See for instance: Reinert, "La présence des étrangers dans les zones d'habitation."

account specific inhabitant needs in the conception of new housing areas.”⁸⁶⁰ These ideas would become crucial goals for subsequent architectural experiments in the realm of housing.

Many of the state’s changing policies at this time were informed by the awareness that housing became increasingly linked to personal identity and lifestyle. In a 1970 report, the CGP concluded that “the increasingly direct link between housing and environment - in the facts and the perception of those by the users - leads to an increasingly direct relationship between the type of dwelling and the lifestyle. Hence, the possibility to lead the lifestyle of one’s choice - expression and condition of personality - appears to be a demand increasingly recognized, and claimed as the social groups reach a certain economic and cultural level.”⁸⁶¹ Another report, again commissioned by the CGP, analyzed the repercussions in the realm of housing of a consumer society in which commodities were directly aligned with lifestyle. It meant, so the report argued, that for developers, “what matters is to ‘sell’ a lifestyle” and that “in the long term, the dwelling conceived like a consumer good and the transformations of the urban environment will tend to merge.”⁸⁶² The report identified two novel consumer options that would shape future territorial development: the semi-rural lifestyle “close to that of the United States” catering to the desire to be in closer contact with nature; and the urban lifestyle of revitalized city centers.

Policy makers across much the political spectrum during the early 1970s agreed with the basic strategy to “restore the freedom of choice” as a way to improve the quality of the built environment.⁸⁶³ As consumer choice in terms of housing became the key concern, the state attempted to radically diversifying its housing policies. Despite all its efforts to promote the single-family home, and despite the rejection of the *grands ensembles*, the government did not give up on collective housing. On the contrary, it intensified the search of new types of housing, alternatives to the *grands ensembles* but also to the single-family home on its own lot. And to entice users to live in such alternative forms of housing, a better kind of architecture was needed.

⁸⁶⁰ Note sur la ségrégation, GRECOH, septembre 1970.

⁸⁶¹ “la liaison de plus en plus étroite entre logement et environnement - dans les faits et dans la perception qu’en ont les usagers - entraîne une relation de plus en plus directe entre le type d’habitat et le mode de vie. Or, la possibilité de mener le mode de vie de son choix - expression et condition de la personnalité - apparaît comme une exigence de plus en plus reconnue, et revendiquée lorsque les groupes sociaux atteignent un niveau économique et culturel suffisant.” Rapport final, groupe du long terme, Commission de l’Habitation, CGP, 1970.

⁸⁶² “il s’agit de “vendre” un mode de vie [...] dans le long terme, le logement conçu comme un bien de consommation et les transformations du cadre urbain tendront à se confondre.” Consommation et mode de vie, Etude par Agnès Pitrou, Compte rendu du Groupe IV Long terme, CGP (CAC 19771142/036).

⁸⁶³ Rapport général, Commission de l’habitation, CGP, mars 1971.

3. Institutionalizing Experimentation

Many of the efforts to promote architectural quality came together in the *Plan Construction*. Launched in May 1971 under direction of Paul Delouvrier,⁸⁶⁴ this new state agency aimed to encourage innovation in housing construction by supporting research, experimental projects, and the development of housing prototypes.⁸⁶⁵ The *Plan Construction* was not the first attempt to encourage innovation in architecture or housing. Such endeavors went at least as far back as to the famous experimental competitions during Reconstruction that had given a crucial boost to the development of mass housing.⁸⁶⁶ Just like the *Plan Construction*, these had been concerned with technological ingenuity and the potentials of industrialized construction. While in hindsight such precedents were considered as apposite to promoting architectural quality, they had espoused a notion of architectural quality that prioritized simple and easily repeatable form. In other words, it was a concept of architectural quality defined by the potentials to increase quantity. That in the span of less than two decades the very definition of architectural quality had changed so profoundly only underscores the importance of a larger shift of mindset. The *Plan Construction*'s implicit identification of formal complexity with architectural quality was undoubtedly part of the move away from a universal user and towards a differentiation of lifestyle.

The production of an architecture going beyond the expression of homogeneous mass production was first promoted by a working group on architecture of the CGP in 1965-66. In its report this group, which was presided by Claudius-Petit and included Chombart as well as modernists like Jean Prouvé, Le Coureur, Max Querrien, and Bernard Zehruss, called the “ugliness” of the *grands ensembles* one of the main problems of contemporary architecture. To address this, the report proposed a series of state programs to encourage architectural experimentation. These would attack both the “offer” and the “demand” side of architecture: they would promote architectural research and the realization of experimental projects but also launch initiatives to “educate” the general public and influence public opinion.⁸⁶⁷

While the *Plan Construction* was developed in line with such earlier proposals, its concerns were beyond architectural aesthetics alone. Another important goal was to boost the French construction industry through “American-style” technological innovation. In 1968, the Consulting Committee for Scientific and Technical Research (*Comité consultatif de la recherche scientifique et technique*) proposed an experimental program addressing the problems of architectural production, which “not only engenders ‘social tensions,’ but where ‘the technological backwardness’ of the sector threatens to represent ‘a limiting factor of the French

⁸⁶⁴ Delouvrier was director of the *Comité directeur du Plan Construction* between 1971 and 1981. When looking back at the *Plan Construction* five years after its establishment, Paul Delouvrier situated its importance in the context of 1960s architectural production, what he saw as characterized by a “lack of imagination” restricted by the “mentality of the building permit.” See: *Cinq ans de Plan Construction: Entretien avec M. Paul Delouvrier, Président du Plan Construction*, n.d. (CAC 19840342/327).

⁸⁶⁵ For an overview of new architectural tendencies resulting from the *Plan Construction*, see: Christian Moley, *L'innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978* (Paris: Plan Construction, May 1979) (CDU).

⁸⁶⁶ See: Bullock, “Developing prototypes for France's mass housing programme, 1949-53.” See also Chapter 1.

⁸⁶⁷ Rapport présenté par le groupe de travail 'Architecture' en vue de l'élaboration du Vème Plan, 22 juin 1965 (CAC 19920405/009).

economy.”⁸⁶⁸ Public housing was the main avenue for transcending this technological backwardness of the French construction industry.⁸⁶⁹

Calls for an improvement that would both be technological and aesthetic intensified towards the end of the decade. Even SCIC, the large semi-public developer responsible for Sarcelles, indicated the wind of change. From the early 1960s it had already begun to diversify its housing production and had developed single-family homes and more upscale urban developments like Val d’Yerres, where lifestyle and marketing took a prominent place.⁸⁷⁰ In 1969 then, it established a research and innovation program and launched a series of “pilot operations” meant to improve architectural quality and develop new housing typologies and technologies. SCIC would become a close partner of the *Plan Construction*.

Despite these precursors, the *Plan Construction* was unprecedented in the boldness and combination of its ambitions. These were at once economic, industrial, architectural, and sociological. The program was meant not only to consolidate France’s position in the international construction sector, to reduce the global cost of housing, and to create more affordable housing, but also to “make a better dwelling environment possible, adapted to the present and future demands of our society.”⁸⁷¹ The way to do so was experimentation, which the *Plan* defined in scientific terms, as testing a “system of hypotheses.” The desired outcome would be a better architecture for a more satisfied user: “The recent awareness of the poor standards of dwellings produced these past decades has led to encourage the search for a better architectural quality, a better adaptation of built volume to the ways of life and to the problems of today’s and tomorrow’s users.”⁸⁷²

The first branch of the *Plan Construction* was sponsoring research. Supported by the surge in urban research from the late 1960s onwards,⁸⁷³ its working groups selected research projects in two domains: on the one hand, technological research was to be done on construction methods, materials, industrialization, and building physics (insulation, acoustics, and so on), on the other hand there was a need for social scientific research focusing first of all on the realm of the

⁸⁶⁸ “non seulement engendre des “tensions sociales”, mais où “le retard technologique” du secteur risque de représenter “un facteur limitatif de l’économie française.” Joseph Abram and Daniel Gross, *Bilan des réalisations expérimentales en matière de technologie nouvelle: Plan Construction 1971-1975* (Paris: Plan Construction, 1980), 15 (CDU).

⁸⁶⁹ This initiative will also inform the program REX (*Réalisations Expérimentales*), leading to the construction of around 3000 experimental dwelling units between 1971 and 1975. See: *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁰ The first project for grouped individual units at Val d’Yerres was La Nérac by the Swiss architect Jacques Bardet, begun after he won the 1964 competition for individual housing by the District of Paris. On Val d’Yerres, see: Christian Moley, *La mesure de l’architecture: Regard sur la politique architecturale de la SCIC et sa production* (Paris: Plan Construction et Architecture, 1998), 9 (CDU); Castells, Cherki, Godard et al., *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne*, 283-372; Bernard Marrey, “Le Val d’Yerres,” in *Les bâtisseurs de la modernité*, ed. Bernard Marrey (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2000).

⁸⁷¹ “rendre possible un habitat mieux adapté dans le présent et pour l’avenir aux exigences de notre société.” Anne Bouret, *Plan Construction: Trois ans d’activité, mai 1971 - décembre 1974* (Paris: Ministère de l’équipement et du logement, 1974) (CDU).

⁸⁷² “La prise de conscience récente de l’insuffisance de l’habitat produit ces dernières décennies, a conduit à encourager la recherche d’une meilleure qualité architecturale, d’une meilleure adaptation du volume bâti aux modes de vie et aux problèmes des usagers d’aujourd’hui et de demain.” “Plan Construction,” *TEL – Tourisme, équipement, logement*, no. 180 (December 1972): CAC 19840342/326.

⁸⁷³ See Chapter 4.

user.⁸⁷⁴ The first batch of sponsored research in 1972 was largely focused on the technological aspects. Sociologists like Nicole Haumont who were included in the decision-making called for a more serious inclusion of social scientific research themes. Paul Delouvrier assured this would be included. The second batch therefore, later that year, was specifically geared towards humanities and social scientific research.⁸⁷⁵

Information and pedagogy in the realm of housing were integral parts of this approach. Organizers saw it as crucial to “gradually put the public in the position of intervening in the process of construction, so that the users can be effectively associated to the conception and management of housing” as well as to “inform the diverse professions of the construction sector of recent development in the domain of the social sciences applied to housing.” This was believed to “eliminate blockages due to the lack of information, which obstruct architectural or technological innovation.”⁸⁷⁶ Through the research it sponsored, the *Plan Construction* thus acknowledged the user - at least in intention - as a crucial part of architectural innovation. On the one hand this implied a politics of participation, focused on tenants groups, family organizations, and civic education associations. On the other, it implied a new consumer-oriented approach. The program administrators were well aware by this time that in the eyes of many inhabitants housing was a consumer good - be it a rare one, and therefore even more important as a vehicle for social differentiation and individual lifestyle.⁸⁷⁷

The agency’s concrete research programs were established by using scientific methods originally derived from the military-industrial complex but long adapted for civilian and commercial use.⁸⁷⁸ Ratios, structural analyses, multi-criterion methods, and diagramming techniques like Honeywell’s Pattern method made up the arsenal of techniques. The *Plan Construction*, inspired by the *Plan Calcul*,⁸⁷⁹ used such methods to define the criteria for its programs.⁸⁸⁰ The hard

⁸⁷⁴ There were four initial themes: “Méthodes de programmation des actions du Plan-Construction”; “Industrialisation ouverte”; “mobilité des ménages, mobilité flexibilité et obsolescence de l’habitat”; and “Information et pédagogie de l’habitat”. Research projects were subsequently funded in these domains. For a list of contracts funded by the *Plan Construction* until 1974, see: Bouret, *Plan Construction: Trois ans d’activité, mai 1971 - décembre 1974*, 66-71. Soon after the initial themes, others were created in domains of construction technology, economics and renovation. See: “Plan Construction,” *TEL – Tourisme, équipement, logement*, no. 155 (February 1972): CAC 19840342/326.

⁸⁷⁵ See the internal notes of the *Plan Construction* in CAC 19840342/326. It was led by Cuisenier, director of the *Centre d’ethnologie française au Musée national des arts et traditions populaires*.

⁸⁷⁶ “mettre progressivement le public en position d’intervenant dans le processus de construction, afin que les usagers soient effectivement associés à la conception et à la gestion de l’habitat [...] informer les diverses professions intervenant dans la construction des connaissances plus récentes dans le domaine des sciences humaines appliquées à l’habitat. [...] éliminer les blocages dus au manque d’information, qui s’opposent à l’innovation architecturale ou technologique.” Ibid.

⁸⁷⁷ An intensive discussion about housing choice, user participation, social differentiation and the personal identification of the inhabitant with the dwelling was held by policy makers at Marle-le-Roi in 1972, see: *Le Plan Construction et la qualité de l’habitat: Colloques d’information sur les problèmes généraux de l’urbanisme et de l’aménagement*, (Marly-le-Roi: Institut national d’éducation populaire, October 1972), 26-33 (CAC 19840342/326).

⁸⁷⁸ The policy-makers of the *Plan Construction* brought their own method of programming back to the National Defense Department and to the methods used by large U.S. corporations like health care logistics firms. See: Rapport du groupe de travail ‘Méthodes de programmation des actions du Plan-Construction,’ 10 février 1972 (CAC 19840342/326).

⁸⁷⁹ Cinq ans de Plan Construction: Entretien avec M. Paul Delouvrier, Président du Plan Construction, n.d.

⁸⁸⁰ Rapport du groupe de travail ‘Méthodes de programmation des actions du Plan-Construction,’ 10 février 1972.

sciences thus still dominated in architecture and planning policy, but unlike during a previous period in which abstraction and calculation were used to directly guide architectural form, scientificity now infiltrated the knowledge- and decision-making processes behind it.

The *Plan Construction*'s second branch had perhaps the most direct impact on the built environment. In 1972, it created a yearly nomination system of *Modèles innovation* or Innovation Models. The idea was to select a number of innovative, industrialized housing prototypes that could be employed in multiple locations all over France. This was meant to improve the architectural *quality* of housing while maintaining cost rationality and efficiency.⁸⁸¹ In 1969, the Ministry had already launched a policy called *la politique des modèles* or "policy of models." Such models basically referred to projects approved by the CSTB and within the cost limits of rental HLMs. Once classified as a model, social housing organizations did not have to go through the official consultation and commission procedure and could build the project in a more efficient, streamlined way.⁸⁸² After only three years this policy had already resulted in more than 100.000 housing units, built according to officially approved models.⁸⁸³ When Robert Lion took over as head of Construction in the ministry in 1970, he continued this policy but re-centered it around the "new" concern with architectural innovation - a preoccupation clearly inspired by growing critique of the *grands ensembles*.⁸⁸⁴ When he launched the *Modèles Innovation* competition in 1972 to select exceptionally innovative projects by groups of architects, construction companies, and developers, his goal was both to increase user satisfaction and to make innovation in industrialized housing construction commercially viable.⁸⁸⁵

The third branch of the *Plan Construction* constituted the most direct intervention in the realm of housing, namely the direct funding of experimental housing projects (figure 6.4).⁸⁸⁶ Some of these were instigated by others but deemed worthy of financial support, while others were instigated by the agency itself. In conjunction with the *Programme Architecture Nouvelle*, a national program to promote new architecture, the agency rewarded especially innovative housing projects with financial support. The principal goal was to allow inexperienced but

⁸⁸¹ "La politique des modèles constitue un élément essentiel de l'action conduite par le Gouvernement dans le domaine de la construction de logements en vue, tout à la fois, d'améliorer la qualité des projets et de contenir les prix." Réunion du comité directeur du Plan Construction, 21 juin 1972 (CAC 19840342/326).

⁸⁸² Christian Arnaud, "Modèles innovation: Interview avec Robert Lion," *Urbanisme* 153-154(1976), 22.

⁸⁸³ Réunion du comité directeur du Plan Construction, 21 juin 1972.

⁸⁸⁴ In his words: "Quality: I clearly felt - and you did not have to be a high priest for that - that it was a growing demand. We began to see around 1970 (with in particular the incidents in certain *grands ensembles* in the Paris region during the summer of 1970) that a certain type of urbanism and housing was going to be widely contested." ["La qualité: je sentais bien - et il ne fallait pas être grand clerc pour cela - que c'était une revendication montante. On commençait à voir autour de 1970 (avec en particulier les incidents dans certains grands ensembles de la région parisienne pendant l'été 1970) qu'un certain type d'urbanisme et d'habitat allait être largement contesté."] Arnaud, "Modèles innovation: Interview avec Robert Lion," 22.

⁸⁸⁵ See: "Circulaire No. 72-93 relative à la politique des modèles," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 23 June 1972.

⁸⁸⁶ Bouret, *Plan Construction: Trois ans d'activité, mai 1971 - décembre 1974*, 20.

imaginative architects to build large-scale housing projects.⁸⁸⁷ To this effect, the program targeted recent graduates from architecture schools, many of whom had ideas remarkably aligned with those of the *Plan Construction* itself. The surge of experimental and innovative housing projects ultimately built with the help of the *Plan Construction* coincided with a transitional period in architectural culture, at a time when the effects of 1968 were setting in to the discipline.⁸⁸⁸ In the wake of the social movements and ideas of May 1968, what posited itself as a direct vehicle of much-needed renewal was a unique mix of sociology, social critique, and architectural research. The *Plan Construction* would turn out to be an ideal sponsor for these avenues.

CHANTIERS EXPERIMENTAUX DU PLAN CONSTRUCTION AU 30 OCTOBRE 1974

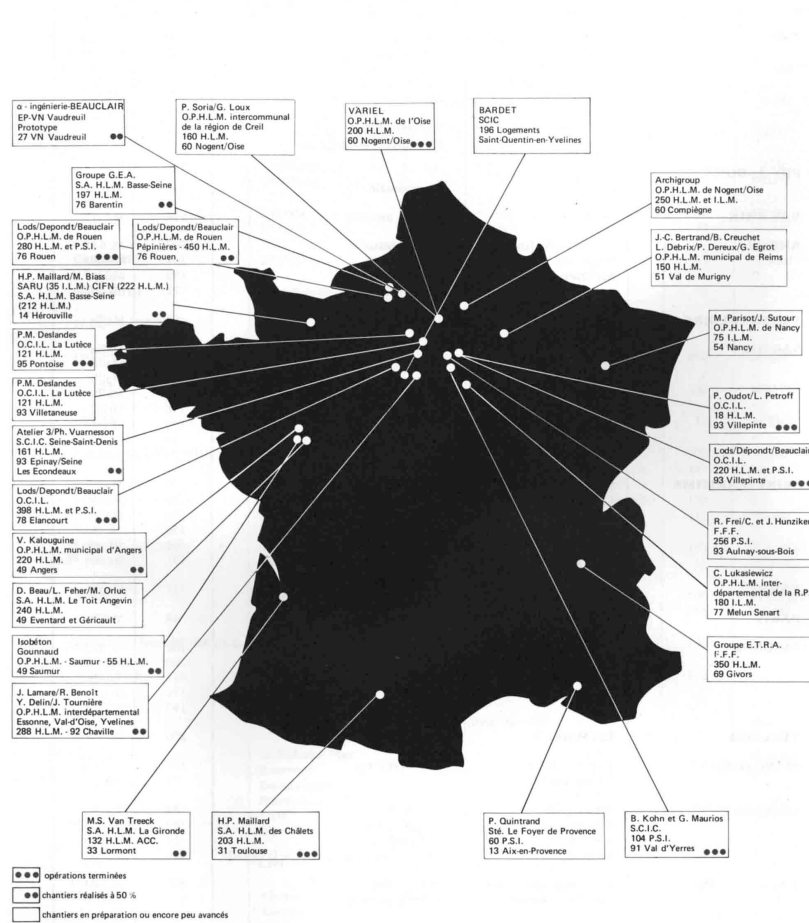


Figure 6.4: Map of experimental projects funded by the *Plan Construction*, 1974 (Anne Bouret, *Plan Construction - Trois ans d'activité, mai 1971 - décembre 1974* (Paris: MEL, 1974): 20).

⁸⁸⁷ “[...] son objectif principal est de faire accéder à la réalisation de programmes de logements des maîtres d’œuvre que en étaient écartés jusqu’ici, en raison notamment de leur jeunesse ou de l’originalité de leurs propositions.” In: “Plan Construction,” 31.

⁸⁸⁸ See Chapter 4.

4. Prefab Participation: *Habitat évolutif*

The convergence of a post-1968 architectural culture bent on sociology and research and a centralized government eager to improve the quality of housing construction would shape a brief but intense moment of large-scale experimentation of which we still find the remnants across France. Much of the architectural innovation in the realm of housing at this time was the result of an auto-critical state responsive to newly perceived user needs and aspiration. Under the banner of *habitat évolutif* - flexible, evolving, or adaptable dwelling - a significant part of the experimentation combined industrialized construction methods with attempts to increase inhabitant participation. More precisely, industrialized production was the principal means by which these new housing projects would facilitate flexibility and thus elicit such participation.⁸⁸⁹ Flexibility in housing was believed to both induce user participation and respond to their unpredictable aspirations.

In an attempt to define *habitat évolutif*, a team of state-funded researchers in 1972 provided the following interpretation: “the flexible dwelling is a dwelling capable to assure at once the different aspirations of the clients and the structural modifications of their family. To talk about flexible dwelling is to emphasize the diversity of construction techniques opposed to uniformity.” To accommodate for the diversity of the user - paradoxically perhaps - standardized construction methods were thus imperative: “Identical construction elements allow a series of possible assemblages; the standardization of fabrication elements allows for the diversification of responses.”⁸⁹⁰ The imperative of diversity was of course a direct consequence of the uniformity and repetitiveness of a preceding urbanism of mass housing - the first generations of *grands ensembles*.

The concept of flexible dwelling was hardly novel: architecture as the facilitator of an environment transformable by its users had been one of the staples of the postwar architectural avant-garde from Constant to Archigram and Cedric Price. Their paper projects expressed a fundamental belief in the emancipatory power of technology, widely shared across the optimistic architecture cultures of the 1960s. They had also lent force to the conviction, espoused from Japan to the United States, that “participation” and “flexibility” were inextricably linked.⁸⁹¹ Despite claims to novelty and reliance on the newest technologies, the thrust of this idea was inherited from interwar modernism. On the scale of the dwelling, precedents ranged from Le Corbusier’s *Maison Domino* and his *plan libre* concept tested at several French villas to Gerrit Rietveld’s and Mies van der Rohe’s movable wall partitions - respectively at the Schröder house in Utrecht and in Mies’ *Weissenhofsiedlung* contribution of 1927. With his *Plan Obus* for

⁸⁸⁹ “des logements évolutifs et des habitants qui co-conçoivent.” In: “L’Exposition ‘Habitat et innovation’,” *Habitat et vie sociale*, no. 3 (1974). For a more conceptual approach to architectural flexibility, see: “Architecture évolutive,” *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 298 (May 1974).

⁸⁹⁰ “[...] le logement évolutif est un logement capable d’assurer à la fois les différentes aspirations des clients et les modifications structurelles de leur famille. Parler de logement évolutif, c’est donc mettre l’accent sur la diversité des solutions de construction opposée à l’uniformité. [...] Des éléments de construction identiques permettent une série de possibilités d’agencement; la standardisation des éléments de fabrication permet la diversification des réponses.” SERES (Société d’études et de recherches en sciences sociales), *Le logement évolutif: Approche historique* (Paris: DGRST, 1972) (CDU).

⁸⁹¹ See for instance: Giancarlo De Carlo, “Une architecture de participation,” *Le Carré bleu*, no. 3 (1972): 8-10.

Algiers,⁸⁹² Le Corbusier had even taken these concepts further into the scale of the housing block and the city itself.

During the postwar period however, French architectural culture left these ideas further unexplored. International examples like the flexible housing projects in Sweden would only really become popularly known in France during the 1970s.⁸⁹³ Before that, only a few French architects were interested in the idea of flexible housing. Perret's housing at Le Havre was a first modest attempt. In 1953, Claude Parent and Ionel Schein proposed a flexible interior organization but their proposals, focused on the single-family home, did not find broad application.⁸⁹⁴ Another project was that of *L'habitation évolutive* presented in 1960 by SAS (the Syndicat des Architectes de la Seine) at the household fairs of the *Salon des Arts Ménagers* in Paris.⁸⁹⁵ And then there was the theoretical proposal of Candilis-Josic-Woods, whose distinction of what they called "determined elements" from "indeterminate elements" promised to allow a free organization of interior space. Their research on flexible dwelling focused mainly on the individual cell and its placement to the high-rise block, but they had not been able to fully experiment with these ideas in their French mass housing projects (figure 6.5).⁸⁹⁶ At Bagnols-sur-Cèze and Toulouse-Le Mirail, the only concrete result of their concept were mobile partitions.⁸⁹⁷ The French precursors were therefore either merely metaphorical or had simply not been disseminated.

⁸⁹² See Tafuri's analysis, "The Crisis of Utopia: Le Corbusier at Algiers," in: Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, 125-49.

⁸⁹³ For an analysis of Swedish examples, see: Manuel Perriáñez, *L'habitat évolutif: Du mythe aux réalités* (Paris: Plan Construction et Architecture, 1993) (CDU).

⁸⁹⁴ Claude Parent and Ionel Schein, "Essai pour un habitat individuel évolutif," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 49 (1953): 4-5.

⁸⁹⁵ "L'habitation évolutive," *Techniques et Architecture* 20, no. 3 (May 1960).

⁸⁹⁶ Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic, and Shadrach Woods, "Proposition pour un habitat évolutif," *Techniques et Architecture* 19, no. 2 (1959): 82-85.

⁸⁹⁷ See: Rémi Papillault, "Le Team X, les bâtiments et les théories qui les font naître: Toulouse-Le Mirail et la cellule de l'habitat," in *Le Team X et le logement collectif à grande échelle en Europe: Un retour critique des pratiques vers la théorie. Actes du séminaire européen, Toulouse 27-28 mai 2004*, ed. Bruno Fayolle Lussac and Rémi Papillault (Pessac: Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine, 2008), 199; Team 10, Risselada, and Heuvel, *Team 10: 1953-81, In Search of a Utopia of the Present*, 86.

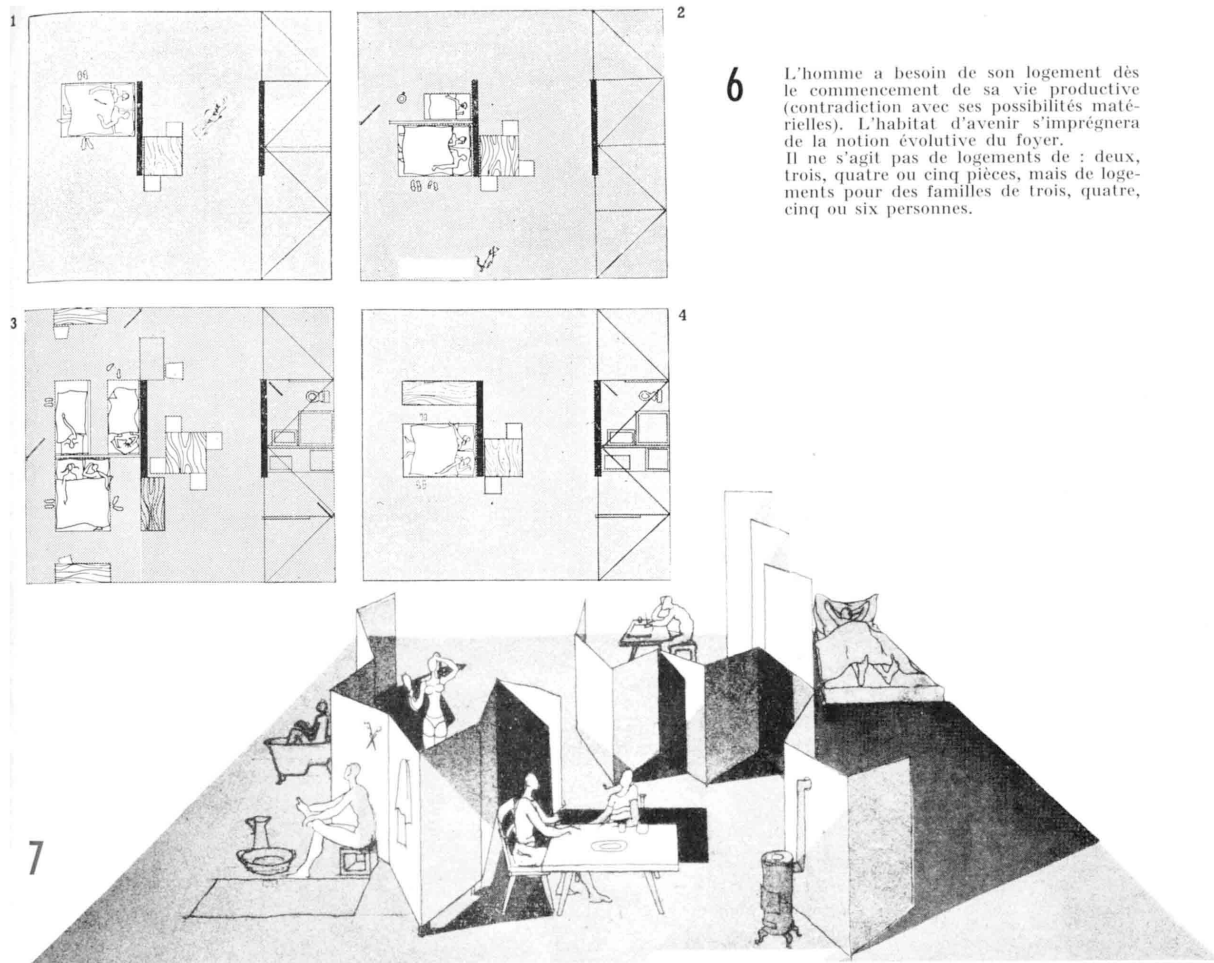


Figure 6.5: Candilis-Josic-Woods' proposal for flexible dwelling, 1959 (Source: Candilis, Josic, Woods, "Proposition pour un habitat évolutif" *Techniques et Architecture* 19, no. 2 (1959): 83).

France had to wait until the early 1970s before the idea of flexible dwelling really took off. But when it did, enthusiasm for it was almost visceral. Much more than their predecessors, the new enthusiasts focused on industrialized construction methods as the only way to realize their ideas on a grand scale. *Evolutivité* for them was linked directly to new technologies and methods of industrialized construction. What is most interesting is that industrialization, one of the primary rationales for the *grands ensembles*, was now harnessed for the exact opposite purpose: not the rigid, functionalist, and dehumanizing environments of an earlier mass housing which the French public was so abhorred, but instead the development of warm, complex, diversified, human-scaled space for the "new" user.

Industrialization - based on the normalization and standardization of construction elements - was not seen as the antidote to a qualitative dwelling environment, at least given the promise that it would allow for diversity and encourage user participation. Observers, planners and activists since at least the mid-1960s had cast participation as the key corrective to mass housing: "In the domain of residential life, participation appears fundamentally like the complement and the

corrective to the process characteristic of the last twenty years: institutionalization, professionalization, concentration, bureaucratization or technocratization, on the one hand, massification on the other.”⁸⁹⁸ Whether participation in such a system was really possible or not was not yet a question: a fundamentally re-conceptualized industrialized production was simply believed to hold the architectural potential to emancipate the user.

As industrialization began to adopt new technologies, so did it take on a new set of meanings and most importantly, a new formal language. The heavy prefabrication methods developed in the 1950s, in the style of the Camus system, were now dismissed for being too formally rigid, inflexible and incompatible with other construction methods. They were deemed too constraining architecturally: the use of load-bearing partitioning walls often less than 3m width imposed an extreme rigidity on the interior organization of individual units and made layout alterations after construction practically impossible. This problem of older heavy prefab systems would soon be one of the main challenges in rehabilitating the first generations of *grands ensembles*. The development of dimensional coordination at the beginning of the 1970s gave rise to the idea of “open industrialization” - the flexible assembly of compatible components allowing the creation of multiple assemblages. In contrast to heavy and closed prefabrication, such systems were light, flexible, more geographically mobile, and more architecturally expressive. Around the mid-1960s already, technological research into heavy prefabrication was being gradually abandoned in favor of such new systems and components.⁸⁹⁹

Technological development however was not a determinant in and of itself; it was part of more fundamental motors of cultural and social change in France at this time. A radically changing and diversifying housing market away from the identical units of many *grands ensembles* and the shift towards smaller development projects that could respond more flexibly to economic conjunctures called for a different material organization. In the words of Michel Lescure, a French construction and real estate historian, “it is in the evolution of the market that the causes of heavy industrialization need to be looked for. Despite diverse remedies, this seems irreparably hit by the reduction in size of operations (miniaturization of HLM programs, prohibition of the “bars and tower” estates), the slowdown of public investments and the crisis of collective housing.”⁹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, in contrast to many other countries and in particular the United States, the belief in the merits of closed industrialization - despite its track record - remained strong even amongst the younger members of the architecture scene in France. In their DGRST-sponsored study of 1971, Bernard Hamburger, Gérard Bauer, and Philippe Boudon contended that a rethinking of closed industrialization could guarantee architectural diversity, more than ever before: “The

⁸⁹⁸ “Dans le domaine de la vie résidentielle, la participation apparaît bien fondamentalement comme le complément et le correctif du processus caractéristique des vingt dernières années déjà décrit plus haut: institutionnalisation, professionnalisation, concentration, bureaucratisation ou technocratisation, d’une part, massification d’autre part.” Durand, “Réflexion sur les quartiers nouveaux et leur équipement,” 88.

⁸⁹⁹ See also: Pierre Chemillier, *Les techniques du bâtiment et leur avenir* (Paris: Moniteur, 1977).

⁹⁰⁰ “C’est encore dans l’évolution du marché qu’il convient de rechercher les causes de la crise de l’industrialisation lourde. Malgré divers palliatifs, celle-ci semble irrémédiablement frappée par la réduction de la taille des opérations (miniaturisation des programmes H.L.M., proscription des ensembles “barres et tours”), le ralentissement des investissements publics et la crise du logement collectif.” Lescure, *Histoire d’une filière: Immobilier et bâtiment en France, 1820-1980*, 59.

imperatives of the architecture and those of the real estate market lead to take the diversity of buildings as the goal of their industrialization. This diversity is perfectly compatible with a significant reduction of work on the construction site and with the production of elements in large quantities, as long as they are composed with this in mind.”⁹⁰¹ Just before, Philippe Boudon had undertaken his “socio-architectural” study on Le Corbusier’s project in Pessac, in which he argued that its architectural modernism was a success not despite, but *because of* the many adaptations, additions, and reorganizations of its inhabitants over time. According to Boudon, the openness towards individual appropriation was “written in the plan” of the dwelling units. Following the line of thinking of this seminal study, the authors embraced architectural complexity without discarding modernism: “We see that the history of ideas in architecture since the Athens Charter has been a progressive rediscovery of the complexity in architecture and thus of the variety it engenders.”⁹⁰² Realizing that commentators abroad tended to dismiss the architecture associated with closed industrialization - from Robert Venturi to Kevin Lynch and Amos Rapoport - the authors nevertheless remained contended, with modernist brio, that “industrialization was not an option,” but something inevitable, and that this required “a new architectural theory.” The authors rejected open industrialization because of the complex three-dimensional coordination they claimed it required. Closed industrialization, so they argued, would allow for more architectural experimentation – despite the disadvantage, which they briefly mentioned, that it was less adapted to the housing market.

Paul Chemetov, who worked with the *Atelier d’Urbanisme et d’Architecture* around this time, argued for complete industrialization in similar terms.⁹⁰³ To him the main obstacle was an ill-informed public and a lack of training amongst architects. In his 1971 study he formulated a simple rationale of industrialized architectural production: demographic growth and increasingly complex urban needs made the flexible and multiple usage of space a necessity. The construction of megastructures through a “free combinatory of industrial elements” would allow such novel use of space.⁹⁰⁴

The projects built throughout the 1970s and resulting from such ideas were not only meant to be flexible from the “consumption side” but often also for the developer and the builder.⁹⁰⁵ The technical and economic rationality of industrialization appeared to go remarkably well with social critiques and heightened concerns with the user. Was the concept of flexible dwelling a means for the developer to increase efficiency in production and to target specific consumer groups, or was it in fact meant to emancipate inhabitants to have more of a say in how they

⁹⁰¹ “Les impératifs de l’architecture et ceux du marché immobilier conduisent à prendre la diversité des bâtiments comme objectif de leur industrialisation. Or cette diversité est parfaitement compatible avec une réduction significative du travail sur le chantier et avec la production d’éléments en grande série, pourvu qu’ils soient composés à cet effet.” Bernard Hamburger, Gérard Bauer, and Philippe Boudon, *Série industrielle et diversité architecturale* (Paris: DGRST, 1971), 3 (CAC 19840342/325).

⁹⁰² “On voit que l’histoire des idées en architecture depuis la Charte d’Athènes a été une redécouverte progressive de la complexité en architecture et donc de la variété qui l’engendre.” Ibid.

⁹⁰³ Interview of the author with Paul Chemetov, 20 February 2008. On the *Atelier d’Urbanisme et d’Architecture* see Chapter 4.

⁹⁰⁴ “libre combinatoire des éléments industriels” Paul Chemetov, *Création architecturale et industrialisation: Pour une architecture de composants industriels* (Paris: Fondation pour le développement culturel, 1971) (CAC 19840342/325).

⁹⁰⁵ Moley, *L’innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 53.

lived? This ambivalence was constitutive of the experimental projects that landed in suburbs all over France. Architects were the first to project the architectural principles of modularity and flexible montage that were part of the new industrialization methods as the carriers of a definitive shift of agency from producer to user. The question whether or not their built projects actually achieved this transfer became the number one question for sociologists who, in their post-occupancy studies, monitored the role of inhabitants in the creation and transformation of their apartments. That such studies were often commissioned by public authorities and executed by private market research firms emphasized the state's concern with user satisfaction in an increasingly market-driven housing sector.⁹⁰⁶

A first key built project was the flexible apartment building by the Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry and their associate Bernard Schoeller for the ZUP of Surville in Montereau, a small town in the vicinity of Paris. Completed in 1969 and closely studied by sociologists and by the policy makers of the *Plan Construction*, the project functioned as a laboratory prototype for the development of subsequent projects. The architects' goal was to create an architecture that would allow users to individualize their own apartments: to develop a personal lifestyle, against the tendency towards a standardized architecture "in which the typical user would find everything, including his standard pajamas chosen by the computer." The architects, who could hardly be called radical and followed a relatively conservative agenda compared to many of their peers, understood their design nevertheless as a statement of critique against the "insidious alienation by way of materialism" so characteristic of mass consumer society.⁹⁰⁷

The office d'HLM de Montereau agreed to build the experimental project in its existing ZUP development. The nine-storey building contained 36 rental social housing units whose interior organization could be shaped according to the demands of the future occupants. Each floor was divided into four units of 83 m², placed around a central core which contained vertical circulation and necessary infrastructure. In every unit, the only fixed elements determinant for the future interior organization were the entrance door and a utilities duct placed in the middle of the space and adjacent to which kitchen, bathroom, and toilet needed to be placed (figure 6.6). Apart from these constraints, future inhabitants had absolute freedom for the positioning of walls and rooms. For the facades, inhabitants could choose out of five element types: a wall panel, a fixed glazed panel, a glass door panel, a fixed window panel, and an opening window panel.⁹⁰⁸ Despite this choice, the interior flexibility did not find a clear expression in the facade. With loggias of 1.6 m surrounding the entire block and the balustrades in white concrete, from the outside the building looked like a standard apartment block for its kind (figure 6.7).⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁶ See for instance the study directed by Alain de Vulpian for the *Service régional de l'équipement de la région parisienne* (Archives COFREMCA). An extract of this research was published as: "Histoire des cellules: Étude d'anthropologie sociale sur le vécu de certains logements," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 312 (1976): 40-54.

⁹⁰⁷ "[...] dans lequel l'utilisateur-type trouverait tout, y compris son pyjama standard choisi par ordinateur." Interview with Luc and Xavier Arsène-Henry in: "Architecture évolutive: Les Architectes prennent position," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 (April 1973): 90-93, 93.

⁹⁰⁸ See: Luc Arsène-Henry, "L'expérience de Montereau," *Les Cahiers du CSTB*, no. 167 (March 1976): 59-66; A. Martel, "An experiment with adaptable housing at Montereau," *Industrialization forum* 5, no. 5 (1974): 59-64.

⁹⁰⁹ The ground floor contained all collective facilities: entrance hall, room for storage, and the apartment of the concierge. At the top floor there was a collective residential space of 40m². See: Perriñez, *L'habitat évolutif: Du mythe aux réalités*.

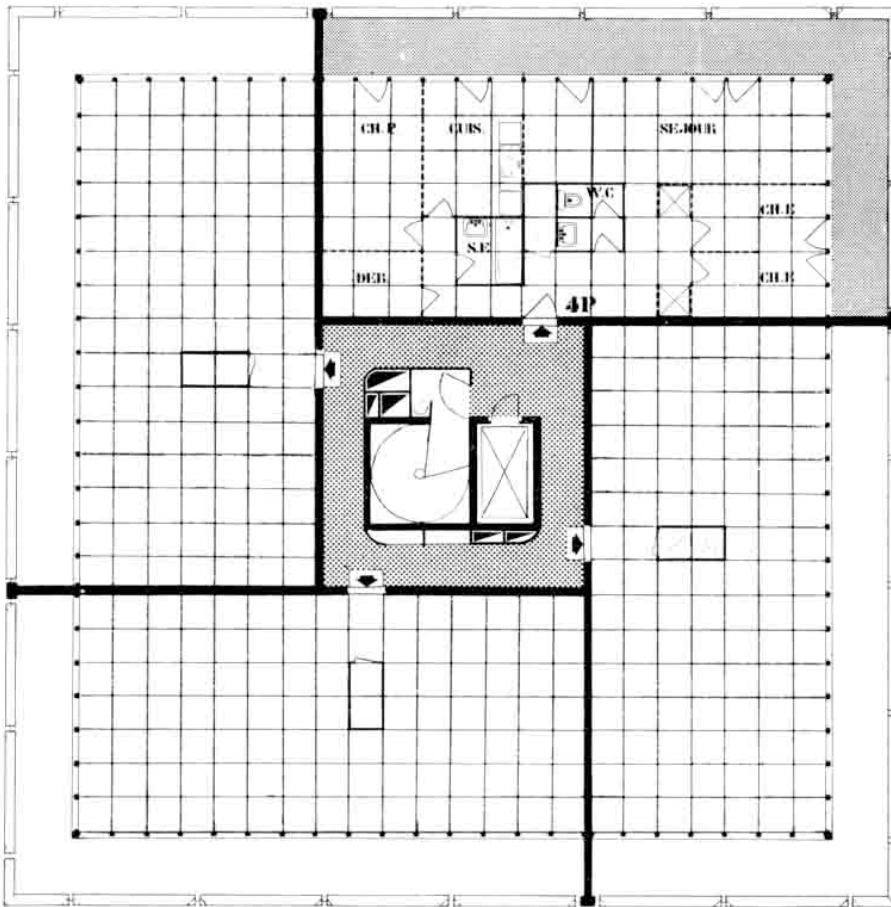


Figure 6.6: Typical floor plan of apartment building at Montreau by Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry (Source: *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 “Architecture évolutive: Habitation” (1973): 95). Each floor consisted of four units placed around a central core containing vertical circulation. Apart from the utilities duct in the center, the units themselves were freed from constraints.



Figure 6.7: Photo around 1970 of the apartment building at Montereau by Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry (Source: *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 “Architecture évolutive: Habitation” (1973): 94). The precast concrete balustrade elements literally overshadowed the random play of facade elements behind them.

Despite its experimental nature, the building was constructed within the cost limits of social housing.⁹¹⁰ The process of consultation and design with the inhabitants - mostly families, with a mix of middle-class backgrounds - began with the distribution of a graphic board displaying possible options of apartment layouts proposed by the architects.⁹¹¹ On average, three meetings with future inhabitants were organized: a first one without the architects to explain the flexibility and the system of choices; a second one in which the architect would sit together with the inhabitants to sketch possible layouts based on their expressed needs and desires; and a third one to finish the final apartment plan (figure 6.8). The participatory design process did not diminish or fundamentally affect the legitimacy of architectural expertise. On the contrary, the architects were now acting very much like they had done in past decades: offering a service to middle-class private clients as liberal professionals. That these clients would now be tenants of a housing project owned and managed by a single corporation only implied a “more advanced” professionalization of the architect as a councillor providing what was now coined “architectural assistance.”

⁹¹⁰ Be it its uppermost level, ILN (*immeuble à loyer normalisé*).

⁹¹¹ Manuel Periañez and M. Routon, *Les logements à plans adaptables de Montereau-Surville (2 tomes)* (Paris: Association Anthropologie Appliquée, 1972), I, 2 (CDU).

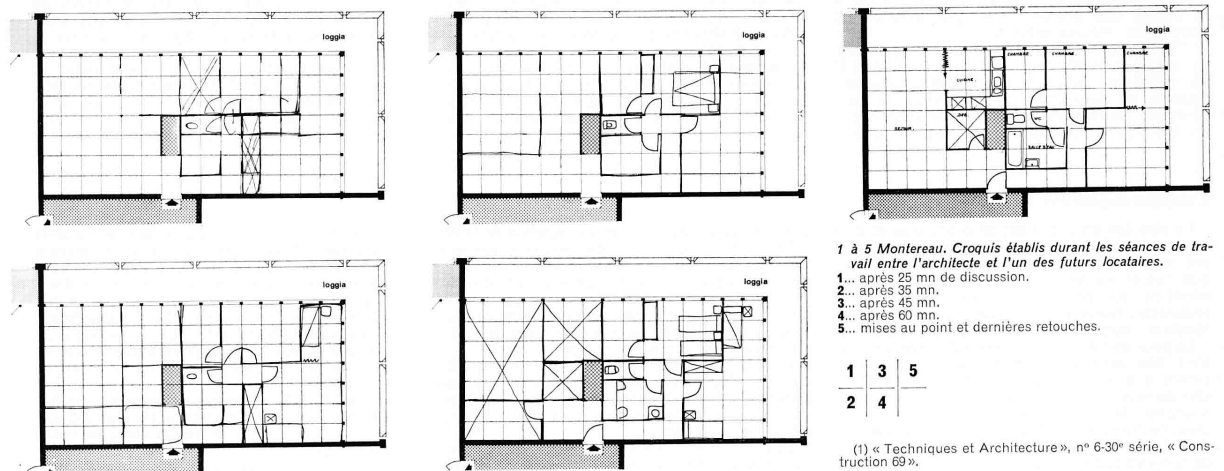


Figure 6.8: Apartment layouts drawn during workshop sessions with the architect and one of the future tenants of the apartment building at Montereau: 1. after 25 minutes, 2. after 35 minutes, 3. after 45 minutes, 4. after one hour, 5. final adjustments (Source: *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 “Architecture évolutive: Habitation” (1973): 94).

In the end, none of the nine layouts proposed by the architects was exactly adopted, and none of the eventual apartment plans were really alike.⁹¹² Some families chose a kitchen independently of the living room or a separate eating corner while others chose to integrate them. Some chose separate children’s rooms, others paired them up to create a communal playing area. Some chose to open up the facade to create transparency, others opted for a more traditional setup with a limited number of windows. The entire process was carefully studied by the *Association d’Anthropologie Appliquée*, whose work was funded by the *Plan Construction*. The sociologists highlighted the unique opportunity flexible dwelling provided: “All sociological housing studies so far have not been able to approach the problem of the adaptation of the plan of the unit to the family’s needs and its impact on family life, but through the wishes and aspirations more or less well-expressed by the interviewees. This is the first time that these questions can be studied in the context of a dwelling materially defined by the realization of these wishes and aspirations, with a population that has had the choice, in a large measure, of the structure of their dwelling.”⁹¹³ The study consisted of an analysis of the plans and layout choices, a psychological survey of the working sessions of the architect with the future inhabitants, and most importantly, an ethnographic survey on the actual use of the dwelling units.⁹¹⁴ The sociologists’ research

⁹¹² According to the director of the HLM office of Montereau. See: Manuel Periañez and Isabelle Marghieri, *Le développement de l’habitat évolutif* (Paris: CSTB / Plan Construction et Architecture, 1985), 75.

⁹¹³ “Toutes les études de sociologie du logement faites à ce jour n’ont pu approcher le problème de l’adaptation du plan du logement aux besoins familiaux et de son incidence sur la vie familiale, qu’à travers des souhaits, des aspirations plus ou moins bien exprimées par les sujets interrogés. C’est la première fois que ces questions pourront être étudiées dans le contexte d’un logement défini matériellement par la réalisation de ces souhaits et aspirations, auprès d’une population ayant eu le choix, dans une grande mesure, de la structure de son logement.” Periañez and Routon, *Les logements à plans adaptables de Montereau-Surville (2 tomes)*. See also: Nouveau projet de recherche sur le quartier de Bordeaux-le-Lac, Association Anthropologie Appliquée, 19 juillet 1971 (CAC 19780319/013).

⁹¹⁴ Periañez and Routon, *Les logements à plans adaptables de Montereau-Surville (2 tomes)*.

interests - revolving around parental authority, the symbolic role of the living room, the relation between apartment layout and family structure, and so on - were purely theoretical and did not exactly correspond to those of their sponsors. The study's primary conclusion was nevertheless simple and positive, pointing out that "the families have really created plans adapted not only to their needs but also to their personality, like is proven by the variable degree of originality of the plans following the social characteristics of the sample."⁹¹⁵ According to the architects themselves, most plans were adapted a couple years later, some even two to four times.⁹¹⁶ While the project was definitely participatory, it did not turn out to be *évolutif* in the long term: as a result of expensive technical improvements necessary when tenants left, the landlord decided to gradually fix the individual layouts to become definitive.⁹¹⁷

The success of the project - the fact that inhabitants were able to concretely adapt their apartments to their personal wishes, proven by the originality of the individual plans - led the architects to launch a second, more ambitious project. The selected site was at Bordeaux-le-Lac. The urban plan for the new development, called "La Clairière du Lauzun," was pretty conventional: ten housing blocks, six slabs, and four towers were distributed over the terrain like they would for many other *grands ensembles*. Like at Montereau, the plans of the individual apartments were drawn in consultation with the inhabitants. They were to follow a flexible system of rules defined by a modular grid of 90 by 90 cm and a technology of movable partition walls that could be dry-mounted, both orthogonally and diagonally. The only constraints were the front door and the fixed utilities duct for kitchen, bathroom and toilet, again just like at Montereau. The duct was load-bearing in this case and held up the floors together with the concrete frame facades, so that the apartment plan could remain free from columns. The facade was again a direct result of the individual choices of inhabitants, who could choose out of a collection of standardized facade elements with different colors (figure 6.9).

⁹¹⁵ "[...] les familles ont réellement créé des plans adaptés, non seulement à leurs besoins mais aussi à leur personnalité, comme en témoigne le degré variable d'originalités des plans selon les attitudes sociales de l'échantillon." Ibid., 21.

⁹¹⁶ Arsène-Henry, "L'expérience de Montereau," 61.

⁹¹⁷ Perriáñez, *L'habitat évolutif: Du mythe aux réalités*.

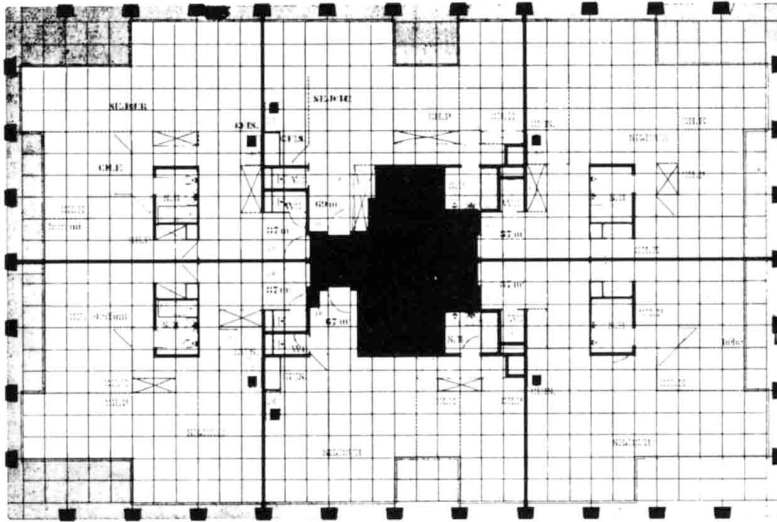


Figure 6.9: Bordeaux-le-Lac, by Xavier and Luc Arsène-Henry: a. plan (Source: *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 311 (1976): 103), b. photo from the mid-1970s (Source: CAA Fonds DAU 133 IFA 11/5). Compared to the Montereau project, the aleatory aesthetics of the facade were meant to provide a greater sense of individuality.

The most important difference however, relatively neglected by the policy makers and sociologists involved, was that this new project no longer consisted of rental housing, but of state-aided condominiums. The local social housing developer in charge of the project was undoubtedly aware that homebuyers would be more naturally inclined to be interested in the participatory design of their apartments than renters. More generally, the class implications for such experiments in participation were hardly acknowledged. Only in a 1974 survey sponsored by the *Plan Construction*, researchers timidly acknowledged that the social group “most resistant to the architectural innovation” pushed for by the program were “the poor and the working classes.”⁹¹⁸ Those most receptive were “intellectual elites,” “artists and teachers,” and parts of the middle and upper-middle classes. Naturally, they were the main beneficiaries for these kinds of projects.

Another experiment in industrialized, flexible dwelling - again sponsored by the state - was the model of the Group for the Study of Industrialized Architecture (*Groupement pour l'Etude d'une Architecture Industrialisée* or GEAI). In 1969, the architects Marcel Lods, P. Depondt and M. Beauclair created, in collaboration with industrialists like Aluminium Français and Saint-Gobain,⁹¹⁹ a construction system of light-weight prefabricated steel elements. Purportedly only two workers were needed to build an entire apartment block out of this “giant mecanoo.”⁹²⁰ Not concrete but steel was the appropriate material for industrialized housing production, so they argued: “It is an ‘adaptable’ architecture that we need to create today. And for that, light construction, mobile elements, modifiable forms are an absolute necessity.”⁹²¹ The system allowed for large spans, creating column-less spaces could be freely partitioned with modifiable partitions.

The ZUP development of Rouen-la Grand Mare provided the testing ground for the model: five hundred HLM rental social housing units, whose maximum surface and construction cost were strictly determined, were built there using the system (figure 6.10).⁹²² In contrast to Montereau and Bordeaux-le-Lac, the housing developer ironically did not have a policy of informing future inhabitants: some of them only found out about the flexibility of their apartments only after having occupied them.⁹²³ The developer had nevertheless decided to select applicants it judged amenable to the flexible nature of the development: the housing attribution policy favored

⁹¹⁸ CAPEM (Centre d'analyse et de prévisions immobilières), *Enquetes auprès des utilisateurs: Rapport de synthèse* (Paris: Plan Construction, 1974), 42.

⁹¹⁹ See: "GEAI - L.D.B.," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 (April 1973): 76-77.

⁹²⁰ See: Marcel Lods, "Une expérience de 500 logements HLM à Rouen dans la ZUP de la Grand-Mare en système industrialisé GEAI," *Techniques et Architecture* 29, no. 5 (September 1968): 61-71; "La Grande Mare, à Rouen," *Bâtir*, no. 174 (April 1969): 42-51.

⁹²¹ “C’est une architecture ‘adaptable’ que nous avons l’impérieux devoir de créer aujourd’hui. Et pour elle, la construction légère, les éléments mobiles, les formes modifiables sont une nécessité absolue.” Lods, "Une expérience de 500 logements HLM à Rouen dans la ZUP de la Grand-Mare en système industrialisé GEAI," 62.

⁹²² A first prototype was built in Aubervilliers. Then, in 1967 the group was given a project at the ZUP La Grand Mare. Between 1971 and 1974, four more operations followed - in Villepinte, Elancourt, and two in Rouen - all with the help of the Plan Construction. The model was selected as *Modèle Innovation* in 1972-73. See: Abram and Gross, *Bilan des réalisations expérimentales en matière de technologie nouvelle: Plan Construction 1971-1975*, 61.

⁹²³ Monique Fichelet and Raymond Fichelet, *Le logement évolutif* (Paris: SERES, 1973), 35 (CDU).

families with more cultural capital and a perspective of upward social mobility. Consequently, the project became one of the *buildings de standing* of the neighborhood.⁹²⁴ As an experiment in adaptability the project was a success, despite the initial attitude of the developer: after moving in, many families decided to modify their layouts.



Figure 6.10: The GEAI project at Rouen-la Grand Mare by the architects Marcel Lods, P. Depondt and M. Beauclair. Top left: under construction; top right: facade detail; bottom: aerial view upon completion in the mid-1970s (Source: CAA Fonds Lods 323 AA 516/5).

⁹²⁴ See: *Ibid.*, 39.

Many other projects followed. Similar in nature, most of them were funded and studied by the *Plan Construction*.⁹²⁵ One of the most successful ones, at least in quantitative terms, was Henri-Pierre Maillard's modular system for housing. Developed in the context of his Research Center for Modular Architectures (*Centre de recherches d'architectures modulaires* or CRAM) and promoted as a "collective creation,"⁹²⁶ the model resulted between 1972 and 1978 in no less than 10,000 dwellings (figure 6.11).⁹²⁷ Because of the convergence of governmental financial support, international prestige, and political will, the most promising territory for such flexible dwelling projects during the 1970s were the *villes nouvelles*. The *Plan Construction* was in fact closely linked to the new town project - and not only because Paul Delouvrier, the number one "man of action" behind the *villes nouvelles*, was in charge of the *Plan Construction*.

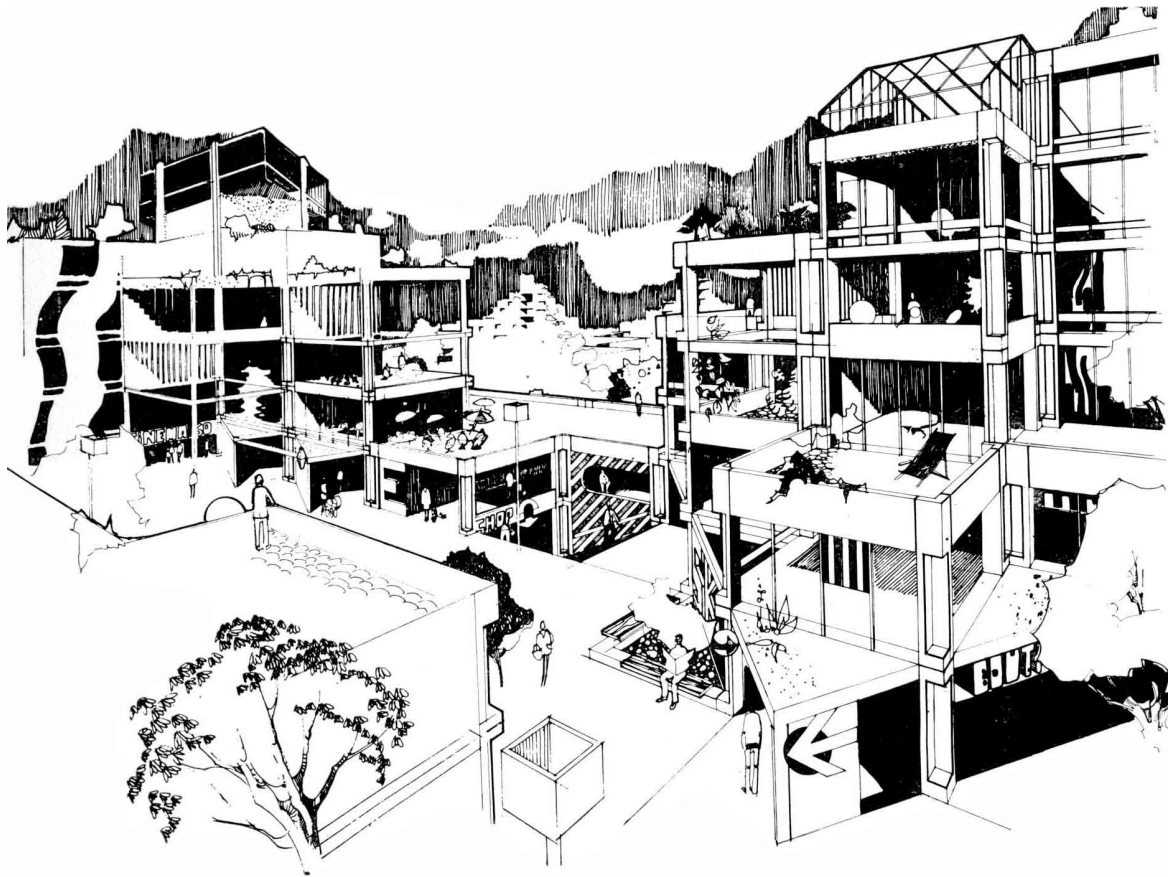


Figure 6.11: Rendering for an experimental in Toulouse using the Maillard-SAE construction system (Source: "C.R.A.M. Opération expérimentale 'plan construction' Toulouse-la terrasse" *Techniques et Architecture* 34, no. 6 (1972): 70).

⁹²⁵ Other examples: ZAC La Terrasse in Chatenay-Malabry, by architect Pierre Sirvin, built in 1972-73, for 208 dwelling units, developed by the *Office d'HLM de la région parisienne*; housing project in Stains by Solvet-Mougenot; project in Villiers-St-Paul by Jean Prouvé.

⁹²⁶ Henri-Pierre Maillard, Paul Ducamp, and Michel Bancon, "Les outils de la création collective," *Techniques et Architecture* 34, no. 6 (April 1972): 65-71.

⁹²⁷ See: Henri-Pierre Maillard, "Du prototype à la série," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 341 (1982).

Most interesting was the housing competition for le Vaudreuil, launched in March 1971 under the title “Consultation for an Experimental Program for 4000 Dwellings” (*Consultation pour un programme expérimental de 4000 logements*).⁹²⁸ The guidelines for the competition entrants had been shaped by the earlier conceptual designs of the Atelier de Montrouge, discussed in Chapter 4. While they were no longer directly involved in the actual design and construction of the new town, their theoretical reflection and urban conception would thus have important repercussions for the town’s subsequent development.⁹²⁹ Apart from industrialized construction and the “integration of functions,” an important criterium for the competition was the “*évolutivité* of the city.” This was understood not only as long term planning flexibility but also in terms of the concrete flexibility of the housing units.⁹³⁰ The first point in the design guidelines as they were published in *Techniques et Architecture* expressed this priority: “A city can not be created by the simple juxtaposition of disparate buildings. On the contrary, between all the elements that compose it, there need to be relations so that elements can form a system that is coherent and susceptible to evolve.”⁹³¹ This “system in evolution” would be translated spatially into the provision of “spatial margins” that allowed for the mobility and growth of local programs, and into a “network of volumes” that created human-scale urbanity and the urban density “characteristic of a Latin city.”

The competition was won by the team of Lods, Depondt and Beauclair.⁹³² The project, ultimately for only 1365 instead of the initially projected 4000 units, would be the first project for the new urban center. Construction began in 1973 using the industrialized system developed by the architects together with the technical engineering firm Alpha-Ingénierie and the developer Bouygues.⁹³³ The basic concept was a neutral and polyvalent “welcome structure” that could be flexibly assembled: a standard module centered on a slice of elevated pedestrian walkway around which the different housing types would be developed (figure 6.12). Through flexible assemblage, the modules gave rise to two- to five-storey blocks of apartments as well as attached individual housing types (figure 6.13, 6.14). Technically, it was an open industrialization system, on 30 by 30 cm grid, of four industrially produced “families of components” (structure, envelope, partition and facilities/utilities) that could be dry-mounted. Without load-bearing partition walls, this system allowed for open floor plans that could be designed following the demands of future inhabitants. As such, the architecture of this flexible dwelling was to provide a

⁹²⁸ See: "Ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil: Consultation pour un programme expérimental de 4000 logements," *Techniques et Architecture* 34, no. 6 (April 1972): 41-64.

⁹²⁹ Catherine Blain has studied the influence of the Atelier de Montrouge on the subsequent architectural production of Le Vaudreuil. See: Blain, "Le Vaudreuil: Contribution théorique à une manière de penser et de produire l'habitat."

⁹³⁰ André Nicolas Bouleau, "Concours et villes nouvelles: Témoignage des recherches contemporaines," *Urbanisme* 146(1975): 36-45.

⁹³¹ “Une ville ne peut être créée par la simple juxtaposition d’immeubles disparates. Au contraire, il doit exister entre tous les éléments qui la composent des relations pour que ces éléments puissent former un système cohérent et susceptibles d’évolution.” “Ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil: Consultation pour un programme expérimental de 4000 logements” In: "Ville nouvelle du Vaudreuil: Consultation pour un programme expérimental de 4000 logements," 45.

⁹³² The team also included the bank Paribas, the technical consultancy firm OTH and three developers (SACI, FFF-Basse-Seine, and SAREF). See: Ibid.

⁹³³ The system was nominated as *Modèle Innovation* under the name “Solfège” in 1974. See: "La première tranche du germe de ville; Le prototype," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 302 (December 1974 - January 1975).

new kind of urban environment, open and transformable by the inhabitants - purportedly not only before their arrival but also during their occupancy.

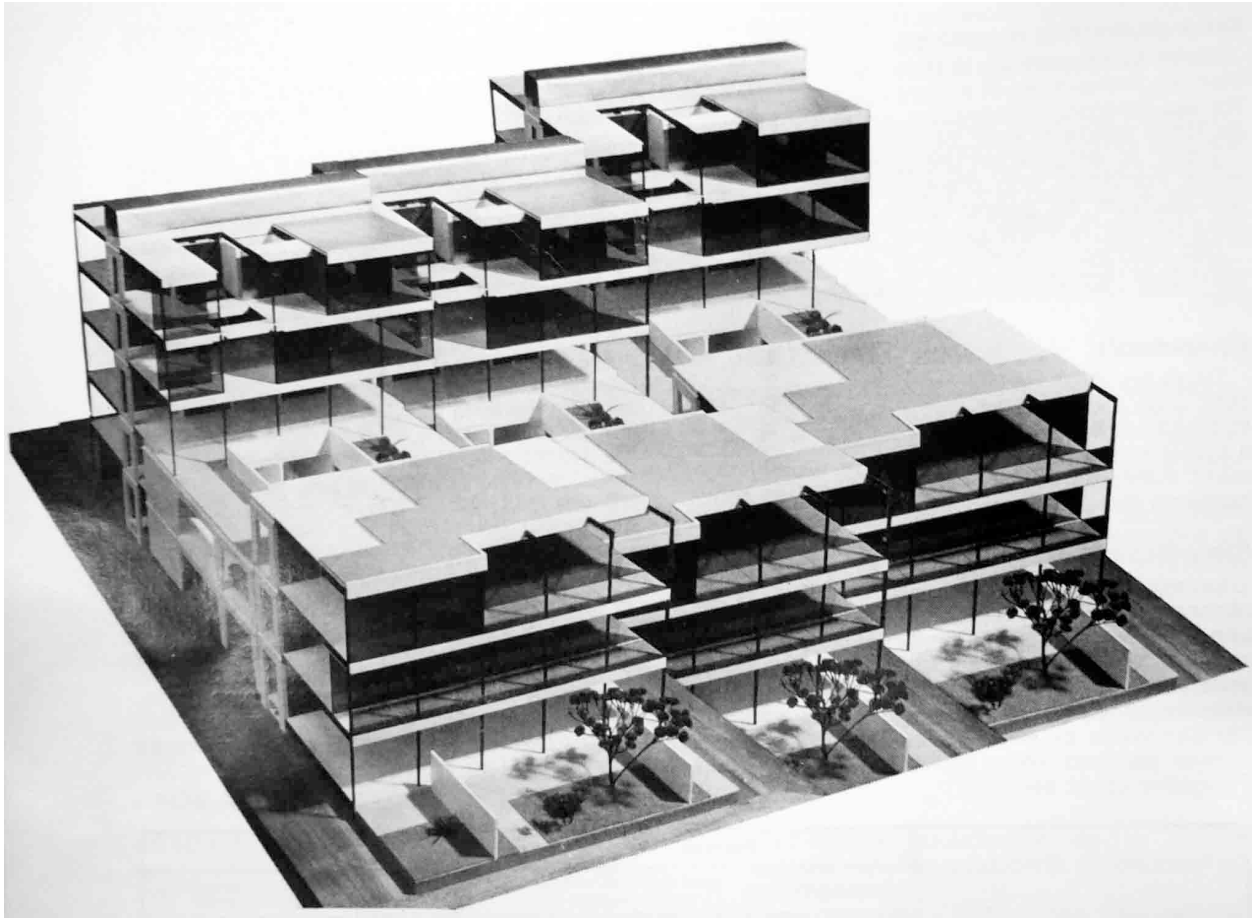


Figure 6.12: The project by the architects Marcel Lods, P. Depondt and M. Beauclair for the housing competition of Le Vaudreuil, 1972 (Source: *Techniques et Architecture* 34, no. 6 (1972): 52). This model of a standard module presented only one outcome of the flexible assembly system.

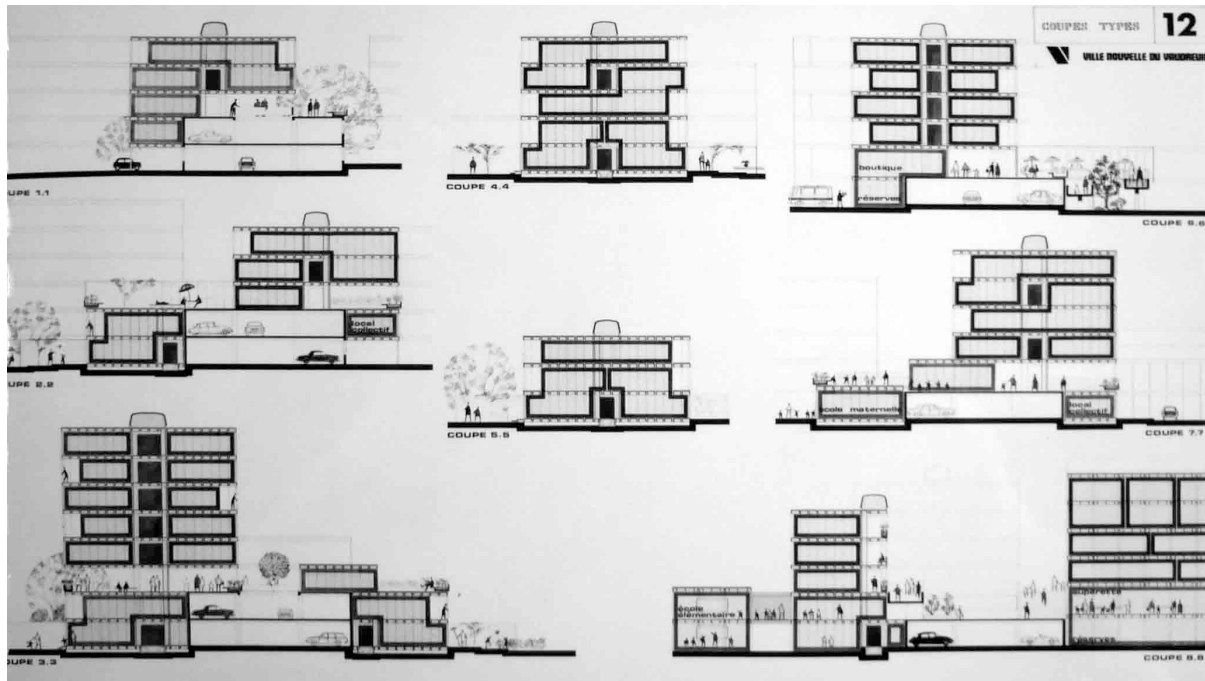


Figure 6.13: The project by the architects Marcel Lods, P. Depondt and M. Beauclair for the housing competition of Le Vaudreuil, 1972 (Source: CAA Fonds ATM 162 IFA 1559/1: Brochure submitted for the competition). This diagram shows the multiple possibilities for creating different urban typologies using the same construction system.



Figure 6.14: The project by the architects Marcel Lods, P. Depondt and M. Beauclair for the housing competition of Le Vaudreuil, 1972 (Source: CAA Fonds ATM 162 IFA 1559/1: Brochure submitted for the competition). This model shows the possibilities for the overall urban organization.

The process of consultation with future inhabitants was overseen by an independent company, Quaternière Education. They assisted families with the creation of their apartment layouts. The assistance began with several initial sessions to help them formulate their actual needs and demands. Then, in a second phase, they would draw actual plans together with a consulting architect. Realizing the future inhabitants did not necessarily have the skills to design their own apartments, the psycho-sociologists decided to use a physical model, scaled one to one, to test out possible apartment layouts. Its lightweight partitions could be moved around instantly, giving future inhabitants the possibility to test out their ideas “in reality” and in real-time (figure 6.15).⁹³⁴ Only after this process the architect would come in to address possible contradictions and suggest improvements.⁹³⁵ Despite the success of this approach, tested with a small sample of ten families, the method did not find a wider application. Not surprisingly, it was considered too labour-intensive and was therefore not integrated in the eventual marketing procedure of the development.⁹³⁶

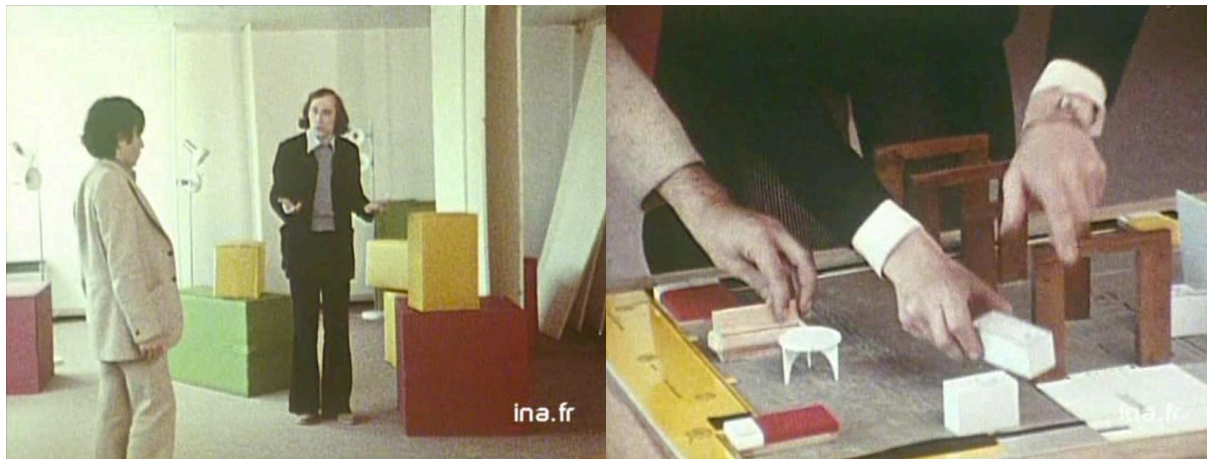


Figure 6.15: Stills from the 1975 documentary “Logement à la demande” by Eric Rohmer, showing how the architect and pedagogue worked with future inhabitants to shape their apartment layout (Source: INA, Collection ville nouvelle 4).

Following these various experiments, the sociological research office within the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in collaboration with the *Plan Construction*, was interested in radicalizing the concept of flexible dwelling. Instead of the partial flexibility of previous projects - constrained for instance by the fixed utilities duct at Montereau - they encouraged experiments

⁹³⁴ “Nous disposons, au Vaudreuil, d’un “atelier”, à cloisons légères mobiles pouvant être suspendues par aimantation à un plafond métallique. Dan cet atelier, pouvaient être construits rapidement des 2P, 3P, 4P, 5P, en respectant les contraintes techniques du système constructif. L’usager pouvait donc construire son projet en grandeur nature, se déplacer à l’intérieur, le tester.” Evelyne Pierre, “Expérimentation dans un atelier à parois mobiles au Vaudreuil,” *Les Cahiers du CSTB*, no. 167 (March 1976): 24-28.

⁹³⁵ Eric Rohmer made a documentary about the model when it was built, sponsored by the *Plan Construction*, and with the collaboration of Jean-Paul Pigeat, Gérard Thurnauer, Henri Beauclair & Kouloum. See: Eric Rohmer, *Logement à la demande* (INA, 1975).

⁹³⁶ See: Periañez and Marghieri, *Le développement de l’habitat évolutif*, 303-05.

in “total flexibility.” The most iconic project in this regard was that of Les Marelles by the architects Bernard Kohn and Georges Maurios. Maurios, who had gained initial experience working for Le Corbusier in India, had been interested in the idea of flexibility ever since his return from the US, where he had studied at Harvard with José-Luis Sert, Jezi Soltan and Louis Kahn in 1960. He had not found much support from the government until his research was finally financed by the DGRST in 1967.⁹³⁷ After a failed attempt to launch a project in Evry, the *Plan Construction* helped realize his project of Les Marelles, located in SCIC’s urban development of Val-d’Yerres.

The key constructive innovation of this project was the *poteau-gaine*, a hollow element that combined a load-bearing function with the distribution of utilities. A three-dimensional structure made out of these elements would allow access to the utilities at any place within the building, and thus, complete flexibility in terms of the placement of kitchen, bathroom and toilet (figure 6.16). It would be industrialized by means of three prefabricated elements in concrete.⁹³⁸ This concept was close to that of the *drager* (support) proposed by Habraken and the SAR research group and took clear hints from Le Corbusier’s Plan Obus and Constant’s New Babylon. The basic idea was that the large-scale dwelling structures would be maintained by “the collective” while their infill would be at liberty of individual users (see figure 6.17).⁹³⁹ The goals of the architects and sociologists involved were similar to those of other flexible dwelling advocates: “We have taken as a postulate: ‘it is to the people to decide themselves about their dwelling,’ our goal being to give to the users the power and the means to conceive themselves, if not their house, at least their inhabited space.”⁹⁴⁰ Referring to the future inhabitant as “*utilisateur*” but also as “client,” they acknowledged that, except from the design consultation process, “it is important to note the little real difference there is between a classic process of commercialization and that of Les Marelles.”⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁷ Abram and Gross, *Bilan des réalisations expérimentales en matière de technologie nouvelle: Plan Construction 1971-1975*, 112-19.

⁹³⁸ See: “Espace construit adaptable,” *Techniques et Architecture* 292(April 1973); “Architecture évolutive: Habitation,” *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 (April 1973): 54-55; Georges Maurios and Michel Herrou, “Les Marelles, une structure servante irriguée de fluides,” *Les Cahiers du CSTB*, no. 167 (March 1976): 45-57. The project of Les Marelles was at the basis of the *Modèle Innovation* “Structure Accueil.” See: “Structure Accueil,” *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 292 (April 1973): 56-57.

⁹³⁹ See: John M. Habraken, *De dragers en de mensen: het einde van de massawoningbouw* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1961).

⁹⁴⁰ “Nous avons pris comme postulat: ‘c’est aux gens de décider eux-mêmes de leur logement,’ notre objectif de réalisation étant de donner aux utilisateurs le pouvoir et les moyens de concevoir eux-mêmes, si ce n’est leur maison, du moins leur espace habité.” Jean-Pierre Maurios and Michel Herrou, *Les Marelles: 1. Experimentation* (Paris: Environnement et comportement, 1975), 1 (CDU).

⁹⁴¹ “il est important de noter le peu de différence réelle entre un processus de commercialisation classique et celui des Marelles.” *Ibid.*, 17.

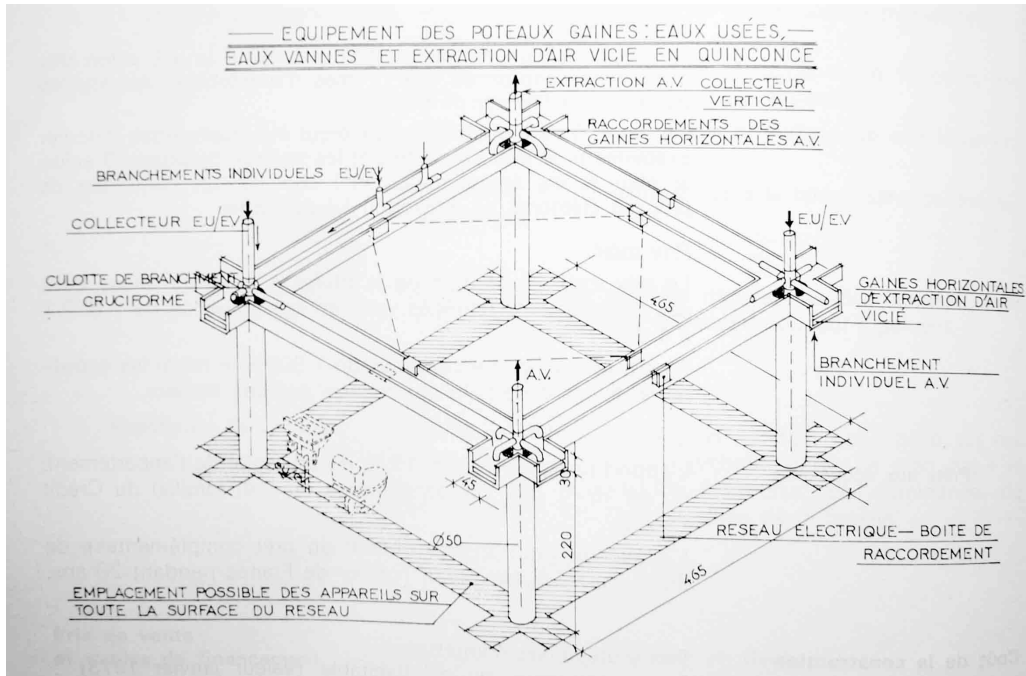


Figure 6.16: The three-dimensional construction system for the project of Les Marelles by the architects Bernard Kohn and Georges Maurios (Source: *Les Cahiers du CSTB* no. 167 (1976): 48).

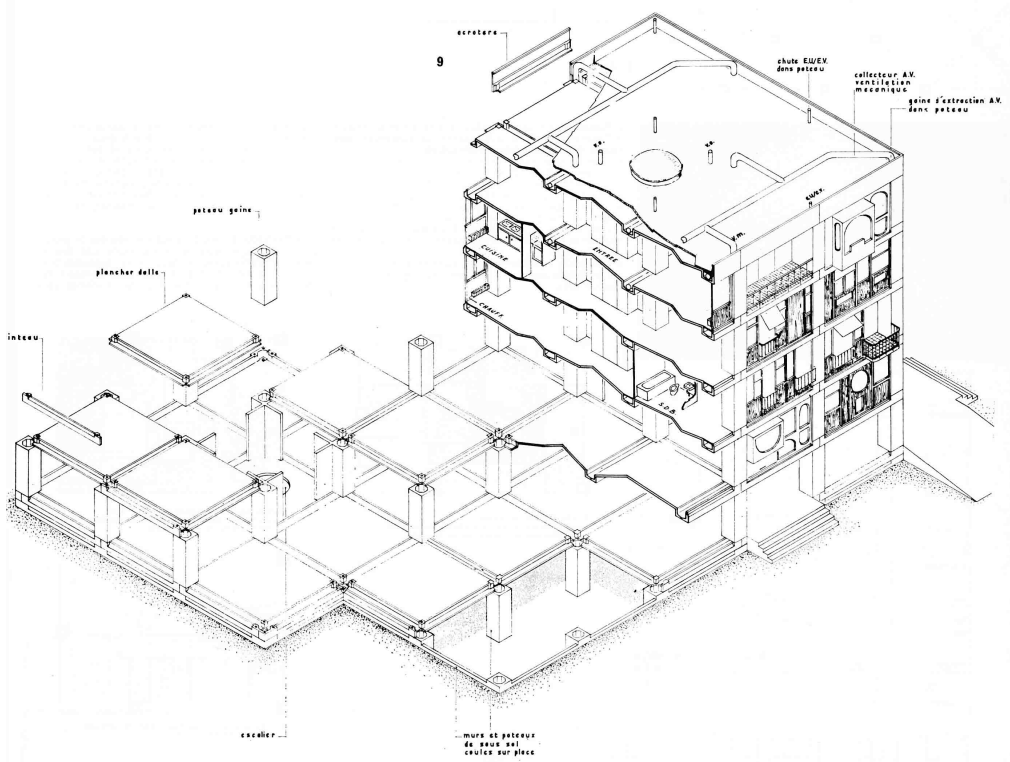


Figure 6.17: Possible assembly of the construction system, allowing free architectural expression of the facade, for the project of Les Marelles by the architects Bernard Kohn and Georges Maurios (Source: *Techniques et Architectures*, no. 292 “Architecture évolutive: Habitation” (1973): 55).

The developer SCIC signed off on the construction of one hundred condominium units built with this system. The consultation process with inhabitants was well-organized, elaborate and particularly high-tech. A physical model in scale 1/10 allowed inhabitants to simulate their future dwelling unit; a video system allowed to film inside the model; and the television display would present the dynamic experience as if the viewer was actually located inside the apartment.⁹⁴² With the help of consulting architects and a psycho-sociologist appointed by Maurios, these technologies were meant to allow for the perfect process of participatory design. Despite these efforts, the project was a complete commercial failure. Of the 100 available units, only 15 found buyers benefited from the opportunity to design their own apartments (figure 6.18).⁹⁴³ Whether this was due to a lack of advertising for the project or the economic slump at the time, it discouraged the developer to ever venturing into the experiment of flexible dwelling again.

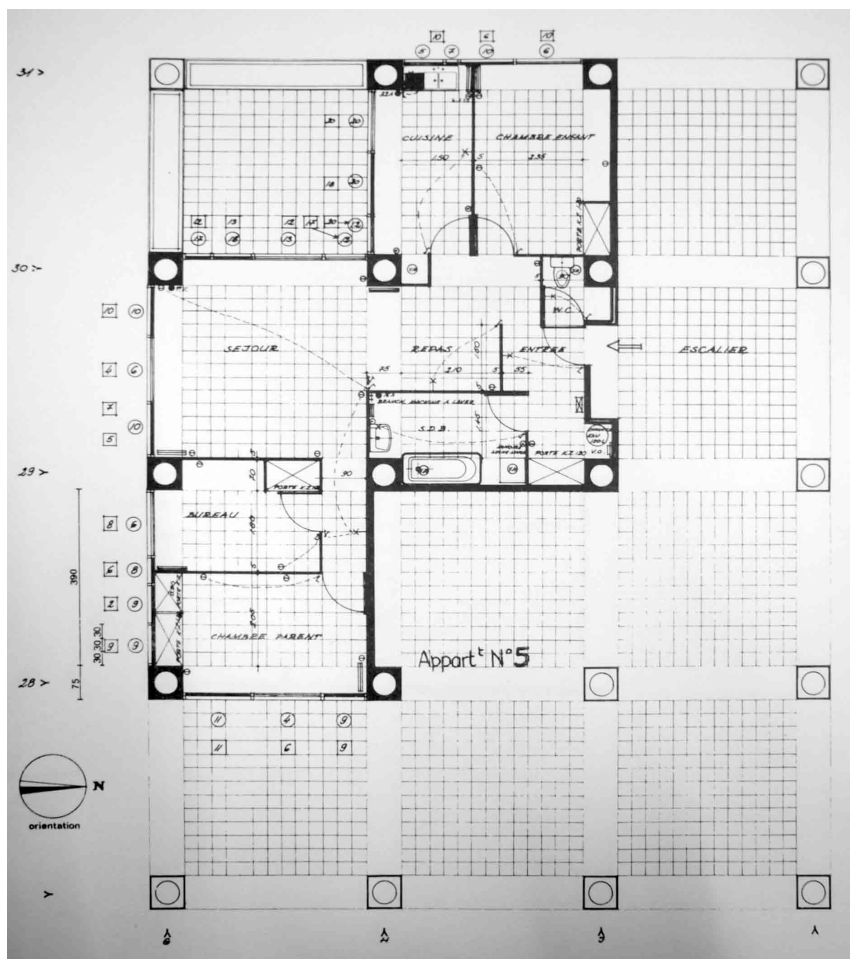


Figure 6.18: One of the customized apartment layouts as drawn by the architects (Source: J.P. Maurios & M. Herrou, *Les Marelles: 2. Monographies* (Paris: Environnement et Comportement, 1975): 101).

⁹⁴² Jean-Pierre Maurios and Michel Herrou, *Les Marelles, habitat adaptable: Les premiers acquéreurs* (Paris: Environnement et comportement, 1974) (CDU).

⁹⁴³ For the complete analysis of the inhabitant design process, see: Ibid; Maurios and Herrou, *Les Marelles: 1. Experimentation*; Jean-Pierre Maurios and Michel Herrou, *Les Marelles: 2. Monographies* (Paris: Environnement et comportement, 1975) (CDU).

The underuse of possibilities offered by such flexible systems might have been most startling in the case of Les Marelles but was in fact a more general phenomenon. When making the balance sheet of the first six years of *Plan Construction* initiatives, Christian Moley already pointed out that the possibilities of flexible dwelling systems remained often underused by inhabitants.⁹⁴⁴ Transforming an apartment after initial occupation entailed a multitude of technical constraints and logistical hurdles for inhabitants. Mayor transformations were often only necessary once or twice, and the presence of flexible systems - rails, cores, and so on just waiting to be used - was experienced as hinder rather than potential. Moreover, despite the many options available, inhabitants often reproduced conventional apartment layouts as they were comfortable with them and were used to them. Whether out of conformism, lack of imagination, or a lack of proper guidance and information from the builders, many of the plans ultimately realized according to inhabitants' demands did not express the creative emancipation architects had hoped for.

Most importantly, the architectural ideal of flexibility reflects the belief in a fundamental neutrality with respect to the existing cultures of dwelling - a belief that was very soon revealed to be unrealistic. The overview of flexible dwelling that was the purview of a 1976 issue of *Techniques et Architecture* on "The Question of Housing," and which contained a collection of international SAR projects including Lucien Kroll's participatory student housing projects in Brussels and several French *Modèle Innovation* projects, signified the end of an experiment rather than its culmination.⁹⁴⁵

In everyday life, inhabitants did not experience the flexibility of their homes as a neutral quality: it was often perceived as antithetical to the idea of a stable home. While architects and developers cast mobile partitions as liberating instruments, their very mobility posed an ontological obstacle for inhabitants in the process of home-making or "settling in."⁹⁴⁶ Constant Nieuwenhuys, with his utopian New Babylon project, had come to this exact same conclusion in his own way.⁹⁴⁷ More concretely, the concept of a dwelling unit continuously adapting to the changing needs of its inhabitants was also antithetical to the realities of geographic and residential mobility in 1970s France. As one of the final gasps of utopianism in modern housing production, *habitat évolutif* was first and foremost an architectural metaphor - in Cacciari's sense, of only being able to show architecture's impotence - of the fundamental lack of choice French consumers faced in a housing market still largely defined by decades of state-led mass housing production. Rather than flexible apartments in collective housing, as state planners, sociologists and modern architects once vehemently believed, it was to be the private boom in single-family home-building that would eventually change this condition.

⁹⁴⁴ Moley, *L'innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 69.

⁹⁴⁵ See the 1976 issue of *Techniques et Architecture* (no. 311) with the theme "La question du logement: 1. du rêve participationniste à la flexibilité."

⁹⁴⁶ Christian Moley referred to this as the "impossibility of neutral architectural space." See: *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁷ See: Hilde Heynen, "New Babylon: The Antinomies of Utopia," *Assemblage*, no. 29 (April 1996): 24-39; Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999).

5. *Habitat intermédiaire*: Between Housing and Home

Aside from *habitat évolutif*, another key concept of 1970s French housing production was *habitat intermédiaire*: this notion brought together a variety of architectural experiments to overcome the opposition between collective housing and the individual home. While these also claimed to offer a new way of taking into account the changing needs of the user, they did so in different ways. In the words of a contemporary observer, *habitat intermédiaire* was “an individualized dwelling but situated in a collective housing group. The advantages of both the individual house and the apartment building? Maybe, but also the possibility to create a quality urbanism, as far from the towers and bars as from the dreary suburban sprawl.”⁹⁴⁸

One of the most interesting and well-publicized cases was built in the context of the *ville nouvelle* of Evry in the southeast suburbs of Paris. For its first new neighborhood, aptly named “Evry I,” the local planning agency organized a high-profile architectural competition with the help of the state.⁹⁴⁹ With a program of 7000 housing units and public amenities, the competition’s objective was to assert the originality of the *villes nouvelles* and their “capacity to create an entirely new urban environment.” The competition enjoyed the financial support of the *Plan Construction*, whose administrators also joined in the competition’s jury and it as a vehicle for the architectural and constructive improvement of French housing production.

The organizers’ goal, as stated in the competition brief, was to “revive the love of urban life.” Their brief stipulated that the project’s novel urban character needed to be expressed at multiple levels: the general conception of the neighborhood, the variety and quality of the architecture, the treatment of open spaces, the conception of public amenities (in particular schools) and their integration in the surroundings, and the “non-segregation of different housing categories.” The organizers wanted projects that were “at once innovative and realistic, experimental and comprehensive.”⁹⁵⁰ Comprehensiveness implied not only that the collective facilities would be built together with the housing - in contrast to the *grands ensembles*. It also meant a more “global conception of public space.” Architectural innovation, in particular in the way it could transform public space, was seen as the ideal response to mounting public critiques of modern urbanism: “The [public] opinion, very sensitive to the problems with the living environment and searching in the new towns a reason to hope, expects from such operations an exemplary treatment of the public spaces.”⁹⁵¹

⁹⁴⁸ “une notion nouvelle, un logement individualisé mais situé dans un ensemble collectif. Les avantages réunis de la maison et de l'immeuble? Peut-être, mais aussi la possibilité de composer un urbanisme de qualité, aussi loin des tours et des barres que des mornes étendues pavillonnaires.” Quote from the back cover of: Thierry Vilmin and Jean-Jacques de Alzua, *Evry-Courcouronnes: Le logement intermédiaire et l'urbanisme* (Bagneux: Architecture et construction, 1978) (CDU).

⁹⁴⁹ The competition was launched in may 1971 by Maurice Doublet, the prefect of the Paris region, and Michel Boscher, mayor of Evry and president of the *Etablissement public d'Evry*, with the support of the *Plan Construction*. The competition jury was composed of state representatives like Michel Boscher himself, André Lalande, and Michel Arrou-Vignod, and architects like Jacob Bakema, Joseph Belmont, and Gérard Thurnauer.

⁹⁵⁰ Evry I: Concours Conception-Réalisation – note de présentation, 1971 (CAC19780319/001).

⁹⁵¹ “L’opinion, très sensibilisée aux problèmes du cadre de vie et qui cherche dans les villes nouvelles une raison d’espérer, attend de telles opérations un aménagement exemplaire des espaces publics.” Ibid.

Another set of ambitions revolved around the idea of going “beyond functionality.” Making explicit reference to Henri Lefebvre’s 1968 *Le droit à la ville*, which by then had become a standard reference for a whole generation of intellectuals and architects, the organizers formulated the goal of creating “the ESTHETIC EMOTION [...] which exalts the symbolic value of places in harmony with their ‘use value,’ and their potential for sociability.”⁹⁵² To achieve these lofty goals, the brief suggested participants to engage with social scientific and architectural research and to focus specifically on public art, landscaping, and urban furniture. Apart from vague criteria like “familial comfort” and “general flexibility”, other concerns of the jury focused on creating “spaces of transition between the individual cells and the public space.”⁹⁵³

While claiming to give the participants plenty of freedom for innovative design, the competition nevertheless included a long list of other pre-defined programmatic and structuring elements. The development needed to be organized around a central pedestrian boulevard to which would be attached all collective amenities guaranteeing “urban animation:” schools, youth centers, community centers, day care centers, kinder gardens, shops, workshops, offices, and recreation facilities. Also alongside this boulevard three-fifths of the housing units needed to be placed, as well as playgrounds and green spaces.⁹⁵⁴

Most importantly, the architects were required to team up with developers and technical consultancy firms in order to guarantee construction budgets and a smooth implementation of the winning proposal. After a first deliberation, four proposals were retained; a second deliberation left two (figure 6.19). The complexity of the competition guidelines - in particular its program, which included a diverse array of collective facilities - led many of the teams to involve specialists in the domain of *programmation* or programming.⁹⁵⁵ The two teams in between which the final choice was to be made had both employed such specialists. The team EUREVRY, which was led by the collaborative architecture office *Atelier d’Urbanisme et d’Architecture*, had the help of a consultancy firm from Grenoble, the *Groupe d’Architecture et Pédagogie*. The winning team, UCY, got help from Jean Ader, an expert in pedagogy who helped plan the school infrastructure, and from SCOOPER, which supplied the preliminary socio-economic studies.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵² “Créer l’EMOTION ESTHETIQUE (...) qui exalte la valeur symbolique des lieux en harmonie avec leur “valeur d’usage,” et leur potentiel de sociabilité.” Ibid.

⁹⁵³ “[...] créer des espaces de transition entre les cellules individuelles et l’espace public.” Concours Evry I: Rapport de la commission administrative et financière & Rapport de la commission Habitat (CAC 19780319/001).

⁹⁵⁴ Evry I: Concours Conception-Réalisation – note de présentation, 1971.

⁹⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁹⁵⁶ Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L’interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d’équipement socio-culturel intégré*, 78-80.



Figure 6.19: The finalists of the Evry I competition as featured on a leaflet for an exhibition in 1973 (Source: CAC 19780319/001). UCY, the winning team, consisted of the following: 1) Architects: Michel Andrault and Pierre Parat (GARP), Pierre Sirvin, and *Société Civile d'Architectes et d'Urbanisme* (SCAU) 2) Developers: a number of HLM offices and private companies grouped around the *Office central interprofessionnel de logement* (OCIL).

The proposal of the winning team, led by Michel Andrault and Pierre Parat, was one of the clearest expressions of *habitat intermédiaire* (figure 6.20, 6.21, 6.22). The project consisted a series of cross-shaped, pyramidal housing blocks arranged so as to created intimate urban spaces between them. The complex and diversified facades offered an unmistakable counter-image to the uniformity of the “towers and slabs” of the *grands ensembles*. The stacking of units in a pyramidal shape allowed each apartment to have multiple orientations as well as a luxurious, room-sized terrace.



Figure 6.20: Evry I “Les Pyramides” by Michel Andrault and Pierre Parat (1971-1974) (Source: Claude Parent, “Interview, Andrault & Parat” *L’Architecture*, no. 403 (1977): 92-104).

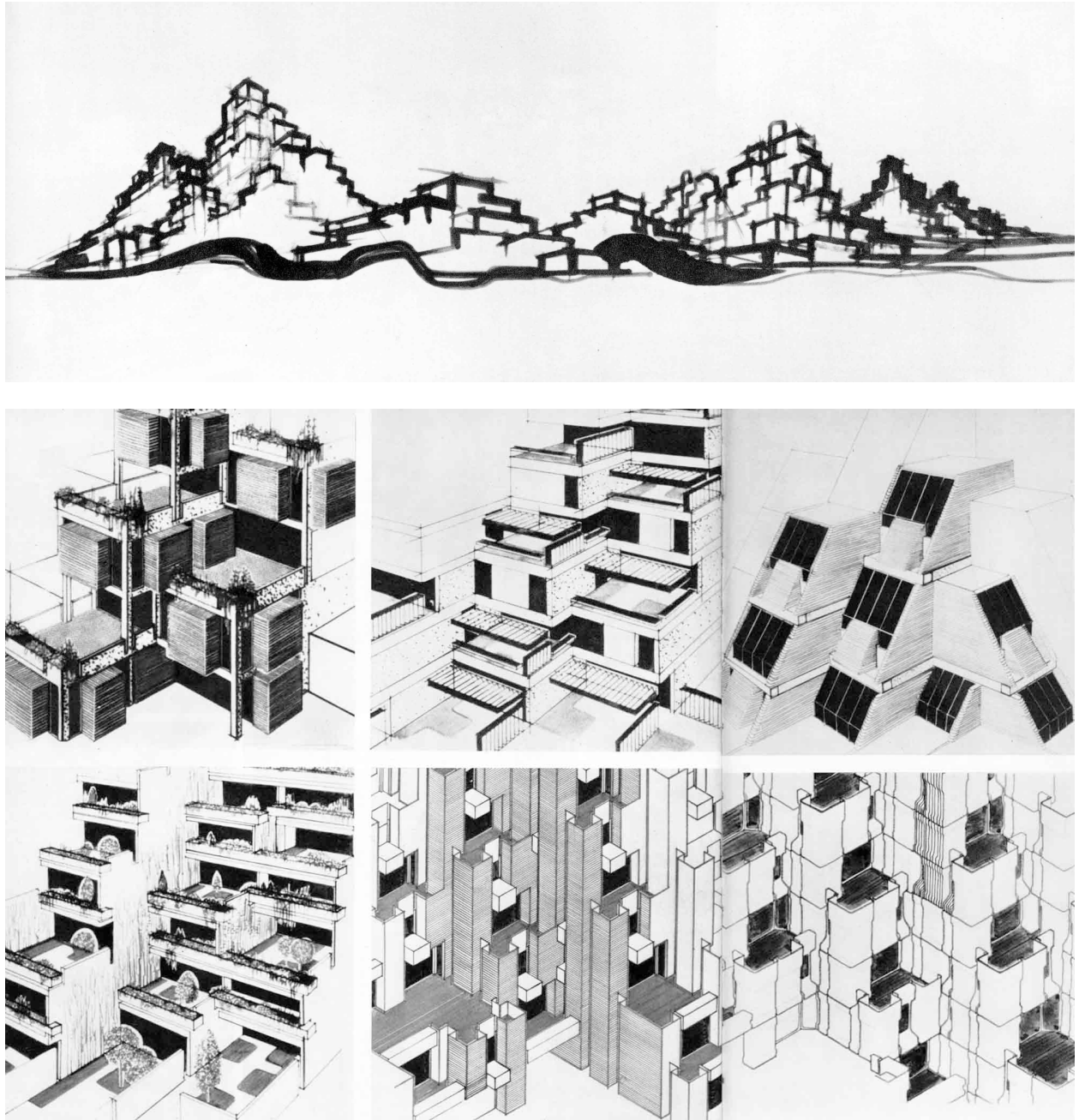


Figure 6.21: Sketches for *habitat intermédiaire* by Michel Andrault and Pierre Parat (Source: Marc Gaillard, *Andrault-Parat Architectes* (Paris: Dunod, 1979): 231, 234-235).

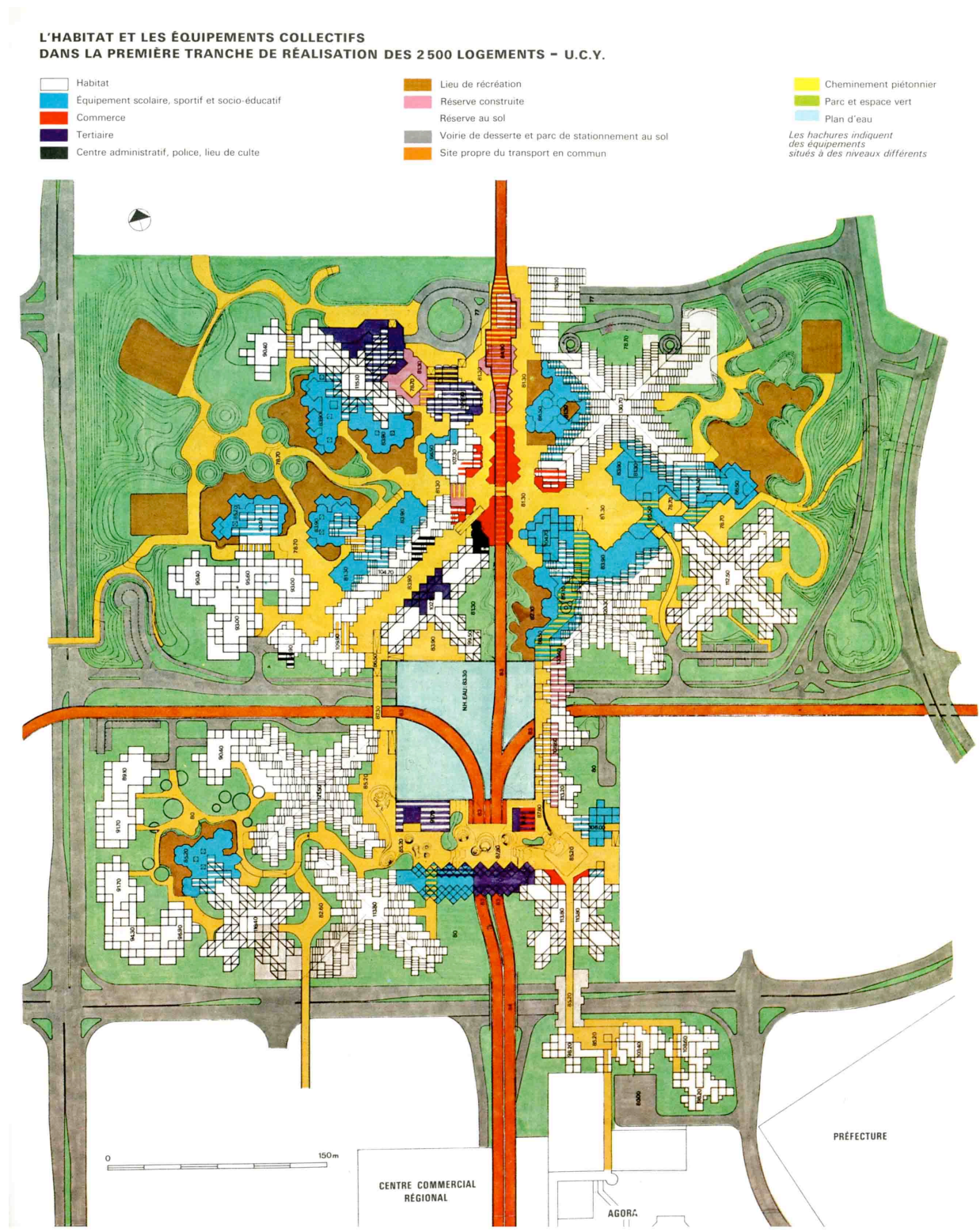


Figure 6.22: The master plan submitted by Andrault and Parat for the competition of Evry I (Source: *Cahiers de l'IAURP* 31 "Evry 1: Concours d'aménagement urbain" (1973): 55).

Purely architecturally, the concept was hardly new. It followed in a long tradition of modernist interpretations of the mediterranean vernacular - from that of the traditional hilltop village to the *kasbah*. Its main example had already been built by Moshe Safdie at the Montréal Expo of 1967. Even for France the project was no first: various architects, including Andrault and Parat themselves, had already been experimenting with pyramidal and stacked housing typologies since the mid-1960s (see figure 6.23).⁹⁵⁷



Figure 6.23: Housing project at Villepinte by the architects Michel Andrault & Pierre Parat, 1970 (Source: “Habitat intermédiaire: individualisation du collectif où collectivisation de l’individuel?” *Architecture française*, no. 391 (1975): 42). This dwelling type was also coined *maisons-appartement* or “house-apartments.”

⁹⁵⁷ Their competition entry for Villetaneuse of 1966 was a first trial. See: Marc Gaillard, *Andrault-Parat Architectes* (Paris: Dunod, 1979), 162, 69. A year later, they received support from the Ministry of Housing for their research. In 1969 then, they found a developer interested in their ideas and launched a project for condominium housing in Epemay. The project was supported by the Ministry but was never built. See: Moley, *L’innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 14. Ultimately, they got a similar project built in Villepinte in 1970. Other well-known projects included that by Jacques Bardet at La Nérac (Val d’Yerres, 1967-1969, developer: SCIC), see footnote 50. For a first overview of *habitat intermédiaire* projects until 1975, see: “Habitat intermédiaire: Individualisation du collectif où collectivisation de l’individuel?,” *Architecture Française*, no. 391 (June 1975): 42-59.

Despite the popularity of the type at this time, the architects of Evry I had been able to develop their own language of a “proliferating urban architecture,” whose complex stacking of units and fragmentation of volumes offered an impressive diversity of housing units in different sizes and layouts. During the time the project was being constructed, the architects transformed its design into a generic constructive system in collaboration with Bouygues and other technical and financial partners. In 1973 then, it was nominated as a *Modèle Innovation* with the title Garden Terrace Houses (*Maisons Gradin Jardin*).⁹⁵⁸ While the design could hardly be called avant-garde, it was a key marker for the momentous shift in housing production in France. What was innovating about it first of foremost, was not the typology itself, but the sheer size of applying it to a whole neighborhood.

Yet, what is perhaps most significant about the winning project is how exactly it was believed to “revive the love of urban life”. Architectural design was a first strategy. The project, while not yet radically inverting the figure-ground relation of modernist housing, nevertheless substantially transformed it. The careful composition of cross-plan pyramid-shaped volumes left a negative of “canyons” - interconnected public spaces that held the middle between streets and squares. These canyons introduced human scale, variety and “the irrational”, all markers of the new urban-ness so direly needed in the French landscape. The decomposition of the overall form of the housing blocks into a fragmented complexity - creating a visual landscape where the end of one block faded into the beginning of another - was essential to this strategy (figure 6.20).

Just like the competition guidelines had prescribed, the design featured a central pedestrian path which structured the neighborhood. All collective amenities were directly linked to it (figure 6.22). The dispersal of urban facilities - commerce most importantly - on the ground floors of the housing blocks was a way to generate more lively collective spaces, again in reaction to the empty open spaces of many housing estates. The ambition to creating public spaces that - while remaining modernist - made reference to the traditional urban types of streets, parks, and squares was also reflected in the landscaping, designed by Mlle Bozellec, the public art, and the urban furniture, designed by Jacques Simon (figure 6.24). Just like in the later generations of *grands ensembles*, the concept that mobilized these efforts was that of “animation urbaine.”⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁸ See: Michel Andrault and Pierre Parat, "Maisons gradin jardin 1973," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 293 (1973): 94-95.

⁹⁵⁹ See Chapter 2.



Figure 6.24: Model of the Evry I project around 1973, showing the project's treatment of public space (Source: CAC 197803179/001: Promotional leaflet for Evry I, n.d.).

A second, equally important strategy “to revive the love of urban life” was social rather than architectural in nature. It had been written explicitly in the competition guidelines. These prescribed a mix of private sector (mostly condos) and state-aided units, the latter being a mix of rental social housing types, social housing condominiums, and units financed by state loans for home-buying. One of the criteria of the jury was the “degree of imbrication of the different categories of housing” (figure 6.25).⁹⁶⁰ According to the organizers of the competition, the goal was to attract a mix of lower, middle, and upper-middle classes: “To avoid a segregation by housing, which often throws back the urbanites with modest income to the periphery, the

⁹⁶⁰ Luc Thomas and Gérard Pele, “Evry I: Concours d'aménagement urbain,” *Cahiers de l'IAURP* 31(April 1973), 77-78.

candidates will need to foresee, in each unity of a thousand to two thousand apartments, a complete range of housing categories, from rental HLMs to non-state-aided housing.”⁹⁶¹

An indispensable part of successful urbanity was thought to be social mixing: planners during this time were influenced not only by the “anti-urban” monotony and emptiness of the early *grands ensembles*, but also marked by alarming calls by sociologists linking social problems to spatial segregation. According to the winning team, their proposal would promote at “diversity and harmony.” The architectural complexity it provided was supposed to not just express, but facilitate such diversity. Perhaps surprisingly, diversity also worked well from the perspective of consumer promotion. The advertising brochure of the eventual project read: “At Evry I, choosing an apartment is not a word in vain. For example in building 1 there will not be two terrace-apartments that are identical.”⁹⁶²

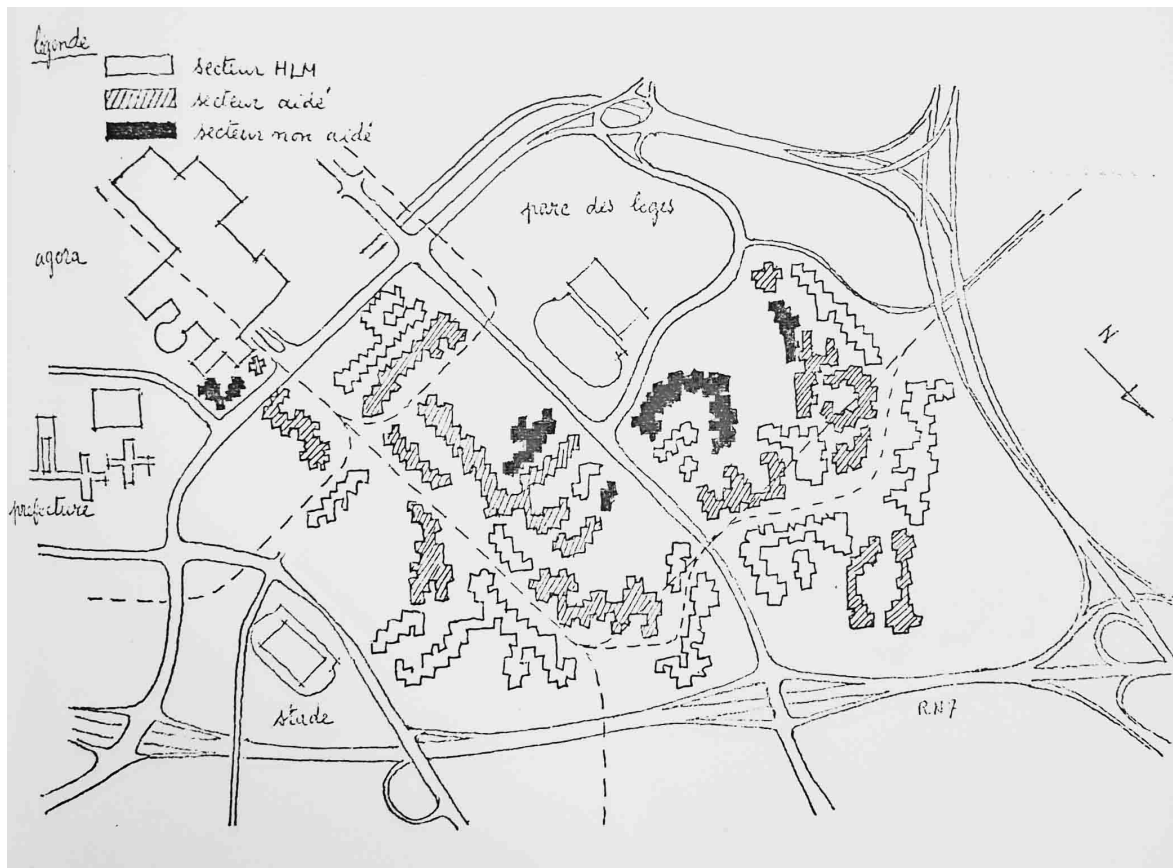


Figure 6.25: Work sketch by the jury in order to represent the distribution of different housing categories for each project (Source: CAC 197803179/001).

⁹⁶¹ “Pour éviter une ségrégation par l’habitat, qui rejette souvent les citadins aux revenus modestes vers la périphérie, les candidats devront prévoir, dans chaque unité de mille à deux mille appartements, un éventail complet des catégories de logements, depuis l’HLM locative jusqu’au logement non aidé.” In: “Un concours international pour la construction du premier quartier de la ville nouvelle d’Evry,” *Le Monde* 20 May 1971.

⁹⁶² “A Evry I, choisir un appartement n’est pas un vain mot. Ainsi par exemple dans le bâtiment 1 il n’y a pas deux appartements-terrasses identiques.” *La vie à Evry I*, brochure UCY, n.d. (CAC 19780319/001).

Despite the competition's efforts to create a decidedly urban neighborhood, and the winning design's convincing response to it, the elephant in the room was still the single-family home. The project's generous, room-sized terraces were cast as viable alternatives to the suburban lawn (see figure 6.26). This would convince prospective inhabitants of the new potentials of collective housing to compete with the so-cherished single-family home. At this time, sociological studies of single-family home developments - first and foremost the 1964 landmark sociological study *L'Habitat pavillonnaire* - had pointed out the advantages of this type of living over collective housing: its feeling of intimacy, the possibilities offered by extra space (storage, hobby room and so on), an individual entrance, a private outdoor space, and so.⁹⁶³ Focusing not so much on why many French families preferred the single-family home in opinion polls, rather than on how they actually lived in it, the study was well-known to policy makers and especially to architects. They saw in it a clear critique of functionalism and the staleness of modern collective housing.⁹⁶⁴

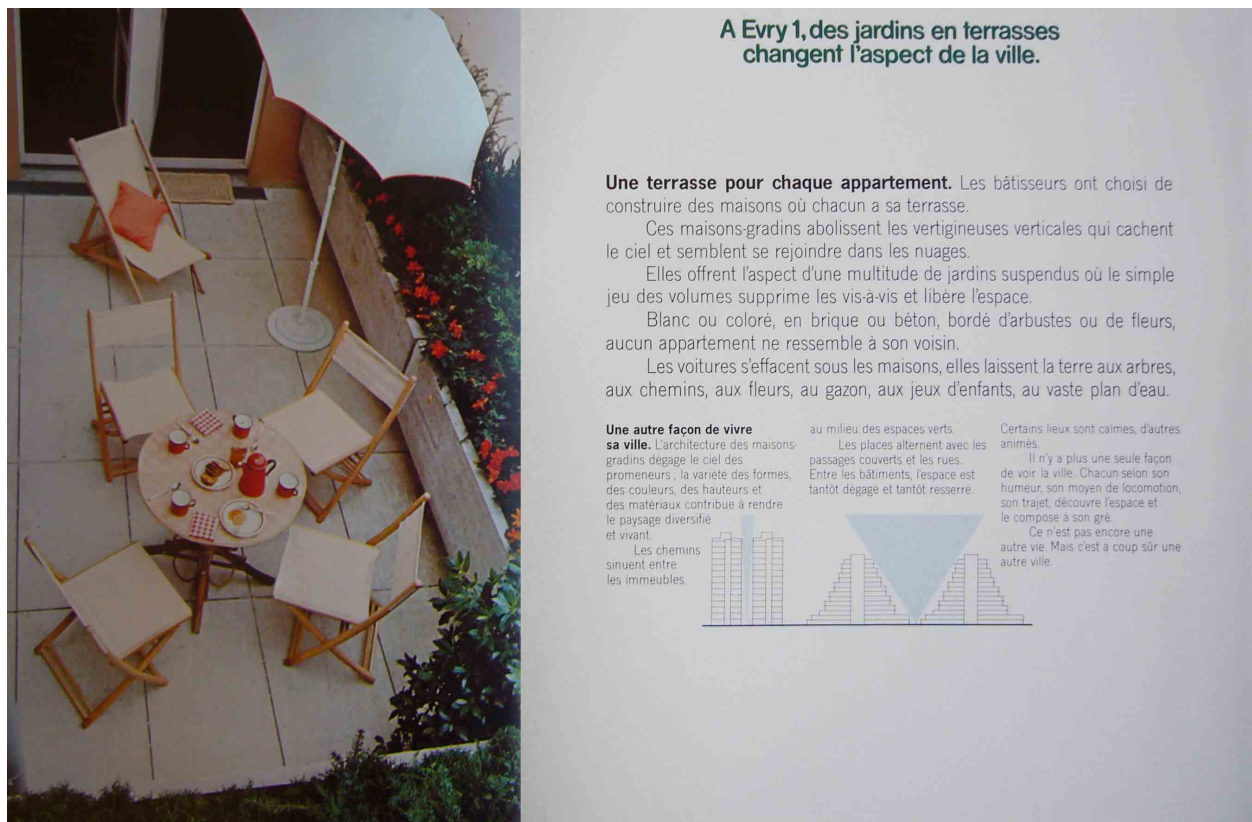


Figure 6.26: Promotional brochure for the Evry I project, around 1973 (Source: CAC 197803179/001: Promotional leaflet for Evry I, n.d.).

⁹⁶³ Raymond, Haumont, Raymond et al., *L'habitat pavillonnaire*. See also: Nicole Haumont, "Les pavillonnaires et la pratique de l'habitat," *Urbanisme* 151(1976).

⁹⁶⁴ The study included a foreword by Henri Lefebvre, whose theories of appropriation were foundational to its analysis. See Chapter 4.

Clearly responding to such positive attributions of the single-family home living, the housing of Evry I was built according to a flexible constructive grid of 5.30 m by 5.30 m, which purportedly allowed “changing uses of volumes and their transformation in function of the unpredictable evolution of needs.” Together with the project’s room-sized terraces, this was meant to facilitate “an appropriation of space by the inhabitants,”⁹⁶⁵ very much in the same way the single-family home allowed its inhabitants to live outdoors and adapt their home to changing family conditions.⁹⁶⁶ The volumetric articulation of each unit, creating an image of “vertically stacked homes” rather than collective housing was instrumental to the new imperative of individuality (figure 6.27).

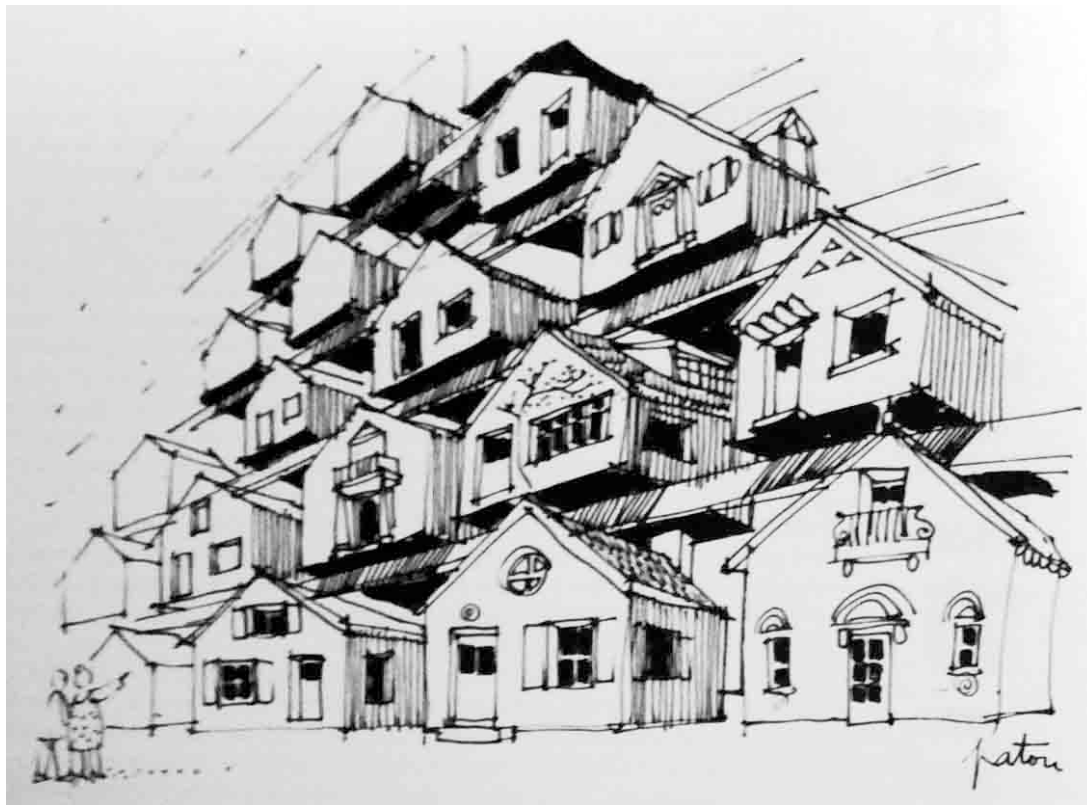


Figure 6.27: Cartoon illustration by Paton (Source: *Urbanisme* 151 “Habitat individuel” (1975): 64).

In short, Evry I was an elaborate effort to enlarge the housing offer for French consumers. The diversity of its apartments - in particular the high concentration of suburban middle-class condominium apartments - constituted a significant novelty in the French housing market. As such, despite being a large state-sponsored project just like the *grands ensembles*, Evry I marked the ideological shift towards liberalized consumption in the realm of housing.

⁹⁶⁵ “[...] les changements d’utilisation des volumes et leur transformation en fonction de l’évolution imprévisible des besoins. [...] une appropriation de l’espace par les habitants.” In: Gaillard, *Andrault-Parat Architectes*, 220.

⁹⁶⁶ See in this respect also: Moley, *L’innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 12-13.

Despite at times lofty sociological motivations, this new intermediary form of housing was the result of an economic rationality prevalent in mass housing production more generally. In the words of the architect Jacques Bardet, who had built one of the first such projects at Val d'Yerres, this intermediary form of housing was new in that it combined “the technical advantages of prefabrication, the economies proper to collective housing, and the independence attached to individual homes.”⁹⁶⁷ In other words, the economic rationale was to increase the density and lower the cost of housing construction while creating a more desirable consumer product.

Despite its ambitions to curb social segregation, create a new “animated” kind of city, and to sell urban lifestyles to the citizen, all at the same time, the experiment of Evry failed to escape the problematic residential mobility patterns that had befallen the *grands ensembles* less than two decades earlier. Andrault and Parat’s formula for Evry was nevertheless repeated in a multitude of projects throughout the 1970s.⁹⁶⁸

Another iconic such project was that by Jean Renaudie for the center of Ivry, a near suburb of Paris.⁹⁶⁹ His urban design consisted of a complex series of stacked star-shaped volumes that infiltrated the existing fabric (figure 6.28). Even when the different volumes were not physically connected, for the walking observer their complexity and juxtaposition created the impression that they were. At the center of the urban development was a building no less than megastructural in scale and ambition: it contained not only a diversity of housing units but also a range of urban amenities including a supermarket, shops, offices, and socio-cultural facilities, and made physical linkages to the housing projects around it. The radical complexity of the entire structure resulted in an absolute singularity of the dwelling units: each and every dwellings was different not only in size and layout, but also in form. Most of them nevertheless had a large, private outdoor space in common. What made this project so exceptional was that, in large part because of its spacious apartment layouts and generously planted roof decks, 90% of interviewed first inhabitants considered their dwelling equivalent to a single-family home.⁹⁷⁰ This is most likely still the case today (figure 6.29).

⁹⁶⁷ “les avantages techniques de la préfabrication, les économies propres au logement collectif et l’indépendance attachée aux maisons individuelles.” Jacques Bardet cited in: “Habitat intermédiaire: Individualisation du collectif où collectivisation de l’individuel?,” 42.

⁹⁶⁸ See: Gaillard, *Andrault-Parat Architectes*.

⁹⁶⁹ See: Pascale Buffard, *Jean Renaudie* (Paris: Sodedat 93 / Institut français d’Architecture / Carte Segrete, 1993); “Opération Jeanne-Hachette à Ivry: Complexe de commerces, de bureaux d’équipements, et de logements,” *Techniques et Architecture* 34, no. 6 (April 1972): 77-81.

⁹⁷⁰ Moley, *L’innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 26.

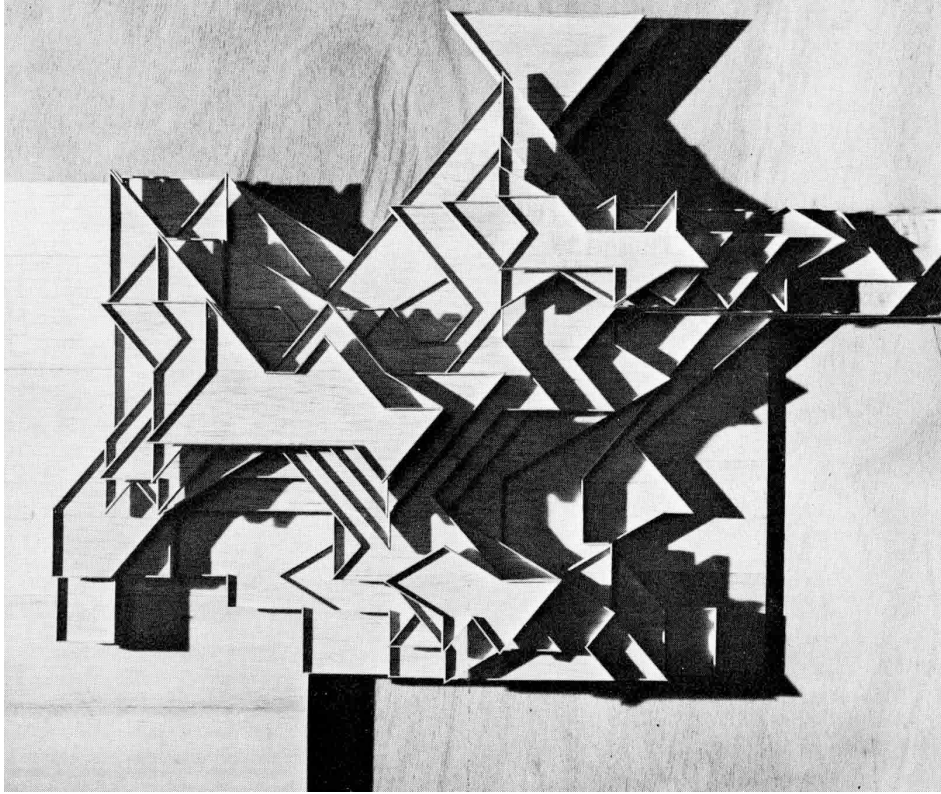


Figure 6.28: Conceptual model of the renovation project of the urban center of Ivry by Jean Renaudie (1969-1981) (Source: *Techniques et Architecture* 34, no. 6 (1972): 79).



Figure 6.29: The city center of Ivry: photo taken in 2009 by the author from one of the towers.

The pre- and post-occupancy studies accompanying the project - sponsored by the *Plan Construction* - emphasized the singularity of the architectural form as the symbolic carrier of a shift in agency towards the user.⁹⁷¹ Again, the concept of appropriation, and its emancipatory power, figured prominently. According to the sociologists, the spatial complexity of the units - their sharp interior angles, oddly placed pillars and unconventional room shapes - forced individual inhabitants to creatively appropriate their dwellings: “this absence of pre-existing referents to the practice of dwelling is exactly what allowed (and obliged) each inhabitant to create or reconstitute their own referents for organizing their apartment and the life inside it, because the a-normal shaping of the space and its complexity induced not a single predefined orientation for its interior fittings and use.”⁹⁷² While the units were rental social housing, the inhabitants’ profile did not fit that of the average social housing project. Just like the many of the experiments in flexible dwelling, the complexity of its architecture forced the units into the highest price category of social housing. Many of the inhabitants, if they did not characterize themselves as having an “alternative” lifestyle, had a higher than average amount of social or cultural capital.

The number of *habitat intermédiaire* projects constructed under the aegis of the *Plan Construction* was impressive. Very similar to Evry I was a competition held for the *ville nouvelle* of Lille Est, won by Alexis Josic (see figure 6.30).⁹⁷³ But not all such projects had an explicitly “urban” agenda. The pyramids of Philippe Vuarneison and l’Atelier 3 remained very conventional in their urban layout (see figure 6.31).⁹⁷⁴ The housing volumes, more purely pyramidal in shape, did not contain any collective amenities and delivered no specific qualities to the public realm around them. Another experiment, idiosyncratic in form but hardly original in concept, was that of the hexagonal honeycombs of Dominique Beau, Laszlo Feber and Michel Orluc (figure 6.32).⁹⁷⁵ The 1974 *Modèle Innovation* project “Eurydice,” by the architects Bouchez, Morax and Montès, proposed a linear assembly of modules into linear blocks - a juxtaposition and superposition of maisonettes leaving space for a pedestrianized public space in the middle (see figure 6.33). With its intermediary floors and transversal units, the project offered dwelling types reminiscent of Victorian terraced housing. The units either had a sunken garden or a roof deck. While its public realm was clearly articulated, the project did not contain

⁹⁷¹ See: Françoise Lugassy, *Les réactions à l'immeuble Danièle Casanova à Ivry. Tome 1: Réactions avant l'aménagement. Tome 2 : Les processus d'appropriation* (Paris: Compagnie française d'économistes et de psychosociologues, 1974) (CDU); Anne Denner, *Etude des réactions à l'habitat angulaire à partir des modèles at home, trirème et D. Casanova (vol. 1). Rapport deuxième phase de la recherche (vol.2)* (Paris: Ministère de l'équipement et du logement, July 1977) (CAC 19910319/030).

⁹⁷² “[...] cette absence de référents antérieurs à la pratique habitante fut justement ce qui permit (et obligea) chacun à créer ou reconstituer ses propres référents pour organiser son appartement et sa vie dans l’appartement, puisque le découpage a-modal de l’espace et sa complexité n’induisaient aucune orientation pré-définie de son aménagement et de son utilisation.” Lugassy, *Les réactions à l'immeuble Danièle Casanova à Ivry. Tome 1: Réactions avant l'aménagement. Tome 2 : Les processus d'appropriation*, II. 143.

⁹⁷³ See: "EPA de la ville nouvelle de Lille-Est, Pont de Bois, Concours d'architecture et de composition urbaine," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 293 (1973): 101-25. The project was also featured in: "Habitat intermédiaire: Individualisation du collectif où collectivisation de l'individuel?," 58-59.

⁹⁷⁴ The model was used for a project of 160 HLM dwelling units in Epinay (finished in 1976), and featured in: Pierre Quercy, "Programme Architecture Nouvelle," *Urbanisme* 152(1976), 74-75. The model was used for a project of 160 HLM dwelling units in Epinay (finished in 1976).

⁹⁷⁵ The project was featured in: *Ibid.*, 80-81.

commercial or collective facilities. Despite their differences, these projects were united not just by the support of the *Plan Construction* but by their essential ambition to create a dwelling environment that would promote a novel lifestyle in 1970s France, by combining the advantages of collective housing with those of the single-family home.



Figure 6.30: Model of housing project for Pont de Bois (Lille Est) by Alexis Josic, 1973 (Source: “Habitat intermédiaire: individualisation du collectif où collectivisation de l’individuel?” *Architecture Française* no. 391 (1975): 58).

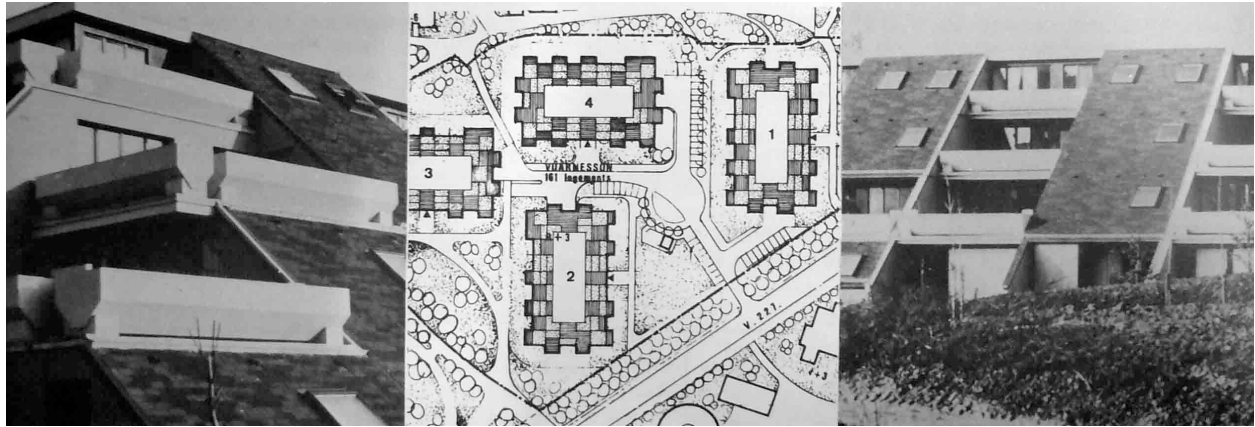


Figure 6.31: Pyramidal housing project by Philippe Vuarnesson and Atelier 3 (Source: Moley, Christian. *L'innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978* (Paris: Plan construction, Mai 1979)).



Figure 6.32: Hexagonal system for housing projects, nominated as 1974 *Modèle Innovation*, by Dominique Beau, Laszlo Feber and Michel Orluc (Source: CAC 19840342/324).

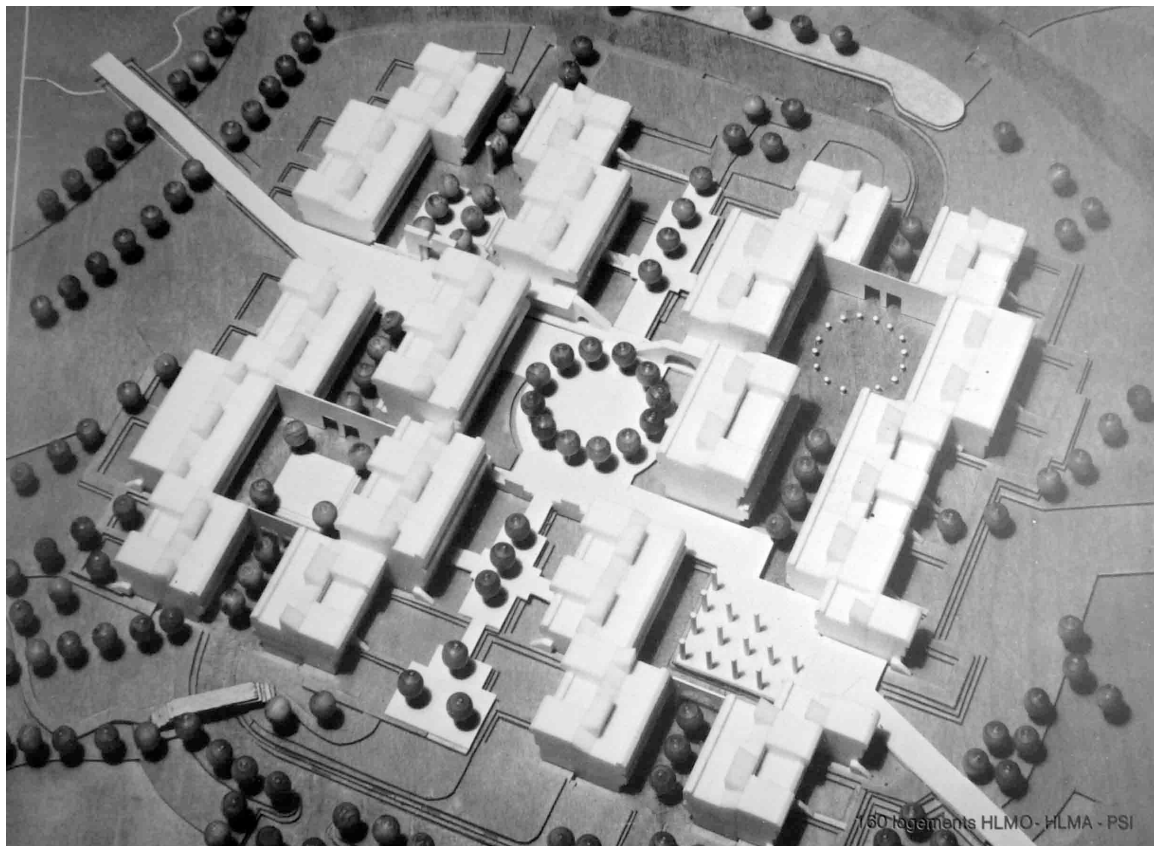
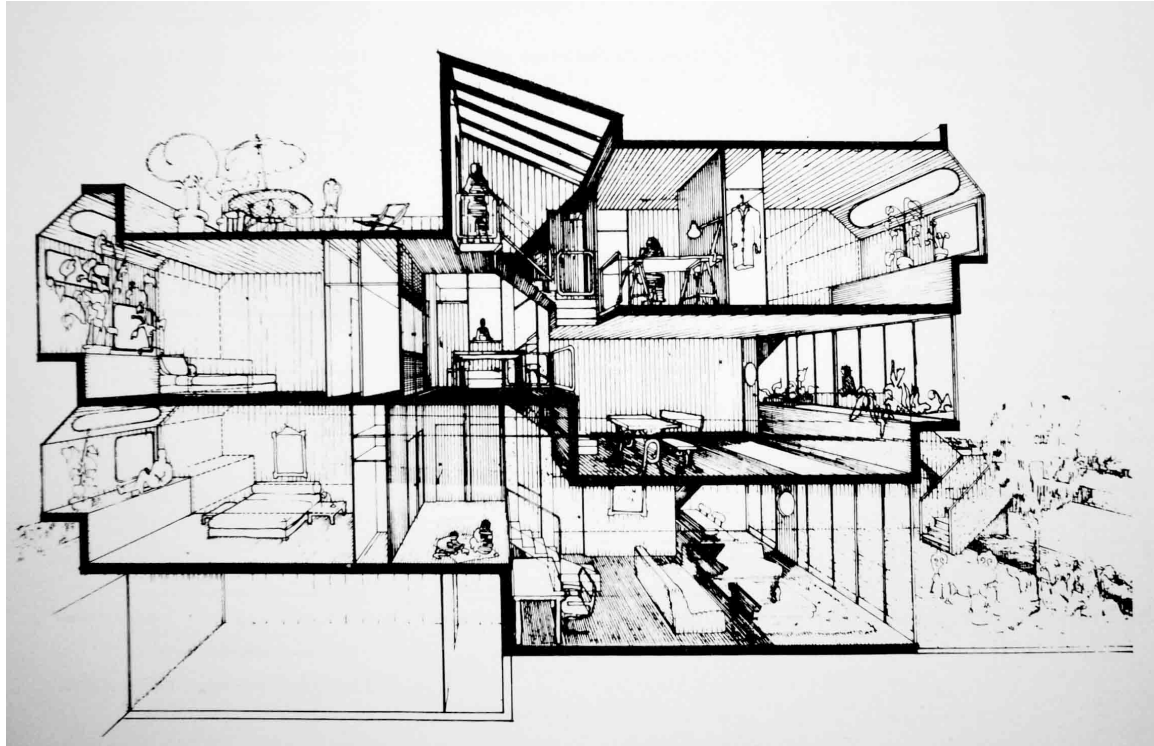


Figure 6.33: 1974 *Modèle Innovation* “Eurydice” by Bouchez, Morax & Montès (Source: CAA, Fonds DAU 133 IFA 42/2).

In all of these experiments the notion of “intermediary” remained ambiguous, both typologically and formally. But whether interpreted as stacked housing units, maisonnettes, semi-collective or semi-urban housing, the notion proved extremely productive for French housing production during the 1970s. So productive that Pierre Hervio, director inside the Ministry at the time, could write in 1975: “A new type of dwelling is born, intermediary between the collective and the individual. Multiple models confirm a return to an urbanism of human scale where the voids count as much as the volumes, where the monotony is systematically resisted, where a veritable urban life can develop itself.”⁹⁷⁶

As with the ideas of flexible dwelling, by the end of the decade however, these hopes would have already proven idle. In the end, the French did not buy the idea of *habitat intermédiaire*: the private roof terraces were not enough to compensate for the absence of a basement or an attic, and despite all the promises, the interior spaces often remained very similar to the standard apartment. Already in 1978, Christian Moley wrote: “In reality, the psycho-sociological observations have shown that the inhabitants of intermediary dwellings experience these like a second-best compared to the dream of the individual home. For them, this type of dwelling is good collective housing, but collective nevertheless.”⁹⁷⁷ These projects were in essence not more than a stepping stone to the single-family home, the yearly production of which officially eclipsed that of collective housing at mid-decade.

⁹⁷⁶ “Un nouveau type d’habitat est né, intermédiaire entre le collectif et l’individuel. A travers plusieurs modèles s’affirme un retour à un urbanisme à échelle humaine où les vides comptent autant que les pleins, où la monotonie est systématiquement combattue, où une véritable vie urbaine peut se développer.” In: *Modèles Innovation 1973-1974-1975* (CAC 19840342/324).

⁹⁷⁷ “En réalité, les observations psychosociologiques effectuées ont montré que les habitants des logements intermédiaires vivent ces derniers comme un pis aller par rapport au rêve de la maison individuelle. Pour eux, ce type d’habitat est du bon collectif, mais du collectif quand même.” Moley, *L’innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 22. See also: Jean-François Paoli, Claude Ricordeau, and François Faraut, *L’habitat intermédiaire: Etude sur les usages d’un logement à terrasse* (Paris: Institut pour le développement de la recherche appliquée en sciences sociales (IDRASS), 1978) (CDU).

Conclusion

The projects of Le Vaudreuil, Les Marelles, Evry, and Ivry have already been taken up in the French architectural canon. But they are only the tip of the iceberg of a more general production of the built environment in 1970s France: partly under aegis of the state and its many programs, hundreds such experimental projects were built all over France. What might sound unlikely today is that many builders and developers were keen on building them. They were because, so they themselves contended, “this type of product corresponds well to the aspirations, needs, and habits of a clientele coming in majority from collective housing blocks in urban areas.”⁹⁷⁸ More than just imitations of the more iconic projects discussed in this chapter, these projects make up the particular culture of building in France at this time: complex volumes of stacked units, hexagonal prisms, and pyramids, large terraces and roof decks, elaborate footprints, industrialized and prefabricated construction, architectural flexibility and modularity, inhabitant consultation and participation, these were all signifiers of the attempts - often genuine but rarely successful - to satisfy a passive user turned into an active consumer.

In opposition to the typical plans and standard cells of the first *grands ensembles*, the architectural diversification of housing in the 1970s was the expression of a more fundamental shift: housing was no longer a mass product to which all citizens should have a right; it was now also a highly complex and diverse consumer product defining the lifestyle of its distinguishing users. This ambiguity is what shaped the culture of an *architecture proliférante* as Christian Moley has coined it, or an *architecture-système* as J. Abram called it.⁹⁷⁹ Its moment was ultimately as intense as it was short-lived. The signs of change were already setting in at mid-decade and by the end of the 1970s its experiments had the sad allure of naivety, the last gasp of a generation trained in a dying Beaux-Arts system.

The social problematization of the *grands ensembles* had often been correlated with an aesthetic critique - their monotony, repetition, scale, mathematical rigor, and emptiness - and this conflation of architectural aesthetics and social agency had remained at the basis of the architectural experiments of the early 1970s. Industrialization, at least in the way architects and state planners had envisioned, was soon known to be a failure. The economic crisis had caused a dramatic cut in the scale of construction sites, and consequently, a return to more traditional building techniques. Expensive, investment-heavy experimentation was the obvious first victim. The single-family home in contrast proved to be remarkably recession-proof:⁹⁸⁰ its economic flexibility was far superior to the architectural flexibility of collective housing. Sociological expertise, which had been the lionized corollary of formal complexity and advanced industrialization, proved equally disappointing. After the intense cross-fertilization of architecture and urbanism with sociology in the period from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, the love affair was over. Hopes had been too high perhaps, and there was a general feeling of

⁹⁷⁸ “ce type de produit répond bien aux aspirations, besoins et habitudes d’une clientèle provenant en majorité d’immeubles collectifs du secteur urbain.” A director of a local social housing organization quoted in: Moley, *L’innovation architecturale dans la production du logement social: Bilan des opérations du Plan-construction, 1972-1978*, 25.

⁹⁷⁹ Abram and Gross, *Bilan des réalisations expérimentales en matière de technologie nouvelle: Plan Construction 1971-1975*, 30; Monnier, *L’architecture moderne en France, Tome 3: De la croissance à la compétition, 1967-1999*, 25.

⁹⁸⁰ See: Barjot, "Introduction."

disappointment about sociology's ascribed role as the vehicle for rejuvenating architecture and redeeming the societal position of the architect.⁹⁸¹ Sociologists - and their high-minded participatory processes - would increasingly be cast as obstruction to innovative design rather than direly-needed collaborators.

Despite their attention to urban form and the creation of an urban streetscape, the bulk of projects remained isolated from their urban context. The actual site and urban context of these experimental projects mattered little to the policy-makers in their Parisian offices. This would become an obvious critique by the end of the decade, when a new paradigm arose that was explicit about place, context, and the city as a project. Despite the rhetoric of *architecture proliférante* it was the emergence of urban traditionalism at mid-decade which constituted the real break.⁹⁸² One with modernism altogether, but also one with national programs and universal models. Instead, urban morphology, architectural type, symbolism, tradition, historicity, and the restoration of urban fabric became the concerns of the moment. They were formulated by a new set of actors entering the scene: a younger generation, trained at the reformed UPA's instead of the Beaux-Arts.⁹⁸³ Already in 1975, critical observers argued that the experiments and state policies in the wake of 1968 had chiefly failed to address the large-scale socio-economic dynamics of the French city:

*"The bourgeoisie continued to reclaim the city centers, the workers have been deported to the periphery in 'projects' where people are between themselves, well delimited by the 'functional' traffic system. There, what awaits you is 'integration,' 'the recreated,' the 'past recovered in the architecture of tomorrow.' While they gut the old city, where profitability - the power - demands replacement, they recreated - like a 'steak is reconstituted' (Baudrillard) - the past, the diversity, the continuity, the animated, the human, the power to the user by means of flexibility, and so on, in the 'project.' [...] Strict functionalism is renounced, laid aside the architecture and the urbanism by the proponents of flexibility. But is their problem not fundamentally similar?"*⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁸¹ Violeau, "Why and How 'To Do Science'? On the Often Ambiguous Relationship between Architecture and the Social Sciences in France in the Wake of May '68.": Violeau, *Les architectes et Mai* 68, 382-92.

⁹⁸² This periodization is generally agreed upon: Lucan, *Architecture en France, 1940-2000: Histoire et theories*; Daniel Pinson, "Formes architecturales et urbaines de l'habitat," in *Logement et habitat: L'état des savoirs*, ed. Marion Segaud, Catherine Bonvalet, and Jacques Brun (Paris: La Découverte, 1998); Christian Moley, "Doctrines architecturales et politiques du logement," in *Logement et habitat: L'état des savoirs*, ed. Marion Segaud, Catherine Bonvalet, and Jacques Brun (Paris: La Découverte, 1998). A 1975 issue of *Techniques & Architecture* on the theme "Architecture urbaine" already laid out a critique of what it coined the "ideology of proliferation" and presented instead a "return to urban morphology." See: Roland Castro, Abdelkrim Driss, Guy Duval et al., "1975: On repense à la ville," *Techniques et Architecture*, no. 306 (1975).

⁹⁸³ The project by Christian Portzamparc "Architecturer la ville" at the PAN competition of 1975 was exemplary of this new interest in the qualities of traditional urbanity. Other emerging influences were the Italian theories and projects of Rossi, Gregotti, and Aymonino, the architecture of James Stirling, and the urban morpho-typology of Panerai & Castex at the architecture school of Versailles.

⁹⁸⁴ "La bourgeoisie continue à récupérer le centre des villes, les travailleurs à être déportés en périphérie dans des ZUP où on se retrouve entre soi, bien délimités par le système 'fonctionnel' des circulations. Là vous attend 'l'intégration,' 'le reconstitué,' le 'passé retrouvé dans l'architecture de demain.' Pendant que l'on éventre la ville ancienne où la rentabilité, le pouvoir exige la substitution, l'on reconstitue - comme on 'reconstitue un beefsteak' (Baudrillard) - du passé, du diversité, de la continuité, de l'animé, de l'humain, le pouvoir à l'usager par la flexibilité, etc, dans la ZUP. (...) Le fonctionnalisme strict est renié, mis au banc de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme par les tenants de la flexibilité. Mais leur problématique n'est-elle pas fondamentalement semblable?" In: Edith Girard, "Enfin libres et soumis," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 174 (July - August 1974): 10-17, 11-12.

Such critiques - at the cusp of what would become the “urban architecture” of postmodernism - were informed by a neo-Marxist critique of consumption. Some critics considered giving inhabitants the choice of their dwelling as just another way for Capital to create surplus-value. About the architectural experiments with flexible and intermediary housing meant to increase the diversity of dwelling options, the same observer wrote: “To choose: this term summarized very well an entire thought about production and consumption: choosing, consuming, changing: this is the ‘scene’ of the user, the consumer. [...] This conception of the dialectic of consumption-production is that which Capital needs to impose; this in all the domains where its development has arrived at a threshold where there is nothing but abstract work and submission of all the agency of the production process of surplus-value.”⁹⁸⁵

More concretely, giving inhabitants “what they want” within the strict bounds already set by the state failed to stop the great leap forward of the single-family home. Neither did it stop the residential mobility patterns in which collective housing - first and foremost that of the *grands ensembles*, but also some of the more experimental kinds in the *villes nouvelles* - continued to degrade.

⁹⁸⁵ “Choisir: ce terme résume bien toute une pensée sur la production et la consommation; choisir, consommer, changer: voici la ‘scène’ de l’usager, du consommateur. (...) Cette conception de la dialectique consommation-production est celle que doit imposer le Capital; ce dans tous les domaines où son développement est arrivé à un seuil où il n’y a plus que travail abstrait et soumission de tous les agents au procès de production de plus-value.” Ibid., 14.

Epilogue

The ending of three decades of unprecedented growth - heralded by the oil crisis of 1973 - coincided with a heightened social and environmental awareness that transformed French urbanism during the second half of the 1970s. Concerns with the user were now translated into calls for an improved “quality of life” and the urgent need for “participation,” buzzwords of May 1968 that had slowly infiltrated into state planning, architectural culture, and urban policies, and which would come to mark the seven years of Giscard d’Estaing’s presidency (1974-1981). In 1975, the Commission Générale du Plan concluded that “an entire set of inhabitant aspirations has been ignored,” a situation for which it regarded the overwhelming popularity of the single-family home an obvious sign. The multi-year national plan it set out was to develop a participatory politics “resolutely oriented towards the satisfaction of citizens’ essential aspirations and a better quality of life.”⁹⁸⁶ This ambition culminated in president Giscard d’Estaing’s Charter of the Quality of Life of 1978.⁹⁸⁷

From the mid-1970s, French architecture and urbanism journals were flooded with articles and op-ed pieces on participation.⁹⁸⁸ Conferences on local democracy, user participation, and urban social movements followed in rapid pace.⁹⁸⁹ Even champions of 1960s futurism, like Michel Ragon, turned into advocates for a “democratization of architecture.”⁹⁹⁰ The renovation of Alma-Gare, a working-class neighborhood in Roubaix, became a national example of how inhabitant activism could lead to participatory urbanism - even when many of the activists turned out to belong to a small circle of middle-class architects and artists.⁹⁹¹ The participatory student

⁹⁸⁶ “Tout un ensemble d’aspirations des habitants a été ignoré. [...] une politique résolument orientée vers la satisfaction des aspirations essentielles des citoyens à une meilleure qualité de vie.” Rapport de la Commission de l’aménagement du territoire et du cadre de vie - Commission générale du Plan, 28 mars 1975 (CAC 19840342/195).

⁹⁸⁷ The *Charte de la Qualité de la Vie* was established by Giscard d’Estaing in February 1978. In April that year he changed the name of the Ministry of Housing and Planning into *Ministère de l’Environnement et du Cadre de Vie*. See: *Charte de la Qualité de la Vie* - Introduction de M. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, Président de la République française, février 1978 (CAC 19840342/211). On the architectural and urban policies of Giscard d’Estaing, see: Lengereau, *L’Etat et l’architecture, 1958-1981: Une politique publique?*, 257-446.

⁹⁸⁸ See for instance the journal *Urbanisme* during the second half of the 1970s: No. 153-154: *Dossier participation*, No. 157-158 (Article: “Participation: De l’information à l’autogestion”), No. 160 (Articles: “Aménagement et participation;” “Pratique de la participation et exercice de la démocratie”), No. 165-166 (Article: “La participation du public à l’aménagement du cadre de vie”), No. 170 (Article: “Equipements collectifs, politiques urbaines et planification sociale”), No. 173-174 (Article: “L’urbanisme, affaire de tous”).

⁹⁸⁹ For a list of French conferences, see: Dan Bernfeld, Marja Mayerl, and Roland Mayerl, *Architecture et urbanisme participatifs: Expériences françaises dans le context européen* (Venice: CIEDART, 1980), 37.

⁹⁹⁰ See: Michel Ragon, *L’architecte, le Prince et la Démocratie: Vers une démocratisation de l’architecture?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977). See also his forward to: Bernfeld, Mayerl, and Mayerl, *Architecture et urbanisme participatifs: Expériences françaises dans le context européen*.

⁹⁹¹ Miller, *The Representation of Place: Urban Planning and Protest in France and Great Britain, 1950-1980*.

housing designs of Lucien Kroll just across the border in Brussels became a staple reference in French architecture and urban planning culture.⁹⁹²

In 1976, participation was officially institutionalized in French urbanism through the obligatory involvement of local user associations in the planning process.⁹⁹³ Celebrated as the arrival of local democracy, this measure was only one of many: in realms as diverse as transport, education, health care, social security, and significant parts of the private sector, the new motto was to turn users, citizens and consumers into “active partners.”⁹⁹⁴ This conceptual transformation also implied, at least implicitly, a shift of responsibility away from the centralized state. While over the past decades it had been the basic precondition for the category of the user and had played a key role in the discourse of participation, that same state now seemed unconvinced of its superiority to provide for the user. New housing policies aimed to diminish direct state support by gradually replacing *aide à la pierre* or direct support in housing construction with *aide à la personne* and the further encouragement of individual homeownership.⁹⁹⁵ The government also abandoned the architectural standardization and normalization of dwelling units and ordered local studies to substitute national regulation. It imposed measures “to break the actual tendency of spreading certain urban stereotypes across the entire national territory, and to put an end to the urbanism of standards and models.”⁹⁹⁶ Contemporary observers noted how, as a result of the “urban movements to which some of those responsible had contributed,” the move away from state-led provision meant in fact the abandonment of the “operational conception of a universal inhabitant without particularities or memory.”⁹⁹⁷ Instead, locality and context became primary ingredients of urbanism - now dominated by projects that were coined “urban architecture” and whose neo-traditionalism signified the beginning of French postmodernism. The publication in 1977 of *Formes urbaines: de l'ilôt à la barre*, in which the authors Philippe Panerai, Jean-Charles Depaule and Jean Castex rehabilitated the traditional perimeter block as the basis for city building, was symbolic for the definitive denunciation of modern urbanism at this time.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹² See: "Atelier Lucien Kroll," *Architecture Française*, no. 401 (April 1977): 4-17; "Portrait de Lucien Kroll," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, no. 183 (January - February 1976): 69-79.

⁹⁹³ "Loi portant réforme de l'urbanisme," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 31 December 1976.

⁹⁹⁴ The *Comité consommation pour le VIIe Plan* (1976) mentioned this tendency. See: Louis Pinto, *La constitution du 'consommateur' comme catégorie de l'espace public* (Paris: Centre de sociologie urbaine, 1985), 106-07.

⁹⁹⁵ The housing reform was prepared by Raymond Barre, see: "Loi portant réforme de l'aide au logement," *Journal officiel de la République française*, 3 January 1977. See: Flamand, *Loger le peuple: Essai sur l'histoire du logement social en France*, 308-10.

⁹⁹⁶ "Briser la tendance actuelle qui consiste à répandre sur tout le territoire certains stéréotypes urbains, mettre un terme à l'urbanisme standard ou 'de modèle'" See: Pour l'amélioration du cadre de vie dans les villes: Les instruments d'une nouvelle politique urbaine, Rapport du groupe interministériel no. 28, CGP, 8 octobre 1975 (CAC 19840342/195)., 95.

⁹⁹⁷ "Dénoncée par les mouvements urbains auxquels certains responsables avaient contribué, la conception opératoire d'un habitant universel sans particularisme ou sans mémoire perd du terrain." André Sauvage, *De l'usager en architecture* (Rennes: Laboratoire de Recherches Economiques et Sociales, 1982), 33 (SHS).

⁹⁹⁸ Panerai, Castex, and Depaule, *Formes urbaines: De l'ilôt à la barre*.

The political culture during these years led France to enthusiastically embrace the arrival of postmodern architecture.⁹⁹⁹ State administrators and architects alike were quick in reinforcing the new political orientations with a social and aesthetic vilification of modernism. The Athens Charter became enemy of the state. At the influential conference “Pour une politique de l’architecture,” held in UNESCO’s headquarters in 1977, president Giscard d’Estaing decried the current state of architecture, which he argued “has been in a global crisis since the 1950s.”¹⁰⁰⁰ To him, its principal cause was the loss of a sense of urbanity in the process of rapid urbanization and economic development of the past decades. Consequently, “the art of the city has been lost, victim to the scalpel of technicians that have dissected it and fragmented it to the point of forgetting it.”¹⁰⁰¹ The role of the architect, as stipulated by a new law on architecture in 1977, was now to respond to the “profound needs” of inhabitants by becoming a “mediator who could make good use of constraints and project the aspirations of his contemporaries.”¹⁰⁰²

By the end of the decade, participation had been recast as both the antidote to modernism and the panacea for the city’s recovery from the violent interventions of modern architecture and urbanism. The demolition of modern housing projects, which began in the early 1980s, only affirmed the new polarity between a now reviled modernism and the imperative of a user-oriented (read: postmodern) urbanism (see figure 7.1). This perspective denied the complex agency of postwar modernism, its experiments in participation, and its search for the user. It also put up a smokescreen to hide the unfulfilled promises and potential pitfalls of participation.

⁹⁹⁹ See: Lengereau, *L’Etat et l’architecture, 1958-1981: Une politique publique*; Éric Lengereau, “Du coup d’arrêt de la circulaire Guichard au ‘cadre de vie’ giscardien,” *Urbanisme*, no. 322 (2002): 47-49.

¹⁰⁰⁰ See: Allocution prononcée par M. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing à l’occasion du symposium organisé par l’Académie d’Architecture ‘Pour une politique de l’architecture,’ Maison de l’UNESCO, 20 Octobre 1977 (CAC 19840342/323).

¹⁰⁰¹ “L’art de la cité s’est perdu, victime du scalpel des techniciens qui l’a disséqué et fragmenté jusqu’à l’oublier.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁰² “L’architecture n’est plus faite pour la satisfaction esthétique de quelques-uns, mais pour répondre aux besoins profonds des habitants. A l’écoute du public: L’architecte doit, plus que jamais, être un médiateur, tirant parti des contraintes, projetant les aspirations de ses contemporains [...]” Ibid.



Figure 7.1: The demolition of one of the towers at Les Minguettes in 1981 (Source: Georges Duby (ed), *Histoire de la France urbaine - Tome 5: La ville aujourd'hui* (Paris: Seuil, 1985) :352).

During this moment of reordering and effacing, the notion of the everyday was harnessed as harbinger of a novel mindset. When Michel De Certeau published *L'invention du quotidien* in 1980, its title ignored the fact that ever since Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne* of 1947, the everyday had been a domain of investigation for postwar intellectuals.¹⁰⁰³ De Certeau's work reframed the figure of the user by emphasizing the inherently creative agency of consumption, a move that was part of a broader intellectual turn with parallels in the trend of "history from below" and the development of cultural studies in the 1980s. Rather than the invention of the everyday however, De Certeau's analysis marked the re-discovery of a critical notion that had developed alongside postwar modernism and that had accompanied rather than succeeded the rapid urbanization and state-led modernization of postwar France.¹⁰⁰⁴ The same thing happened with lifestyle: cultural theorists of the postmodern were more than eager to equate it with the yuppie, punk, and alternative cultures of the 1980s and thus with the demise of the nuclear family and the "mass consumer." This enthusiasm with newness obscured the rapid

¹⁰⁰³ See: Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien: 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980). Its English translation in 1984 as "The practice of Everyday Life" did not retain this idea of invention.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See: Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*.

development of modern lifestyles at the heart of what was now coined the “Fordist regime” of the postwar.

By analyzing this “prehistory,” which tended to be forgotten in the enthusiasm of postmodern critique, this study has offered a broader history of modern urbanism in the context of the social and cultural change of the postwar. Beyond the straw dogs of both modernism and participation, it has shown the way in which the evolution of French modern urbanism revolved around a search for the user. Contrary to the prevailing notion that modern urbanism was based on a single architectural doctrine or a homogeneous culture of state expertise, the study has demonstrated its fundamentally *experimental* nature: urbanism in postwar France involved a changing network of professionals and experts studying not only its own production, but also the reception and consumption of what was built. The process of feedback between these realms - in which the domain of sociology had a preeminent role and supplied the primary language of mediation - precipitated the historical evolution of built form during the postwar decades in France.

Against the background of state modernization, rapid urbanization and a rising consumer society, the category of the user became an increasingly complex yet central question, which expanded and at the same time unsettled the bases of modern urbanism in France. The notion of user need in architectural modernism evolved from an objective, biological given to a complex problem for which sociologists were indispensable experts. Sociology was thus more to architecture and urbanism than the supplier of an imaginary, a vocabulary, or a fondness for social critique. While it proved impossible to fully instrumentalize sociological knowledge in architectural design, sociologists did provide architects with a much-needed entryway into the unknowable universe of architecture’s reception, use, consumption and change, in short, its social life.

If there was one notion in postwar France that allowed to address the social world beyond the controllable process of architectural and urban production, it was that of the user. This register of understanding had come into existence with invention of an anonymous, abstract user by the planning apparatus of the welfare state. And as this user, under the influence of a rapidly developing social welfare system and consumer culture, slowly transformed from a passive receiver of mass provisions to an creatively consuming participant, so it gave architects and planners the opportunity to engage with larger social and political dynamics of their designs. Many of the generally left-leaning critical architects continued to conflate social agency with architectural aesthetics - the result of a mindset inherited as much from interwar modernism as from the intellectual repository of May 1968. Despite good intentions however, they were unable to master the larger social and political dynamics of the postwar city. On the contrary, their architectural and urban proposals - regardless of how participatory or consumer-friendly they were - were at times even an instrumental factor in the gradual stigmatization of many modern housing and new town projects and the predominance of the suburban single-family home, so despised by the country’s intellectual elite.

This study was neither meant to redeem architectural modernism nor to denounce the promises of participatory planning. By refusing to answer directly to the overwhelming amounts of rhetoric and critique and instead placing them in their larger context, the study has proposed a historical framework for analyzing power in the postwar city, beyond the master narrative of authoritarian imposition and reactive contestation. My research has led me to question the

allusions of emancipation and empowerment that surround architects' and planners' search for the user. If it is true that "power can be taken, but not given,"¹⁰⁰⁵ then the institutionalization of participation since the 1970s hardly amounts to the distribution of power its advocates claim it to be.

While architecture and planning historians have over the past decades begun to revise the canonical understanding of modernism, one fundamental assumption has remained surprisingly intact: that of the opposition between "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to planning. What seemed intuitively certain was the way in which participation breaks with the technocratic nature of planning. And yet, as this study has shown, the transformation of the inhabitant into a user who actively participates in the organization of hers/his urban environment, entails the development of legitimate "user knowledge" and the continuing involvement of a group of experts ambivalently positioned between civil society and the state. Seemingly opposed to technocracy - the belief that technology is independent from politics and can make it redundant by offering a neutral tool in policy-making - participation is in fact part of a socio-technical regime that fundamentally confounds any opposition between expertise and emancipation. By showing how concern with the user traverses what have previously been understood as fundamentally opposing approaches to the city - modern, authoritarian and technocratic planning versus participatory design and local decision-making - the study calls to dismantle the basic notions of "top-down" and "bottom-up" as they continue to shape urban debates today.

Finally, this has been an inquiry into the agency of architecture in society. If today we seem to have lost an idea of what this once rather straightforward notion means, "society" has in turn lost the interest of architects. To the profession's mainstream, talking of the political and the social dimension of architecture can seem if not retrograde then at least curiously discomfiting. Yet, at the same time, the past decade has also seen a slow but certain resurgence of architectural interest in this uncertain world that exceeds it. Some issues have been resolutely placed back on the agenda, be it as questions now rather than imperatives: What is and can be the role of design in society? How does architecture have an effect, socially or politically - beyond the bounds defined by its own means of production? What is essentially the social, political, cultural, and environmental relevance of architecture today?

These contemporary questions can not be dissociated from the historical connections of architecture with modernism, socialism, national development, welfare, social democracy, and the modern state. Twentieth-century architecture and urban planning have to a great extent been shaped - both directly and indirectly - by the social programs of a pervasive welfare state. Architects, planners, government officials, and reformers of all kinds have posited their projects as a vehicle for social change - be it rarely revolutionary and not often always progressive. If and how architecture played this role and what its actual social repercussions were, remain in many cases nevertheless far from clear.

At a moment when the social and political relevance of architecture is being fundamentally questioned, this study thus provides a new perspective for re-thinking its critical agency in our contemporary world. By revealing the ways in which architects and planners have taken into

¹⁰⁰⁵ Familiar quote by Gloria Steinem.

account the uses and users of what they produced over two decades of phenomenal social and cultural change, the study has demonstrated that architecture in France was situated in between *metaphoric* and *actual* transfers of agency between experts and users. It has shown furthermore that architectural knowledge cannot be treated like a closed realm internal to a single discipline, but that its vitality depends on the way it engages with foreign domains of knowledge - in this case, the social sciences. As this story moves beyond that of modernist naivety and the impasse of postmodern critique, it allows us to understand the *situated agency of architecture* in its wider context. In short, it tells us something about the historical and theoretical relationships between architecture and human agency. And therefore, if we exist in between the making of our environment and that environment's making of us, a greater awareness of this most basic of relationships can only make us realize we are often much freer in the world than how it makes us feel.

List of Acronyms

CEDER: Centre d'études des équipements résidentiels (Study Center for Residential Facilities)

CERFI: Centre d'études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles (Center for Institutional Studies, Research and Formation)

CGP: Commission générale du Plan (General Planning Commission)

CIAM: Congrès international d'architecture moderne (International Congress of Modern Architecture)

CSTB: Centre scientifique et technique du bâtiment (Scientific and Technical Center for Construction)

CSU: Centre de sociologie urbaine (Center of Urban Sociology)

DATAR: Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régional (Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action)

DGRST: Délégation générale de la recherche scientifique et technique (General Delegation for Scientific and Technical Research)

ENA: Ecole nationale d'administration (National School of Administration)

ENPC: Ecole nationale des Ponts et chaussées (National School of Bridges and Roads)

ENSBA: Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts)

GCVN: Groupe centrale des villes nouvelles (Central Group of New Towns)

INED: Institut national d'études démographiques (National Institute for Demographic Studies)

INSEE: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

IUP: Institut d'urbanisme de l'Université de Paris (Institute for Urbanism of the University of Paris)

HBM: Habitations à bon marché (inexpensive housing)

HLM: Habitations à loyer modéré (moderate rent housing)

MJC: Maison des jeunes et de la culture (youth and cultural center)

MRU: Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme (Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism)

SCIC: Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse des dépôts (Central Real Estate Company of the Caisse des dépôts)

SDAURP: Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région de Paris (Regional Urban Plan for Paris)

UIOF: Union international des organismes familiaux (International Union of Familial Organizations)

UNAF: Union nationale des associations familiales (National Union of Family Associations)

ZUP: Zone à urbaniser par/en priorité (zone for immediate urbanization)

ZAC: Zone d'aménagement concerté (zone for concerted planning)

Bibliographic Note

Since the 1980s, the large housing estates or *grands ensembles* have been portrayed as the main cause of France's suburban crisis. After decades of cosmetic rehabilitation and heightened social tension, large-scale demolition is now the order of the day. Historians have therefore been astonished that "a society would undertake the destruction of a generation of buildings of which it had not even understood the making."¹⁰⁰⁶ Postwar modern urbanism is nevertheless far from being a virgin domain of scholarly inquiry in France. Its historical development has been accompanied by a mass of social scientific studies and critical assessments, often in tune with an increased social problematization. While this involvement has enriched the field of urban studies and sociology over decades, it has left the history of urbanism itself as a highly fragmented domain of scholarly interest. The disparity in disciplinary approaches to the topic - ranging from the intellectual history of architectural modernism to the political, social and urban histories of which it is a part - has until now provided little opportunity for broader analytical histories.

Historians have approached postwar urbanism in France first of all from the perspective of social housing provision: the *grands ensembles*, which represent the bulk of production during the decades of unprecedented urban and economic growth after WWII, were meant to address the national housing shortage and to provide workers with decent, modern housing.¹⁰⁰⁷ National modernization has been the corollary focus of interest. Christine Mengin has emphasized how during the 1950s and 1960s, the *grands ensembles* embodied France's industrial ambitions and became prominent tools of economic and regional development.¹⁰⁰⁸ Annie Fourcaut has shown that for state planners and policy-makers they were tools of modernization shaped by the will to overcome the perceived ills of Paris' interwar suburbs.¹⁰⁰⁹ And Rosemary Wakeman has used the case of Toulouse in the French provinces to show how the impetus of modernization, originating in French state bureaucracy and corporate capitalism, found local reception and was changed through local negotiation.¹⁰¹⁰ In one of the few broader cultural histories, Marc Desportes and Antoine Picon have situated French urbanism in its larger historical context of territorial planning. They have shown that the postwar modernization of the French territory - in which the *grands ensembles* were a key element - was the outcome of a centuries-long process that subjected the concrete experiences of space to abstraction and representation.¹⁰¹¹

¹⁰⁰⁶ "[...] il est singulier qu'une société entreprenne de détruire des bâtiments dont elle n'a même pas compris la genèse" See: Annie Fourcaut, "Introduction," in *Faire l'histoire des grands ensemble: Bibliographie 1950-1980*, ed. Annie Fourcaut and Frédéric Dufaux (Lyon: Editions ENS, 2003).

¹⁰⁰⁷ See for instance: Flamand, *Loger le peuple: Essai sur l'histoire du logement social en France*; Lefebvre, Mouillart, and Occhipinti, *Politique du logement, cinquante ans pour un échec*.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Mengin, "La solution des grands ensembles."

¹⁰⁰⁹ Fourcaut, "Les premiers grands ensembles en région parisienne: Ne pas refaire la banlieue?."

¹⁰¹⁰ Rosemary Wakeman, *Modernizing the Provincial City: Toulouse, 1945-1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁰¹¹ Desportes and Picon, *De l'espace au territoire: L'aménagement en France XVIe - XXe siècles*.

Bruno Vayssière has been one of the first to study the architecture of the *grands ensembles*.¹⁰¹² He situated it in a strain of French modernism that was ideologically linked to the centralized state during the Reconstruction period (1940-1954), more particularly to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism. While in quantitative terms the achievements of this period are slight when compared to the mass production that started in the mid-1950s, the authoritarian wartime government and the Ministry's centralized, technocratic reconstruction projects have been understood as the essential basis for the subsequent production of the *grands ensembles* and their "statistical architecture." This period, which is now relatively well-known thanks to the landmark urban historical study by Danièle Voldman,¹⁰¹³ has thus set the tone for understanding French postwar urbanism.

This situation has created a peculiar void of knowledge on the banal modernisms of the postwar French city. While some scholars continue to dismiss architectural form as an insignificant side-product of national policy-making, those that do acknowledge its importance have tended to locate the moment of invention long before their actual proliferation over the French territory. In revising the widespread assumption that postwar urbanism equals the mere degradation and mediocre realization of interwar CIAM modernism, scholars have excavated various precedents and experiments, going as far as aerial photography, colonial ethnography, and 19th-Century Saint-Simonianism to explain postwar urbanism.¹⁰¹⁴ By focusing on formal precedents and genealogies, these existing accounts have failed to address their design and transformation *during the time they were actually built*.¹⁰¹⁵

The dominant narrative has thus been a succession of three episodes: a period of architectural invention, followed by one of massive construction, and finally, by one of contested inhabitation, social problematization and urban crisis. The few attempts at a historical overview of postwar urbanism confirm this story, which is ultimately based on the dichotomy between technocratic production "from above" and subsequent social contestation "from below."¹⁰¹⁶ While sociological studies have undoubtedly played a key role in this conviction,¹⁰¹⁷ historians like

¹⁰¹² Bruno-Henri Vayssière, *Reconstruction, déconstruction : le hard French, ou, l'architecture française des trente glorieuses* (Paris: Picard, 1988).

¹⁰¹³ Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique*.

¹⁰¹⁴ See for example: Terranova, "French State Vernacular: Les grands ensembles and Non-conformist Modernism, 1930-1973"; Haffner, "Social Space Revolution: Aerial Photography, Social Science, and Urban Politics in Postwar France".

¹⁰¹⁵ Nicholas Bullock for example has clearly distinguished the architectural qualities of the 1949 and 1950 MRU experimental competitions from the in his eyes mediocre mass production of the *grands ensembles* that followed. See: Bullock, "Developing prototypes for France's mass housing programme, 1949-53."

¹⁰¹⁶ See: Duby, ed. *Histoire de la France urbaine, tome 5: La ville aujourd'hui*; Pierre Peillon, *Utopie et désordre urbains: Essai sur les grands ensembles d'habitation* (La Tour d'Aigues: Aube, 2001).

¹⁰¹⁷ For example, a landmark sociological study on the social repercussions of modernist urban renewal: Coing, *Rénovation urbaine et changement social l'îlot n° 4 (Paris 13e)*. Sociologists like Manuel Castells have subsequently placed the motor of urban change and the shift away from modern urbanism in grass-roots contestation. See: Castells, Cherki, Godard et al., *Crise du logement et mouvements sociaux urbains: Enquête sur la région parisienne*.

Antoine Prost, who contrasted the massive construction of *grands ensembles* during the 1960s with the “revolt of the users” during the 1970s, further galvanized it.¹⁰¹⁸

Recent scholarship has nevertheless begun to critically reassess this view by giving more room to the complex interplay between invention, production, and inhabitation. Jean-Noel Blanc has shown that the *grands ensembles* were not only the result of a conjuncture of interests and a convergence of economic rationality and social modernization, but were essentially based on an ideological consensus that was as precarious as it was momentary.¹⁰¹⁹ The dissertation of Gwenaëlle Legoullon promises to offer a first comprehensive study of the period 1954-1962, combining an analysis of national policy-making with local case studies.¹⁰²⁰ Rather than architectural utopias or product of a single ideology, the *grands ensembles*, so she argues, are the outcome of a complex process of national policy-making and local politics that entailed not only strong ideas, but also many hesitations. Thibault Tellier’s study is one of the first to continue the social and cultural history of modern housing projects into the mid-1970s.¹⁰²¹ As already had been suggested in a previous article by Annie Fourcaut, his study shows how their construction was accompanied and followed by concerns to transform them into successful neighborhoods.¹⁰²² Brian Newsome has argued that the authoritarian and technocratic planning system inherited from the wartime government gave voice to French citizens and created openings for participation more than a decade before May 1968.¹⁰²³ Together with a series of monographic studies,¹⁰²⁴ this new research has demonstrated in different ways that the *grands ensembles* constituted a societal experiment, involving a network of actors focused not only on their financing, conception and production, but also concerned with the social life in these environments once built.

Nevertheless, architectural and urban design has rarely been considered as an integral part of this experimental process. Architectural innovation and experimentation has instead been located in

¹⁰¹⁸ Prost, "La périodisation des politiques urbaines françaises depuis 1945: Le point de vue d'un historien."

¹⁰¹⁹ Jean-Noel Blanc, “Le consensus sur les grands ensembles, ou le grand malentendu” and “La politique des grands ensembles après 1958: le temps des ruptures” in François Tomas, Jean-Noël Blanc, Mario Bonilla et al., *Les grands ensembles : une histoire qui continue* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2003): 43-136.

¹⁰²⁰ Gwenaëlle Legoullon, "La genèse de la politique des grands ensembles, 1945-1962" (Sorbonne, 2010).

¹⁰²¹ Tellier, *Le temps des HLM 1945-1975: La saga urbaine des Trente Glorieuses*.

¹⁰²² Fourcaut, "L'animation dans le béton: Autogérer les grands ensembles?."

¹⁰²³ In the marketing strategies of the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism (MRU) during the late 1950s Brian Newsome sees a clear shift from Vichy-style propaganda to novel forms of consultation, which he understands as a form of “participation.” The Ministry’s early marketing studies find parallels in the development of sociological theories of inhabitant participation in newly planned residential neighborhoods, as well as the national housing exhibitions like the *Salon des arts ménagères*. While these cases successfully illustrate the increasing concern of the government with inhabitants or users, they are less convincing as cases of a “participatory planning.” Like Nicole Rudolph, Brian Newsome relies on the 1959 “referendum apartment” as a central case in the changing architectural and urban policies of the French state. Newsome, "The Struggle for a Voice in the City: The Development of Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in France, 1940-1968"; Brian William Newsome, *French Urban Planning, 1940-1968: The Construction and Deconstruction of an Authoritarian System* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

¹⁰²⁴ See for instance: Sylvain Taboury and Karine Gougerot, *Billardon: Histoire d'un grand ensemble* (Paris: Créaphis, 2004); Judith Chapoulie, "La création du grand ensemble de Massy-Antony (1956-1972)" (Master's Thesis, Paris 1, 1998); Sandra Sagaspe, "Genèse de la construction et étude de la population initiale du grand ensemble de la Grande Borne à Grigny et Viry-Châtillon" (Master's Thesis, Paris 1, 1997).

the artist, utopian and paper projects of the 1960s.¹⁰²⁵ In her study on the modernization of domestic space, Nicole Rudolph has nevertheless shown that while the standard apartment unit of the *grands ensembles* was largely conceived during Reconstruction, it became subject to architectural reform in subsequent decades under the influence of perceived inhabitant dissatisfaction.¹⁰²⁶ Most importantly, recent studies have shown that the *villes nouvelles*, France's official new town project during the late 1960s and 1970s, provided an opportunity for large-scale architectural experiment.¹⁰²⁷

What has seriously impeded further exploration of this period is an academic division of labor treating *grands ensembles* and *villes nouvelles* as isolated types of development and thus as separate topics of historical inquiry. While some recent studies have begun to challenge the opposition between these urban developments¹⁰²⁸ - which share the same historical moment and cultures of expertise - this treatment nevertheless persists practically in the way this history is being written. French historians are either scholars of the *grands ensembles* or of the *villes nouvelles*.¹⁰²⁹ This situation threatens to obscure the continuities and ambivalences of state action in the built environment during the 1960s and 1970s.

Based on this wealth of existing studies, my study has approached the *grands ensembles* and the *villes nouvelles* as both social *and* architectural experiments in light of a broader cultural shift in French urbanism. Using local and national government archives (of the Ministry of Construction, the *Commission générale du Plan*, and other state planning bodies), governmental reports (preserved at the *Centre de documentation de l'urbanisme*), sociological studies, and architectural sources (professional journals and the national architecture archives), the study combines approaches from architectural history, cultural studies, and social history. Ultimately, it offers a material and cultural history of how "concrete" and "knowledge" meet in the postwar French city.

¹⁰²⁵ See: Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970*; Sadler, *The Situationist City*.

¹⁰²⁶ Rudolph, "At Home in Postwar France: The Design and Construction of Domestic Space 1945-1975".

¹⁰²⁷ As part of the governmental research program mentioned below, see for instance the study: Korganow, Meehan, and Orillard, *L'interaction ville- équipement en ville nouvelle: Reception et adaptation de la formule d'équipement socio-culturel intégré*.

¹⁰²⁸ See: Fourcaut and Vadelorge, eds., *Villes nouvelles et grands ensembles*.

¹⁰²⁹ On the one hand, the history of the *grands ensembles* in France is the subject of a team led by Annie Fourcaut at the *Centre d'histoire sociale* (CS) in Paris. On the other hand, the history of the *villes nouvelles* has been the subject of a large-scale state-sponsored collective research project, the *Programme interministériel d'histoire et d'évaluation des villes nouvelles* (PHEVN).

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AN ENSBA: Archives nationales (Paris), Fonds Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts

AJ⁵² (974, 977, 978, 983, 1030-1040, 1043, 1130, 1131)

CAA: Centre d'Archives d'Architecture du XXe siècle, Institut français d'architecture (Paris)

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CDC/SCIC: Caisse des Dépôts, Fonds Société centrale immobilière de la Caisse (Paris)

(Only a fragment of the archives is available for consultation)

Folder ALFA

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AD Val d'Oise: Archives départementales du Val d'Oise

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MP Sarcelles: Maison du patrimoine de Sarcelles:

Deposit of photos by Jacques Windenberger

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