

# **Towards a definition of socially oriented Urban Living Labs**

**S<sup>o</sup>H<sub>o</sub>L<sup>a</sup><sub>b</sub>**

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First Version: 01/06/2019, Final Version: 23/03/20

ISBN 9789464007527

D/2020/SoHoLab, uitgever

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This document was produced the SoHoLab research team consisting of Architecture Urbanisme Société: Savoirs Enseignement Recherche (AUSser CNRS 3329); Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano (PoliMi, DASTU); and Cosmopolis, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, Agence National de la Recherche (ANR, France), Innvoris (Brussels, Belgium), Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR, Italy) under grant agreement No 693443.

Refer to this report as:

Aernouts, N., Maranghi, E. & Ryckewaert, M. (Eds.) (2020). *Towards a definition of socially-oriented LivingLabs*, Brussels: Soholab, 163 p.

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Research team:



Regional partners:



Local partners:



European and regional co-financing:



# **Towards a definition of socially oriented Urban Living Labs**

*Nele Aernouts, Elena Maranghi and Michael Ryckewaert (Editors)*



*This report is dedicated to the memory of Andrei Feraru  
whose invaluable contribution to this project ended too soon.*



# About

Already since the 1970s, internationally, the regeneration of large-scale modernist social housing estates has been on the research and policy agenda. What more can we say about this theme, after almost 50 years of regeneration practices?

Although social and spatial problems in large-scale social estates are inextricably linked, in the past decades, they have often been tackled independently from one another. Throughout Europe, various spatial policies have been deployed to regenerate estates. The demolition of high-rise buildings, the introduction of new typologies as part of a social mix rationale, spatial connections of public spaces with surroundings and the inclusion of social and commercial facilities are well-known examples of spatial policies. Participation programs associated to these interventions have been mainly based on mere information or consultation processes, putting local actors and habitants in a passive role instead of considering them as active agents. Recently, the social innovation and collective empowerment perspective is gaining ground in community work in Europe. Social organizations, self-organized collectives and grassroots movements increasingly deploy collective strategies to overcome socially exclusive conditions, as a complement to state-organized forms of governance. As a result participatory forms of governance in urban policy involving third sector-organizations are on the rise. In the UK, France and regions such as Brussels, associations and social housing organizations are encouraged to support social cohesion projects, social entrepreneurship and tenant boards. Such local organizations promote social mobility from within and more positive representations of the neighborhood. However, they often lack the spatial knowledge and means to impact top-down planning processes that shape the social estates.

The SoHoLab project therefore aims to develop an integrated approach towards the regeneration of large-scale social housing estates in Europe. Through a Living Lab approach, the project wants to address (1) the socially innovative potential of involving social housing residents in the regeneration of their housing environment, (2) embedded and/or ethnographic research as a tool to gather in-depth knowledge of local living conditions and to contribute to the construction of a counterhegemonic image of the neighbourhoods considered and (3) the capacity of collaborative research and planning, bonding and bridging efforts to unite residents, neighbourhood inhabitants, public housing organizations, spatial practitioners and cultural, educational and social organizations around the subject of regeneration.

This approach is developed, tested and refined on the basis of a

retrospective evaluation of existing projects in Paris; of action research in an ongoing LivingLab experience in Milan; and new LivingLabs in Brussels and Paris. The regeneration of large-scale social housing estates has been an important policy topic in Paris, which deals with a long history of conflicts in and on housing estates. The 3 cases selected for a retrospective analysis (Saint Martin in Longjumeau; La Fosse in Fresnes; Jean Bouin in Taverny) have high policy relevance, as they are rare past examples of collaborative approaches in Paris focusing on the sustainable redesign of public space in social estates. The Milan case builds on the experiences of a local observatory established by PoliMi in 2013 in the San Siro neighbourhood. By opening up a space in the neighbourhood, PoliMi has put in place an action-research project focused on the construction of alternative representations of the neighbourhood and on the promotion of local actions aimed at fostering local change. The focal area of the Brussels case is Peterbos, a large social estate at the fringes of the region, equally characterized by important social-spatial challenges. The diversity of cases results in a comparative and mutually beneficial approach: the retrospective analysis of the Paris cases offers important input to guide the consolidation path of the ongoing Italian experience and both give fruitful elements for developing and valorising such practices in Brussels.

This second investigation deals with a conceptualisation of socially-oriented LivingLabs for the respective contexts of Paris, Milan and Brussels. Each city develops its own methodological framework for LivingLabs, informed by its context and the disciplinary backgrounds of the researchers. Nevertheless 5 main areas for action can be delineated: 1. Addressing a lack of power and representation of underprivileged populations; 2. Applying 'in situ' research approaches; 3. Rethinking collaboration in participatory planning; 4. Gaining insight in the 'use' of space in large-scale estates; 5. Reframing the role of the university.

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# Towards a definition of socially oriented LivingLabs

## **This report**

Explorative research on the spatial, territorial, institutional and planning dimensions of the regeneration of large-scale social housing estates (as part of the first SoHoLab investigation) revealed that territorial planning instruments, such as the city and neighborhood contracts gain increasing importance. However, in the areas under study, they failed to offer integrated and structural tools for regeneration (Milan, Brussels), or to make up for a participatory deficit identified in large-scale social estates (Brussels, Paris).

In this report we explore the potential of a Living Lab approach in order to deal with these deficiencies. By doing, we aim to contribute to developing customized approaches for setting up, questioning and/or elaborating an Urban Living Lab (ULL) approach in the context of the regeneration of large-scale social estates and underprivileged contexts in general. The literature review is illustrated with several existing foreign and domestic best practice examples of Living Lab cases in underprivileged areas. It therefore revisits literature on participatory planning, co-design and Urban Living Labs.

In the context of the SoHoLab research, this is the result of the second investigation (T2.2) that intends to guide the development of a tailored methodological framework for Urban Living Labs. Each university partner adopts different research angles, in relationship to its own institutional and planning context (Paris (Longjumeau, Taverny, Fresnes), Milan (San Siro) and Brussels (Peterbos)), stage of the Living Lab and according to its own research disciplines.

## **Living Labs, user-centered ecosystems**

According to the definition developed by ENoLL (European network of Living Labs), "Living Labs refer to user-centred, open innovation ecosystems based on a systematic user co-creation approach integrating research and innovation processes in real life communities and settings". Living labs "place the citizen at the centre of innovation" in order to "better mould the opportunities offered by new ICT concepts and solutions to specific needs and aspirations of local contexts, cultures, and creative potentials."

Three main predecessors of Living Labs (LL) in Europe could be

identified: the Scandinavian cooperative and participatory design movement of the 1960s and 70s, the European social experiments with IT in the 1980s, and the Digital City projects from the 1990s, showing the strong relationship between technology, innovation and LL. Coming from the United States – originally developed in MIT – the concept of LL however literally appeared in Europe by the 2000s, when several cities were involved in the “Intelligent Cities – Intelcities” (2002-05) project. It could be stated that LL have become popular in Europe because of the character of multi-stakeholder active participation. Such participation has been considered extremely relevant in the latest years to develop social innovation and to tackle contemporary challenges in urban contexts.

According to ENoLL, central to the Living Lab approach are the following characteristics: 1) user involvement and empowerment; 2) real-life setting; 3) multi-stakeholder activities; 4) multi-method approach; 5) co-creation. As could be noticed, these are very general characteristics, which can include a wide variety of different practices, contexts and actors.

### **Urban Living Labs**

Steen & van Bueren (2017) state that “Urban” Living Labs distinguish themselves from Living Labs, by unanimously displaying an explicit territorial focus. This focus is geared to finding local sustainable solutions addressing wicked problems that tend to be global, such as climate change and energy transition. The use of cities or parts of cities as laboratories is in line with the current emphasis on the city as the impactful governance level for economic development (Glaeser, 2011; Barber, 2013; Katz & Wagner, 2014) and for sustainable development (van Bueren et al., 2012; Bulkeley & Betsill, 2013). It also responds to calls for citizen empowerment (Saurugger, 2010; Fung, 2015).

However, so far Urban Living Lab approaches have rarely addressed deprived contexts and diverse communities comprising immigrants, elderly, youngsters and socially deprived groups and individuals. In addition, the potentiality represented by the relationship with co-design and participatory planning still remains underdeveloped in research paths. In order to study the potential of Living Labs in response to deficiencies of contemporary planning instruments, the development of a tailored methodological ULL framework is crucial.

### **From technical, over socially oriented ULLs, towards new understandings of participatory planning**

By revisiting the participatory planning literature, Serge Wachter of the ENSAPLV university partners concludes that former participatory

approaches in underprivileged areas in Greater Paris and France in general, amongst others through the PNRU and the city contracts, have insufficiently tackled the involvement of inhabitants in decision-making processes related to regeneration policies. In the French context, in which the authority of the State is strongly present, frequently the rhetoric of participation does not correspond to the reality. The prospect of participation is strongly dependent on the willingness of the Mayor, or the Presidents of inter-communalities and representatives of the State, to share their power amongst “laymen”. This has led academics to denounce such trajectories as ‘une participation impossible’. Wachter puts forward the LL as a possible answer to this participatory deficit. He conceptualizes LLs as promising tools for the development of “tactical urbanism” interventions: grounded, localized, grassroots tools for regeneration. Wachter suggests it might be seen as an instrument to reach the ultimate state of participation, as it includes the notion of empowerment, which could lead to a radical reform of the City Policy.

The 4 LivingLabs discussed by Nadya Labied, Cycle Terre, Caen la Mer Habitat, Lorraine and the Casemate, focus on LLs for sustainable urban development in social housing. What marks these initiatives is the notable role of “promoters”: young architects, who have a strong environmental and social conscience, and an interest of involving construction actors in the design phase; and inhabitants in the construction phase. Starting from a rather technical aim, an environmentally sustainable regeneration through the use of natural materials or recuperation, the architects develop socially-oriented Living Labs as enablers of a successful implementation of these aims.

By searching for overlaps between LLs, their own on-field experience and analyses of similar experiences such as the Neighborhood Labs, Community Hubs and New Welfare Spaces in the context of Milan, Italy, Elena Maranghi and Francesca Cognetti of the Politecnico University partners move away from technical approaches and try to define the main characteristics of socially-oriented Urban Living Labs in deprived contexts. Such localized social Labs, developed by third sector organizations, appear to be important spaces for inclusion and welfare, in a context marked by scarcity of structural public funding. From the 90s onwards, through planning instruments like the Neighbourhood Contracts, information and consultation processes developed by public institutions made place for a more active and direct role for communities. Amongst others, the Neighborhood Contracts introduced Neighbourhood Labs in 5 public housing neighbourhoods of the city, informing and communicating with residents about regeneration processes. From an integrated approach, accompanying physical interventions of the Neighbourhood Contract, they became permanent territorial devices to promote social cohesion. As

such they tried to push their role as 'platforms of co-design', constantly mediating between 'institutions and local contexts'. Similarly, New Welfare Spaces are part of a common tendency in local welfare policies, which are opening up to the active participation of local organizations and citizen in co-producing solutions to their needs. The two cases of Community Hubs and New Welfare Spaces show a common focus on opening up spaces as devices to implement and foster participation. They also illustrate that in a context marked by scarcity, an "Urban Living Lab like tool" can become an important device for developing processes that strengthens local knowledge, competences and community welfare.

In their analysis, Maranghi and Cognetti refer to the work of Yvonne Franz (2015) in order to link some tendencies observed in the cases to a more general definition of socially oriented Living Labs: 'a supporting instrument in those processes of connecting research with civic society, involving residents to gain knowledge at the neighbourhood level' (Franz, 2015). In respect to a technical approach to LLs, social LLs focus on processes and 'spaces of encounter': experimental environments where researchers and users meet to go to a non-predefined outcome. Although Franz points at the importance of the involvement of underrepresented voices and issues, it still remains difficult to see how they can be involved in 'a more open and inclusive process' (Franz, 2015). Maranghi and Cognetti therefore put forward some key points observed in their own experience in Mapping San Siro, that question ULL approaches in underprivileged contexts: 1) declining co-creation as co-research for co-learning and co-design; 2) developing an innovation ecosystem focused on the quality of processes by strengthening local actors to appropriate research tools; 3) creating cross-boundary arenas in which diverse actors and organizations interact with a specific role through 'knowledge brokers' (Concilio, 2016) situated in space and time. As such the socially-oriented LivingLab becomes close to action research, also in respect to the potential role of universities in developing a rooted, long-term approach both combining research and action.

Whereas the university partners of Politecnico University try to develop a new definition of socially oriented Livinglabs, the university partners of VUB especially focus on methods and tools to rethink participatory regeneration in the context of large-scale social estates. Moreover, their Living Lab is envisaged as an action research combining methods of anthropology and novel participatory approaches to architecture and planning, with the aim of developing more inclusive regeneration practices. Nele Aernouts and Jeanne Mosseray argue that participatory planning approaches have had a long and difficult relationship with the regeneration of large-scale social estates. Whereas the collaborative planning paradigm has contributed to a stronger focus

on institutional stakeholders in participatory regeneration practices, amongst others on the gap between technical and social services, time-limited and project-specific partnerships, it has insufficiently dealt with power relationships between those institutions and inhabitants. 'Antagonistic' participatory planning approaches, aiming to socially and politically challenge governmentality on the other hand, are not evident in the context of large-scale social estates. Due to scarcity of resources, diverse forms of deprivation and a strong social mix, inhabitants have limited capacity to collectively organize themselves. Subjectivity planning, in which attention is put on minor and cautious forms of disobedience and civil autonomy might as such be more realist in such areas, potentially positively informing former participatory planning perspectives.

By shedding light on the discipline and changes in the field and by discussing the cases of Rabet atelier, Boulogne-sur-Mer and Droixhe, the authors argue that the discipline of anthropology has an intrinsic value in this sense. This is especially the case in the Brussels context, in which planning processes in large-scale social estates are still strongly determined by institutions, but in which the latter are responsive for a stronger engagement with the local scale. Floating observations (Petonnet, 1982) and ethnography can enable to make stakeholders aware and critically reflective about their own cultural practices. Second, they can learn us about the minor engagements and acts of resistance by inhabitants that increase their civil autonomy. Third, they allow for keeping an open-ended view, before and throughout the action research and regeneration process. As such, the university partners of VUB do not intend to develop a Living Lab as a physical 'place', but rather as an embodied permanency, a continuous engagement and reflexive stance by the researchers on the site.

### **Towards the "SoHoLab approach"**

Dealing with very diverse contexts, methods and strategies, it might be useful to not reduce the different perspectives presented by the reports to a unitary vision, but to speak of SoHoLab approaches.

Nevertheless, some common methodological characteristics in dealing with the analysis and regeneration of large scale social-housing estates could be underlined, in the areas under study and the selected case studies. These characteristics consist of points of attention or possible roles that could be assumed by researchers when dealing with such processes and contexts:

- Applying open, situated approaches, be it in the form of a permanency in a physical space or by using an ethnographic stance;
- Starting from one-on-one contacts before moving to a more collective level. This seems essential to win trust and to develop good relationships

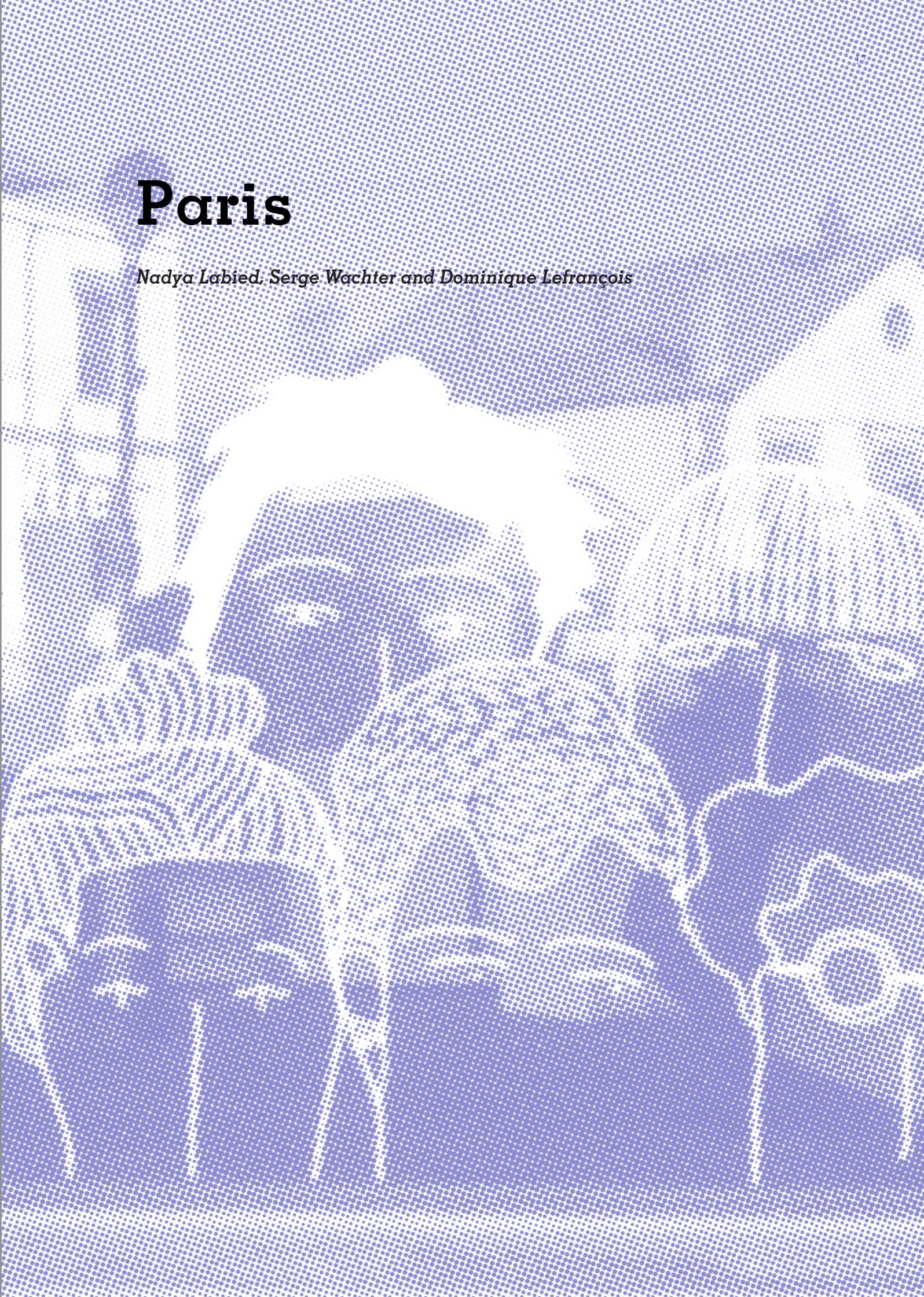
with all stakeholders;

- Playing the role of brokers, recognizing opportunities, mediating between different planning stakeholders and levels and linking initiatives, projects and ideas.
- Developing an interdisciplinary work, involving architects, ethnographers, artists, community builders and institutional partners in the action research;
- Starting from an action research stance, the cases considered tend to involve and activate knowledge co-production and "tangible" actions that contribute to actual local change, such as short term physical interventions (pilot projects / tactical urbanism) but also to the creation of shared visions/ projects/plans. This is in line with strategic planning theory and approaches that advocate for multi-track approaches combining short term action with(in) long term visioning.

These brief points will be further developed by the research units in order to outline policy/research advices for setting-up a ULL in deprived areas which aim to contribute to a sustainable regeneration of the local context that effectively involves its inhabitants and local organizations.

# Paris

*Nadya Labied, Serge Wachter and Dominique Lefrançois*





# Living Labs, a participatory turning point for landscaping?

*Serge Wachter*

French cities do not excel at applying best practices in terms of citizen participation in development operations. Of course, this can vary from one case to another and some cities have distinguished themselves, at times, as champions or showcases of the involvement of the inhabitants. According to specialists, this deficit goes hand in hand with a state of local democracy which is, if not downright apathetic, at the very least not as deliberative when compared to some countries of Northern Europe, such as Germany or Britain<sup>1</sup>. A culture of counter-power has not penetrated our institutional genes either nationally or at the local level. De facto, Jacobin centralism still marks its imprint on political and administrative customs on an organisational chain from the central state to the communal level. Despite some vicissitudes and recent disappointments, isn't the person of the mayor still the embodiment of a "little kinglet", who himself elects the municipal council and reigns supreme over the affairs of the commune?

Recently, an op-ed article of a town planner had an unappealing judgement on the practices of the concertation by denouncing them as "tedious and useless"<sup>2</sup>. According to him, "if representative democracy is in crisis, participatory democracy is not better." Far from reconciling the inhabitants with the life of the city, the devices and tools put in place seem to discourage the elected, the experts as the citizens... ».

## **Misery of participation especially in popular neighbourhoods**

The verdict is severe and it is true that this situation, the result of an institutional inheritance, is verified in a large number of cases on an urban scale and even more often on metropolitan scale, the large size being often inversely proportional to the democratic devolution. But the balance sheet is proving to be much worse (and disturbing) for the development actions carried out in the direction of the popular neighbourhoods, those comprising a high proportion of social housing. It must be agreed that the districts eligible for the national urban regeneration programs have never constituted, apart from a few exceptions, areas conducive to citizen participation, irrespective of their form, process or expression. Thus, it is

claimed that the politics of the city, is a game played by three, where the modes of decision result from an arbitration on the sly associating the mayor, the president of the intercommunal and the prefect. The actors of civil society, the associations of users or inhabitants are ousted, they exert only a minor influence on this triumvirate. Recently, the demolition and reconstruction programs carried out within the framework of the ANRU and contractualisation between the state and the cities have led to negotiations and compromises which have concentrated much of the power in the hands of Mayors, "Real leaders and integrators of territorial public action"<sup>3</sup> at the expense of associations, inhabitants and other non-institutional actors of local life. Above all, the latter are the victims of ontological weakness: in decision-making processes, they are heavily penalised and marginalised by the lack of relays or political force to represent them, to defend their interests and to assert points in their favour in places of power.

It should be noted that in most cases, "regeneration projects are never approached by the issues to which they must respond," we discuss at the margins of the "how", but never the "why": only a few minor adjustments are therefore possible in the programs giving credit to those who doubt the interest of the concertation – among the inhabitants and the professionals. It must be seen that this dialogue of the deaf concerns the whole chain of the development process, from the master plan to the architectural conception, to that of the scale of the inhabited. It must be admitted, in the underprivileged suburbs, "architecture is done without the inhabitants"<sup>4</sup>, and this was true especially within the framework of the National Program of urban renewal conducted from 2008 to 2013. From the point of view of the recipients, the politics of the city is democratically unworthy: when they exist, in the neighbourhoods, the deliberative arenas are confined, at best, to the role of the recording chamber. Such a deficiency surprises and seems deplorable: Is it not in these quarters where the needs for rehabilitation of housing and the living environment are the most urgent and the most critical, so that participation should be the most active, the most cooperative and embody a power of proposition? Last but not least, one must admit another observation which aggravates the story even more: a large part of the neighbourhoods which have been the subject of priority policies in the 1980's are still considered as priorities today.

### **Tyranny of participatory injunction**

A start has been made recently; for instance the Programming Act of February 2014 for the city and urban cohesion advocates the establishment of mechanisms to encourage more participation of inhabitants in the development of urban renewal programs. Citizen councils are set up,

consultation forums called to weigh in decision-making processes. Let's note, an injunction for citizen involvement, a rhetoric of participation now accompanies the speech of the politics of the city where committees of neighbourhoods and other associations of inhabitants and users are invited to "co-build", with technicians and experts, development projects. Researchers can ask themselves: "Is the use of participation the solution for crisis-related planning?"<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, some experts consider that a "tyranny of participatory injunction" has emerged. It extends its hold on local stages, including priority areas of city policy. This tyranny enthrones the participation of the user or citizen as one of the keys to urban renewal programs<sup>6</sup>. No doubt it is an incantation, a figure of rhetoric and this watchword seems paradoxical to say the least in view of the analyses and state of affairs showing a degree close to zero of urban democracy in working-class neighbourhoods. In the 1990s, it had been presented as a linchpin of the Social Development of Neighbourhoods and then totally neutralised by the oligarchic nature of city policy; whereas participation is again celebrated today as one of the main routes of the reform of urban renewal programs. This contradiction has been noted by M. Carrel, for whom "the policy of the city grants the question of the "participation of the inhabitants" a paradoxical status. Always claimed in official reports and texts since its origins, it struggles to be embodied in public policy programs and remains impalpable for many professionals of urban social development. It couldn't have been put better and indeed, "many professionals of the city's politics express unease at the discrepancy between the official discourses promoting "participation of the inhabitants" and the realization of a difficult participation in implementation". On the whole, this diagnosis results in a shock formula that resonates as a very bleak picture of city policy. This demonstrates an "impossible participation" for the affected inhabitants.

Such a contradiction does not hinder this rising passion for participation practices that is also spreading in the academic research community. Thus, in the "grey literature" there are formalisation essays of various intensities and indicators of participation reflecting the virtues or defects of urban governance. Indeed, one can measure a deficit or a lack of participation that can jeopardise or seriously compromise the legitimacy and sustainability of urban governance. A risk gradient has recently been modelled, calculating varying degrees of threat that would fail to incorporate the practices of deliberation and participation into its mode of devolution<sup>7</sup>. As we see, presented or formalised in a scholarly way, by common sense or according to the official rhetoric of urban renewal programs, participatory approaches appear today as one of the first conditions for the success of policies in favour of sensitive neighbourhoods.

In other words, the association of residents or users with the affairs that concern them, in various forms and expressions, is now, if not an obligatory figure, at least an essential component of the development programs and urban renewal. Is this new imperative of participation and consensus-building - either tangible or desired - a vehicle for change in planning practices? Does this point to the promise of a major step forward in popular democracy in underprivileged neighbourhoods?

### **Living Lab: between participation and empowerment**

The truth is that this jump seems to open a new phase in the approach and implementation of the urban project or urban renewal.. It is a matter of reinventing the foundations and procedures of development in a context where the old ways of doing things lead to deadlocks and failures. Schematically, we notice a chronological passing of a technocratic and statesman phase of the urban project which reigned in the years 70, to a neo-liberalism "market oriented" phase applying the revenue of strategic management from the private sector in the period 1990-2000, to arrive today at a new pattern that is spreading in an era of ecological, energy and digital transitions<sup>8</sup>. In particular, this new model gives a central place to the participation of the inhabitants in project approaches. It is appropriate to move from normative planning to inventive planning by encouraging all-round "micro-democracy" initiatives. Many experiences have flourished and spread in recent years in French cities and Europe which illustrate some approaches to this planning that wish to be "inventive and socially inclusive". Thus, the requalification of public space, the temporary occupation of a place, the collective appropriation of a neglected one cherished by the followers of "tactical planning" constitute some "demonstrators" of these participatory approaches. It should be noted that these experiences, except for exception, shine if not by their lack at least by their scarcity in the social housing districts. Nevertheless, according to followers, "believers", or activists, the "collaborative" draws a new horizon for "The city's factory"<sup>9</sup>.

One must admit that organizational innovation in terms of democratic procedures does not only obey the Schumpétérien model of entrepreneurial offer. This unequivocal and transposable scheme in the political sphere deserves to be revised, taking into account the contribution of an open innovation-centric approach to users. The uses, needs and proposals of the inhabitants constitute a lever for maybe not completely rethinking the software of local policies, but at least for adapting their principles and modus operandi to the challenges of the contemporary world. A more participatory democracy can be synonymous with institutional innovation

and managerial efficiency. Living Labs can bring their own stone to this new building. Last but not least, in the local or urban political space, the latter are also potentially places of counter-power that can enhance and moralise the democratic process.

In fact, citizen involvement must be a catalyst and play a key role as an active principle of development actions. Positioned upstream of the project, it must replace the top-down expertise. Organised under favourable conditions, the participation of the inhabitants stimulates innovation. To do this, the uses and needs of the inhabitants must be placed at the origin of the design process following the guiding principle of design thinking. Here lies a key principle of the philosophy of Living Labs. The participation of citizens is thus necessary today, if not as an obligatory figure, then at least as a driving force and a renewal of the development procedures. Contrary to a widely held opinion, consultation practices do not constitute a purely formal legal-regulatory ritual that weighs down the sequences of the design process while hindering the aesthetic or functional impulses of the Architectural creation. Similarly, they are not intended to undermine the authority of an opponent by aiming at the historical position of "overhanging experts". By handling ad hoc tools such as Living Labs, they lend themselves, on the contrary, to the promotion of an expertise to prevail over technocratic routines declaring the "feasibility" or the validity of the project.

It must be seen that the increase in the resources and capacity for action of civil society does not necessarily hinder the decision-making processes in the area of urban planning. On the contrary, this means a lever, an opportunity to experiment with new avenues for local public action and singularly for the development, construction and rehabilitation of housing projects. This applies to micro-projects as well as infrastructure or equipment projects. At the final stage of this march forward, it is increasingly considered that the initiatives of the inhabitants mobilised by common interests, shared values and experienced issues relating to their inhabited and living areas represent a successful orientation to reinvent development practices. This vision inspires a growing number of calls for projects, where recent architectural contests on the scope of Paris and greater Paris illustrate this new democratic passion for participation. Let us use the word "empowerment" which stands out today, according to some experts, as the *ultima ratio* or the supreme stage of this citizen involvement. This opens up new opportunities to explore both urban planning and architecture. It should be noted that this democratic impetus is not limited to development actions but wins over all sectors of local public action. It stands out as a new path that lends itself to the regulation of public affairs on an urban and territorial scale.

In urban projects, it is certainly possible to dream of a reactive civil society which has become aware of the stakes on all levels, mobilised, militant and benefiting from a transparency of information. In social history, the Marxist eschatology assimilated this path of emancipation to the passage of a working class "in itself" to a working class "for oneself" aware of its historical role and its ability to transform the world<sup>10</sup>. There is also a moral and individual and collective consciousness component in the process of participation. Does the *Mutatis mutandis*, the *Zeitgeist* -or the *doxa*- of the development today invite to accompany and to stimulate the advent of a citizen participation "for oneself"? Does it, in an anti-capitalist perspective, invite the authors of the report to speak of "a radical reform of the city's policy"<sup>11</sup>?

### **On the road to experimentation and innovation**

This new "paradigm" has emerged in recent years as a result of the conjugation of a series of factors creating a terrain conducive to its development. It is not exhaustive: the crisis of representative democracy, that of the welfare state and public services, the increasing budgetary austerity of cities and other local governments, the questioning of the power of experts and the rise in power of the Internet and social networks, the failures of social inclusion in all its forms and the rise of socio-spatial inequalities, the environmental crisis and the threats linked to global warming... are all systemic factors calling for new types of regulation modes. Of course, these changes also directly affect the practices of architecture and development and invite them to test and experiment with new tools and instruments.

In this regard, according to Harriet Buckley, the experimental methods in the field of local policies, in particular those aimed at combating climatic deregulation, are growing<sup>12</sup>. They lend themselves to approaches that put factual hypotheses in concrete and provide the means to apply the error-testing and tool-fitting method by successive approximations. Such visions apply to systems of action where uncertainties, plurality of actors, the complexity of their relationships and interdependencies, contingencies linked to a shifting social and political context, which is the source of conflict and controversy, limit or even render inoperative the range of existing solutions for public policy. These systems of action generate, in the words of M.M. Weber "wicked problems", intractable problems creating temporary points of agreement between the players, inducing scalable interests and power questions. In particular, in the contemporary world, cities and metropolises face constantly emerging "wicked problems" and continuous jets<sup>13</sup>. As a result, the resulting problem-solving approaches,

programs and agendas are not looking for a single recipe, an unlikely "One best way."

They build scenarios, test probabilistic approaches; they hesitate, proceed by trial and error and apply the precautionary principle. In doing so, they obey the game of incrementality and the continuous adaptation of the modes of intervention. In fact, it should be noted that "experimentation is distinguished as a new mode of governance"<sup>14</sup>. This is an asset compared to top-down and "legal-bureaucratic" visions to use Max Weber's expression. This observation is amenable to a generalization and there is a rise in the power of the use of tools and instruments to test new procedures for deliberation and the involvement of inhabitants in the urban project, including in popular neighbourhoods. Thus, "citizen laboratories", the arenas of deliberation and other innovative participatory approaches, adopting, to greater or lesser extent, a "format" and a spirit of Living Lab, have flourished in recent years, in France as well as in other countries of European Union. These practices and devices are also "formatted" for working-class neighbourhoods and they intend to introduce and disseminate all-round approaches to "co-construction" urban regeneration projects with users or inhabitants. It goes without saying that these new procedures, these new tools, want to stimulate and encourage initiatives and mobilizations to harness local resources and skills in a context of increasing scarcity of resources and budgets allocated to aid programs in working-class neighbourhoods.

This Government by the instruments replaces, because of its performance, the linear and hierarchical modes of intervention – some would say substantialists – based on the application of formal rules stained with the general interest label- that have for a long time inspired and guided the approaches of urban planning<sup>15</sup>. It is, if not aimed directly at supplanting, at least at overhauling the "top down" model that has long governed city policy. In popular neighbourhoods, these approaches are on the margins of formal and "oligarchic" consultation procedures of urban renewal programs monopolised by the state and elected officials. Nevertheless, it is observed that these initiatives are often supported and recovered somewhat by institutional or official powers and integrated into city contracts. In terms of 'urban governance', such instrumental regulation does not aspire to achieve optimal or maximal efficiency in the allocation of resources. It does not dream anymore of a coordination of well-oiled and unanimously cooperative urban collective action based on an egalitarian distribution of resources and offering promises of equivalent profits to stakeholders. On the contrary, it is limited to the elaboration of solutions, of scenarios acceptable to the actors and protagonists, solutions which form balances and always precarious agreements and which are the result of

relations of strength and political compromise.

Let's add that this new regime adapts to the mutations of the State, its withdrawal and its cure of slimming. Its former prerogatives are transferred to various agencies able to better manage and generate public-private partnerships and to emancipate themselves from the rigidities and shackles of administrative law. This is evident in many public policies, including, but to a lesser extent, those for urban renewal programs. In parallel with new tools, new technical procedures – from the private sphere – are disseminated, regulating urban development. Let's take for example Contractualisation, the generalisation of calls for projects, the practices of benchmarking, best practices and scoring, the continuous evaluation of performance, the development of concessions for the management of urban services and even the construction of social housing in the private sector, transfers of responsibilities and increased burdens to local authorities and the drastic reduction of their endowments, the creation of communes XXL...

These new processes and instruments are supposed to increase flexibility, "agility" and of course the effectiveness of local public action. This trend is similarly affecting social housing organizations subjected to a regime of austerity and conversion to the rules of management guided by if not the desire to achieve profit, then at least by the desire of managerial efficiency<sup>16</sup>.

### **Tactical planning and Living Lab: a government by instruments?**

Spontaneously or as a result of interests and strategies, unprecedented approaches to development emerge and adapt to this new regime of budgetary austerity and managerially orchestrated adjustment by the state. Of course, this trend produces chain effects on the ways of managing cities and other local government. This is particularly so in the case of tactical planning that has been booming in recent years. This designation covers a variety of practices, but these have in common a collaborative base that usually brings together an assortment of actors assembled to develop alternative development practices in order to offer goods and services outside the logic of market rules. These actors include associations, architectural collectives and other representatives of civil society. There is a lineage between these approaches and the different forms of production and management of common goods, which are based on a collaborative spirit and a direction guided more by an ethic of sharing than by the individual appropriation of resources. It should also be pointed out that temporary urban planning is distinguished by the creation of new

activities and functions located in the spaces and buildings they occupy or invest and identified under the name of the placetiers. In fact, Living Labs, FabLabs, co-working spaces are very often included in the programming and achievements of temporary urban planning operations and it is very common that these activities and services specific to third-places are present premises and sites where these ephemeral operations are being carried out.

These practices of transitional urban planning have flourished in recent years. Some believe that they open new avenues for planning policies where various expressions of civic sense and citizenship can find ways and channels to express themselves. They emerge from and insert themselves into the flaws and cracks of urban planning and project urban planning deemed to be lacking innovation and in search of renewal - or better, "reinvention". These "non-standard" approaches are genetically related to Living Labs and incorporate in most cases their main ingredients: innovation, experimentation, learning by doing, participation of users and various stakeholders. This current feeds on approaches that decline an all-out urban sustainability ranging from shared gardens to short-chain and edible landscapes from urban agriculture to precarious installations and architectures or temporary in the public space to accommodate, to house various collaborative activities generally obeying the philosophy of "Do It yourself" and "grass roots initiatives". Its adherents or sympathisers are generally sensitive to representations in the Zeitgeist advocating a forward march towards a model of "frugal City" applying on all levels, for individuals and local communities, the values and Practices of sobriety – if not austerity.

Such visions are generally encouraged by "modernist" urban powers which, in good heart or by exerting pressure, stimulate and accompany these alternative practices and misuse of the "standard" approaches of urban planning. Often, these "urban planning margins" are incorporated into innovative approaches launched by cities wishing to offer real estate products and hybrid services combining private and collective developers or associations if not from the "social sphere and solidarity," at least taking their distance from the logics of profit and the market. Moreover, it must be recalled that most of the time they are part of the framework and the spirit of experimental, "cognitive", user-centric and participatory approaches that can be stamped by the Living Lab label<sup>17</sup>.

Observers have analysed this trend as a gradual shift from one-off to the mainstream of urban policies<sup>18</sup>. This seems excessive even though many local authorities have incorporated this type of urban planning into their planning offer as well as into their political agenda. Are these emerging practices calling for a lasting anchor in the urban landscape? It

is true that the “collaborative urban fabric” is a hit with caring audiences.

De facto, “urban modernist strata” have hooked this type of experience, combining the informality, creativity and festive culture that these approaches convey. In particular, in western metropolises, this trend expresses “post-materialistic” aspirations brought by social and urban areas in gentrification. It is clear that some local authorities are surfing this wave by capturing and retaining audiences of sympathisers, cronies or clientele. Are we witnessing the rise of a new model called to become, if not dominant, then at least inscribed in current practices, routinised and placed at the top of the planning agenda? Yes, certainly, but the scale of micro-projects that lie in the margins of ordinary urban production - in all but the most massive structures - of housing, equipment and infrastructure operations. For this is the destiny of alternative planning: to intervene at the margins, in the faults, the gaps in the development policies. Gap is geographically the appropriate word because the elective places of tactical planning are mainly abandoned, wasteland, unoccupied land waiting for an assignment. Popular and publicised, it affects only very moderately the essential components and mechanisms for the production and operation of urban tissues.

In truth, the visibility and media coverage of these operations are inversely proportional to their actual ability to produce significant effects on urban layout. These projects also struggle to be part of the long term: their nature obeys, in fact, the temporal cycles of the event, the planning and the temporary installations. In any event, this is neither disappointing nor deplorable, the will or ambition of tactical planning is not to change the architecture of the city! It must also be seen that, in the most favourable contexts, these approaches convey values and “good feelings” which are propagated by imitation which open up promising avenues and new principles for development policies. Last but not least, the approaches to tactical planning are based on collective intelligence, the production of common goods, cooperation and diffuse-for the worse and the better-values of sharing and solidarity. In other words, their message is benevolent and hints at ways and hopes for development projects outside the caudine forks of real estate development. As such, they must be honoured and they deserve to be encouraged - and evaluated and channelled<sup>19</sup>. The rise of these experiences, however, raises a question: is this collaborative model not the preservation of the metropolitan fact - even more so in “gentrified” neighbourhoods with no real power to disseminate in disadvantaged spaces, be it social housing neighbourhoods or low-density rural areas? Let’s also acknowledge it: like temporary urban planning, Living Labs are, par excellence, a polarised metropolitan fact in some neighbourhoods and far from having won the sensitive areas awarded by the city’s politics!<sup>20</sup>

For all the reasons cited, in a minimal register - one could say cosmetic - and in many respects, tactical planning is on the road to institutionalization. Indeed, it is observed that many institutions in charge of development have appropriated the languages and codes of this short-lived planning. The latter seems to have now been incorporated, even digested, into/by the urban production strategies of the so-called "creative" neo-liberal city. On the whole, it must be admitted that "tactical planning is a new essential element of contemporary urban policies of metropolitan areas that are caught up in competitive logic to attract investment, creators and Tourists"<sup>21</sup>.

### **Governing by instruments**

By broadening the picture, we must admit that the political and institutional catalysts of this new urbanism - and the accompanying instruments such as Living Labs - are following a new regime of relations between the state and local actors. This model also prints its mark on social behaviours and the values that drive them by amplifying and intensifying the individualization of society. Since decentralization, many functions and responsibilities have been transferred to local authorities. This weight loss treatment has accelerated in recent years and the State has continued and extended this transfer of important parts of the management of public affairs outside its regal perimeter.

Such developments have as a backdrop the rise of a remote government, a new form of regulation granting additional management capacities and initiatives to the private sector and local actors. The state withdraws from the territories, it outsources functions by redistributing charges and responsibilities and by remotely regulating local public action. By extending R. Epstein's argument it is possible to analyse this process as a form of forced empowerment of local and urban political systems, a hypermodern operating modality of government power and technology - as Michel Foucault would say<sup>22</sup>. Simplifying, it can be said that in this scheme, local actors, and more broadly both individuals as well as civil society are invited - obliged? - to show initiative by providing solutions to the problems and difficulties they face. In total, empowerment - and one of its vectors, supported objectively by Living labs - is a citizen mobilization but also a form of power freeing energies, innovation and capacity for action. It will be understood that when they exist or are available, it is a matter of bringing out, exploiting and valuing local skills and resources. But it must be seen that this process induces at the same time a domination, coercion, a submission to a new norm which places the individual and the collectives that they constitute in the face of a duty

of initiative, autonomy and responsibility for the improvement of their living environment. Through the Living lab, the new spirit of capitalism also breathes on local public management and the approaches to development<sup>23</sup>. In the final analysis, do not these empowerment practices reflect the fundamental values and principles of liberal regimes based on the love of human and citizen rights, the ultimate goal of which is to achieve freedom, emancipation of the individual?

Let's note, the remote government is coupled with a government by the instruments. The latter is illustrated by the implementation of policies of activation, assignment of duties and responsibilities to the inhabitants and users and their groupings on the one hand and to the local actors of the other, singularly the cities. In this context, the appearance and growth of Living Labs in urban regulation is one of the instrumental facets, an illustration of the rise in power of this form of government.

# Sustainable urban planning and participation

*Nadya Labied*

Distressed neighbourhoods have to face socio-economic development issues in addition to environmental concerns, and Living Lab approaches are often developed in relation to urban projects that claim the goal of sustainable transition.

The notions of sustainable development and urban renewal were associated from the 2000s, particularly following the Borloo law in 2003 which aims to “restructure, in a goal of social diversity and sustainable development, neighbourhoods classified as sensitive urban areas”<sup>24</sup>.

In the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report: “Sustainable development is a mode of development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>25</sup>. This definition specifies that urban development should not be for the benefit of one population to the detriment of another, which implies taking into account several dimensions, including the social dimension. The process of consultation and participation of residents in urban development projects is therefore part of the objectives of sustainable development.<sup>26</sup>

Urban renewal projects associating sustainable development and citizen participation have been carried out in France since the 2000s, but they only take into account the technical aspect of sustainable development, forgetting the social aspect. “This is how the participative dimension of sustainable development is totally absent from the urban renewal operation of Moulins”<sup>27</sup>.

As Renaud Epstein points out, in some projects “the people in charge of the agglomeration have made sustainable development an element of territorial and institutional marketing”<sup>28</sup>.

From 2007, following the Grenelle Environment Roundtable<sup>29</sup>, new, more demanding standards in terms of sustainability are being put in place, based on labels that attest to the energy performance of housing. These labels become a market element in private housing projects, and in the social sector they condition state aid, especially in difficult neighbourhoods.

As social housing is very present in eco-neighbourhoods, labelling allows the lessor to increase its subsidies.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, ANRU also claims

sustainable urban planning, and asserts that the “urban architectural and landscape quality” of urban renewal projects depends on several criteria, including “the consideration of environmental issues in the management of spaces and buildings delivered, and the involvement of local residents and users in the design and implementation of the project”<sup>31</sup>.

This can lead us to think that decision makers seem to have realised more recently that the implementation of sustainable development strategies requires rethinking the governance of territories, through the involvement of all stakeholders.

If urban projects that make the link between sustainable development and neighbourhood projects therefore have common challenges, how do the different actors, including the inhabitants of social housing, perceive this notion?

## **Methodology of research**

In some cases of Living Lab that we will study (Sevrans and Caen-la-mer), the approach is still at the design level, and the projects have not yet started. At this stage we can only have the point of view of the contracting authority, local authority or social landlord.

In order to gather the points of view of the other actors, inhabitants, project managers, researchers, companies and associations, we will analyse the link between sustainable development and neighbourhood projects by relying on surveys that we are currently carrying out in three renovation projects of urban “sustainable development” in the Paris region, in which the notion of participation of the inhabitants was set up (Taverny, Longjumeau, Fresnes).

These investigations seek to understand how each of the actors perceives the question of sustainable development in relation to the problems of urban renewal in social housing districts.

In particular, the operations of Sevrans and Taverny have in common two themes: the environmental issue and the participation of inhabitants in the building site through the insertion clause<sup>32</sup>. In February 2005, the ANRU Board of Directors adopted this national integration charter, which is the first national document to impose an obligation of result in terms of integration. At least 5% of the hours worked as part of the urban renewal project investments and 10% of the jobs created under the GUP or the management of equipment, were devoted to the insertion of inhabitants of the ZUS in the job market. This national integration charter is available in every urban renewal project by signing a local plan to implement the national integration charter (PLACI)<sup>33</sup>.

Thus, the methodology is the survey of the various actors of the living lab identified. These actors are different for each case: social landlords, architects, town planning services, building companies, and inhabitants.

During interviews we found that the setting up of a Living Lab or a participative approach in the project represents sometimes an element of marketing, enhancement, or an expertise that the project owner or the project manager wants to associate with his company. Thus, in addition to the social issues of the Living Labs, there can be important economic issues.

We will carry out our investigation by scientific interviews with very different actors involved in each of the projects, as well as by an observation work, including sketches. The analysis of this corpus will be cross-referenced with sources and more general texts, as well as an inventory of the literature concerning Living Labs in France.

The living lab experiments that will be reported relate to a question: What does the notion of living lab bring to the question of participation, in which the French believe little, to implement it for reasons which have already been explored for a long time? The living labs were also chosen for their desire to foster innovation that could affect social housing (innovation mainly driven by technology, which raises questions.)

### **Choice of four cases of Living Lab**

We began by identifying twenty cases of Urban Living Lab in France, and we realised that few of them concern social housing. On the other hand, most of these projects wish to respond to two recurring themes that are the energy and digital transition, by proposing new models that involve the population in a participatory approach. There are few living labs in social housing, and we voluntarily chose some cases that are not HLM's to open the perspectives to neighbourhoods perceived as enclaves.

For the 4 cases we selected, there were several criteria for choice: the involvement of the population in the projects, and the search for new answers to two current questions: sustainable development and the digital transition. But in each case the concept of Living Lab is not defined in the same way, for some it is a place, for others it's a process. In addition, the target audience concerned is not necessarily the same. These are all questions that interest us in this research.

### **Case 1 : The project Cycle Terre in Sevrans**

This project proposes to involve the inhabitants in the urban renewal of their city by allowing them to take part in the construction. The Cycle

Terre project will train people from Sevrans to earth construction. Sevrans is a city very concerned by unemployment which affects 19% of the active population, and reaches 40% among young people under 25 years.



**Figure 1** Source: <https://www.ville-sevrans.fr/conference-de-lancement-du-projet-cycle-terre-0>

## **Objectives**

The Cycle Terre project is about using the earth as a new construction material for the city.

With 68 stations that will be carried out on the metropolitan network scale, 43 million tons of earth will be excavated from 2017 to 2022. In a logic of circular economy and reduction of the cost of management of excavated earth, Cycle Terre intends to use part of the excavation lands from the creation of the Grand Paris Express network to build the city. It will be a question of treating these lands to be able to use them as building material on the territory of Sevrans.

The project aims to develop local know-how in the use of natural building materials through small productive units. In parallel, the inhabitants will be trained in earthen construction. And all the more, even if the site of the Grand Paris Express network offers itself as an opportunity for employment in the neighbourhoods of Seine Saint Denis, it faces no less a problem of unskilled labour, that cannot be recruited today.

The use of the earth would be virtuous, not only to limit the grey energy of materials by sourcing closer to uses, but also because of the high availability and reversibility of this material.

This project is one of the winners of the European call for projects "Innovative Urban Actions" in the Circular Economy category. It follows

several actions, including the project "From excavation to mud brick", developed in 2017 by the agency Joly & Loiret architects, the company De Wulf and the Amàco research center, as well as the exhibition Terres de Paris at the Arsenal Pavilion in 2016.

Sevrans is one of the poorest cities in Seine-Saint-Denis, hard hit by riots in the suburbs in 2005. With 40% of social housing, the city is the object of several urban renewal projects. The mayor of the commune, Stéphane Gatignon, first communist and then ecologist, resigned in March 2018 after 17 years of mandate to protest against the inadequacy of public policies in the suburbs.

### **Actors**

Twelve partners are involved in this project:

- Five research centers: the IFFSTAR (*Institut Français des Sciences et Technologie des Transports de l'Aménagement et des Réseaux*), the Craterre (Centre de Recherche et de l'Application de la Terre), Lab AE & CC Labex (Architecture Environment and Constructive Cultures) of ENSAG, Amàco (*Atelier Matières à Construire*), and SciencesPo Paris;
- The ANTEA group, an office of engineering studies specialised in geology;
- The architectural firm: Joly and Loiret Architects;
- The CompétencesEmploi Association, tool for the implementation of the employment policy of the municipality of Sevrans;
- The city of Sevrans;
- The real estate developer Quartus;
- The CSTB (Scientific and Technical Center of the construction);
- The society of Grand Paris.

The interest of this project lies in the fact that it thinks of the question of neighbourhoods at the scale of the precarious suburb, as a whole, and the association of the main actors of the earth construction in France, to tend towards the constitution of a true industrial sector in a logic of circular economy.

### **Operation of the project**

A factory of 6000 m<sup>2</sup> of sorting, storage and land treatment will be created near the future station "Sevrans-Livry" line 16. Its management will be entrusted to an operator under legal and economic conditions that remain to be specified. The land extracted for the construction of this station will be sorted according to their components (clay, sand, gravel) then selected to produce four types of raw earth materials: brick, clay panels, lightened

earth and coatings. These materials can be implemented in the project “*Sevrans Terre d’avenir*” which provides for the creation of 3000 dwellings, activity areas, school and sports equipment.

This program of the European Regional Development Fund (FEDER) will finance the project up to 4.8 million euros, corresponding to 80% of the project, to allow a 3-year experiment. The cost of the project is estimated at 6.1 million euros excluding the operation of the factory. The manufacturing unit is expected to be operational in 2019, an exhibition “*Terre de Sevrans*” will also be mounted, and an architectural design guide for the earth will be released.

In June 2019, the building permit is deposited, the start of the work is planned in November. It will be a removable and moveable factory.

### ***Project issues***

Key issues in this project are related to sustainable development, but actors also claim an ethical dimension<sup>34</sup>:

- Limit the grey energy of materials by sourcing closer to uses, to build low carbon footprint and reduce construction nuisances;
- Ensure the availability of building materials: the constituent elements of concrete are becoming scarce, such as sand (which requires distant imports) and aggregates. Securing the supply of materials goes hand in hand with reducing vulnerability to resource shortages for the city;
- Develop the reversibility of constructions, with a material that can be reused locally or mixed with other components (unlike concrete);
- To avoid the extension of landfills of millions of square meters due to the urban development, in accordance with the objective of the energy transition law (“around 70% of the recycling of the waste of the BTP<sup>35</sup>, and reduction of 50% of landfilling in 2025 compared to 2010 “);
- Propose healthier materials for air quality, and construction sectors with less impact on the surrounding territories;
- Develop the local economy by combining vocational training with the development of the city: some inhabitants of Sevrans will be recruited as part of the insertion clause, and trained to raw earth construction.

### ***Can Cycle Terre be defined as a Living Lab?***

Silvia Devescovi, the urban project manager, does not define Cycle Terre as a Living Lab. But she points out the difficulties in relations with researchers, because the municipality wants the search results to be fed back into the project. “Next time it will be better to define the limits of benefits and work arrangements of each”. The participation of researchers in this project is very interesting for us because it points out the question

of the position of the researcher, and its temporality.

According to Silvia Devescovi there is a lack in the consultation component on the project: she wants to push a little more the participation of the inhabitants but it's not the wish of the municipality. But it seems to us that even if the project of Sevrans seems like top down, it's not, because it comes from the problems of inhabitants : institutions listen to them.

For the association Competence Emploi, the advantage of the insertion clause is that people are paid as they are trained. This association follows employees' trajectory to verify that the terms of the clause are well respected and that the training offered to them is useful for them. For example in Taverny this was not the case, the person engaged with this clause was not trained, but engaged as a mere manoeuvre for the duration of the construction work. This also shows the importance of multi actor-collaborations.

## **Case 2 : Living Lab « Caen la mer Habitat » :**

Caen la mer Habitat is the largest social landlord in the city of Caen. It wants to develop a Living Lab approach with a future test apartment (Silver appart) for senior citizens in which companies can test their solutions in real conditions. For this lessor, the Living Lab is an approach that it defines as the development of solutions based on uses and users, in order to anticipate, create and evolve the new services to the inhabitants.

### ***Objectives***

The social landlord Caen la mer Habitat was engaged in 2017 in a program of reflection around the social housing "innovative and collaborative". It joined the TES (Secure Electronic Transactions) Competitiveness Cluster to concretely participate in the development of the innovations of the companies that compose the cluster. The landlord intends to present itself for these companies as a privileged field of experimentation; it also tries to do its own field tests, to have them tested by the residents. Its objective would be to reflect with companies and inhabitants on the housing of tomorrow and new ways of living.

### ***Actors / Network***

The Pole TES brings together 130 actors (large groups, small and medium companies, research laboratories, local authorities and various organizations). It works in the field of digital high technology e-health,

e-tourism, connected community and connected agriculture.

Caen habitat houses nearly a third of the Caen population, with a heritage of 10120 housing units, 548 housing units for seniors, 577 student housing units and 113 professionals.

### **Operation**

The Pole intends to develop two essential axes for Caen Sea Habitat: home maintenance and economic projects in the heart of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods (urban agriculture, exchange network, pooling of equipment ...).

For its part, Caen La Mer Habitat wants to develop a Living Lab approach with a future test apartment (Silver appart) for senior citizens in which companies can test their solutions in real conditions.

### **Actions / project**

May 24, 2017 Caen Mer Habitat organised a "Hab'ility" day with the cluster TES on "Living together tomorrow? Innovation for a shared future ", during which innovative services and technologies, thematic workshops and mini-conferences were proposed. It was held at the Dôme, a collaborative space of innovation formerly *Maison de la Recherche et de l'Imagination* (home of the Research and Imagination) of the agglomeration. Several themes have been invested:

- Technologies to bring people together (exchange platforms and services, connected objects, virtual reality);
- An economy to share (collaborative economy, grouping of orders, pooling of services, agriculture and urban apiculture, fablab ...);
- Spaces for exchange (smart city, architecture, shared spaces ...);
- A diverse community to enrich itself (home support, intergenerational roommates, international student roommates ...).

Caen la mer Habitat joined the organization of the 2018 edition of the Intensive Computer Week, which for 5 days, from January 15 to 19, 2018 invited a hundred students-engineers and students from Caen to reflect on the theme of the city and the habitat of tomorrow. The projects were presented on the 22nd of January at ENSICAEN on the occasion of an evening open to the public.

This edition focused on the theme of shared uses in housing and urban planning of tomorrow. Public space is presented as a societal issue; Collective spaces crystallise many issues such as the maintenance of security, the control of urbanization, the fight against exclusion, the protection of the environment.

For the organisers, it is a question of rethinking these spaces which they consider a zone of passage and of transforming them into a living place, source of creativity and innovation, where expressions such as “neighbourhood life” would resume all their sense: what they already are, and asks the question of a diagnosis made by students, engineers, etc. The aim is to explore new uses, to bring out more responsible and sustainable behaviours and thus to build a new sharing economy: Gardens and shared vehicles, third-places, eco-neighbourhoods, exchanges of skills, pooling of space, modularity of housing and services ...

A website <http://hability-clmh.fr/> was created for the inhabitants of Caen to propose ideas for improving the habitat.

A new operation of 103 new dwellings was also launched by CLMH with a group of future inhabitants who participate in the design process.

### ***The demand for participation comes from the landlord***

In the interviews, Virginie Bellesoeur, director of quality and control in CLMH, said that people who applied for social housing were selected to participate in their shared housing projects, but said she “you could see, they didn’t hide from it quite a bit, because they were essentially interested in having housing more than the process, which can be understood, except that this was not what we were looking for”. Therefore we see that the demand for participation in this case comes more from the landlord than from the inhabitant.



**Figure 2** Source: <http://www.hability-clmh.fr/habitez-la-premiere-residence-intergenerationnelle-participative-a-caen/>.

### **Case 3 : Lorraine Living Lab**

Under the patronage of the University of Lorraine and Greater Nancy, the Lorraine Fab Living Lab® is a platform for prospective evaluation of the uses and acceptability of innovation. It is located on the *Technopôle Renaissance*, in the heart of the city of Nancy. Driven by the Research Team on Innovative Processes (ERPI Laboratory) and ENSGSI (National School of Engineers in Innovation), the Lorraine Fab Living Lab® brings together devices to accelerate the creation and development of collaborative innovation for the uses of tomorrow.

The Lorraine Fab Living Lab entity includes the Lorraine Smart Cities Living Lab. This component is led by a strategic committee made up of the University of Lorraine, Promotech CEI and external personalities depending on the projects (Grand Nancy, entrepreneurs, associations, users, etc.). The accreditation of projects is the responsibility of the Scientific Council led by the ERPI laboratory.

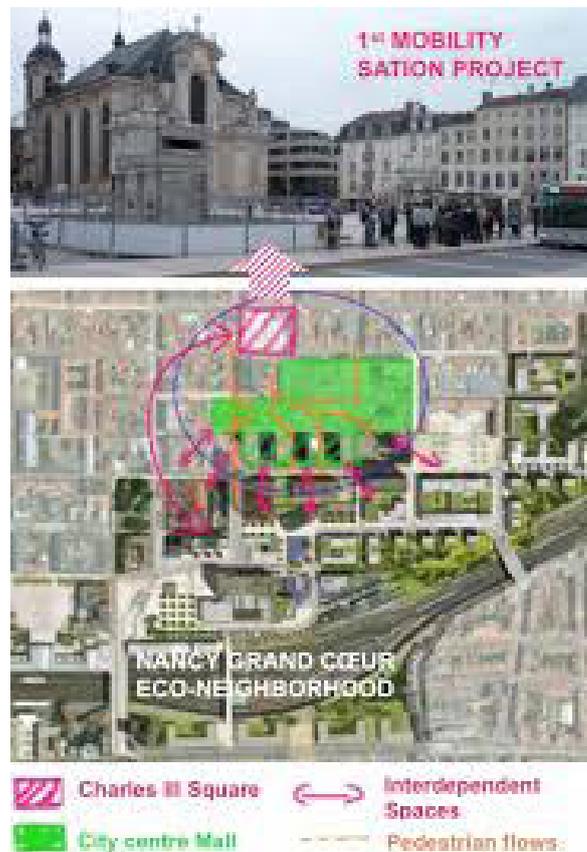
Lorraine Smart Cities Living Lab project, was launched in 2008 and certified in 2010 by the ENoLL Living Labs European Network, it's the first French FabLab installed in an engineering school and recognised by the Fab Foundation in 2011.

Users are citizens, entrepreneurs, researchers, etc. The originality of this LL is to combine the participative dimension and digital innovation, to create a "collaborative innovation".

A research-action experiment by Lorraine Smart Cities Living Lab has particularly caught our attention. It is the design of the eco-district Nancy Grand Coeur in a participatory approach, from 2011 to 2013.

This project is very interesting for us because it has associated research with the Living Lab in an iterative process. The lines of thought, hypotheses and methods of this research can inspire our work, especially since the theme of the project is sustainable development: it is about applying co-design in an eco-neighbourhood project.

The methodology of the Living Lab was adapted to the urban project of eco-neighbourhood in Nancy. The participatory process of the Living Lab, also called "collaborative innovation" is considered here as a scientific answer to a territorial issue.



**Figure 3** Source: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01332219/document>

Below we have analysed an article that describes the concrete steps of this experiment<sup>36</sup>.

One of the authors, Laurent Dupont, wrote his thesis in 2009 on the collaborative approach in urban projects.

The research team was multidisciplinary, including engineers, social scientists, architects, and so on. 15 specialists worked together to develop a participatory process involving users, and to understand how the participatory process can generate an overall process of co-design.

During the first year, the approach mobilised 180 participants, including 130 in 19 workshops, with a frequency of one or two per month for 6 months.

Various topics have been explored to describe and reveal several aspects of potential uses. Each workshop has been prepared with technicians and subject experts to ensure that participants are in a realistic frame. The general part was led by researchers, and the workshop part animated by sociologists and architects.

After a year of experimentation, the diagnosis was more oriented towards the social sciences, only the goal of organization was achieved, but not that of collaborative design. The researchers accumulated data

that did not yet allow the evaluation of the impact of their method on the management of the project.

During the 2nd year, the Living Lab focused on a site and a subject: the renovation of the square Charles III and parking in Nancy, the subject being ecomobility.

Concretely, this work did not change the project but tried to improve it where possible and to anticipate certain difficulties.

During the 3rd year users were invited to participate in 2 workshops on the organization of the Charles III station. These workshops included model exhibitions, and various representations of the project, to allow use tests for the evaluation and adjustment of the project.

This research concludes that the realization of a project of eco-district with a method resulting from the Living Lab is possible, from the diagnosis of the use to experiment of co-designed solutions. Some methods from the industrial environment were adapted, but the methodology was mainly related to the human aspect. Collaborative innovation is therefore the product of frequent exchanges between citizens and technicians.

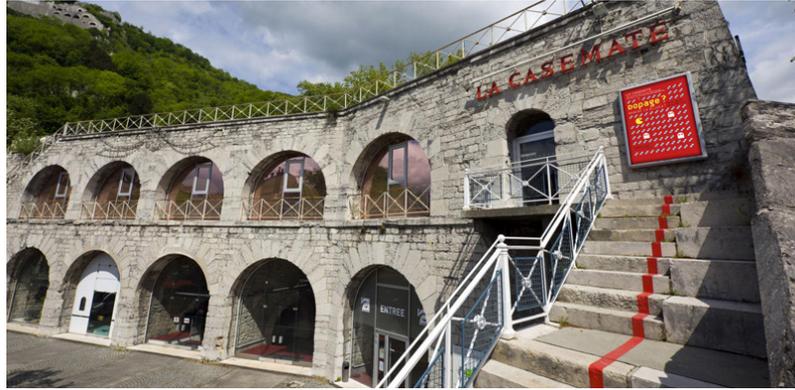
#### **Case 4 :The Casemate in Grenoble**

Grenoble's CCSTI, known as "*La Casemate*", is a centre for dissemination and promotion of scientific, technical and industrial culture (CCSTI) located in Place Saint-Laurent in Grenoble, France.

On the night of November 21, 2017, a deliberate fire destroyed the Casemate Fab Lab. The Fab Lab of the Casemate makes available to the public technological innovations, such as numerically controlled machines. The living Lab Casemate is aimed at young people aged 15 to 25 to help them discover and experience these innovations.

One of the first themes explored within the living lab was poster and advertisement, with the result of making Grenoble the first « ad-free » urban area in Europe. This living lab also experimented with architectural programs; it made several propositions to turn a library in Grenoble more towards the outside and the public space. For instance, one of the façades could be used as a dynamic interactive surface.

Most of the proposals are not interesting per se, but can be seen more as a way of bringing together people and enhancing their creativity. The living lab also provides local authorities with insights and sheds light on the expectations of some inhabitants. The arson by "a group of individuals claiming anarchism, claiming to fight against what might be called the "digital capitalist "" shows the incomprehension aroused by the digital, and perhaps also by the political dimension of the Fab Lab<sup>37</sup>.



**Figure 4** Source: <https://lacasemate.fr/qui-sommes-nous/la-casemate/>

## Conclusion

The analysis of the various interviews provides a better understanding of how each of the actors perceives the notion of Living Lab, as well as the issues and expectations behind their implementation. But when do we get away from the needs of the inhabitants?

The project Cycle Terre is not necessarily defined by the different actors as a Living Lab<sup>38</sup>, the participative dimension is not involved in the design but in the building. However, it combines sustainable development and urban renewal, as well as important social issues for the city of Sevrans. It is this social interest, even if they concern only a dozen people at the project level, who have determined the choice of the city, and gave an ethical dimension to the project justifying its financing by the European Union. The formation of the inhabitants and the possible creation of employment linked to this project present it as a solution to the social difficulties of the suburbs, themselves linked to the concentration of social housing.

In Caen la Mer the lessor considers the Living Lab as a new way of designing social housing. The objective would be to solve the problems between tenants and lessors but there is also the economic stake to create an expertise in the field of the participation in CLMH and to be submitted to the communes<sup>39</sup>.

In the Lorraine Living Lab the approach resulting from engineering is considered as not enough to generate a process of co-design, we must consider the management, so the human factor, with tools from the social sciences. At last, we chose the Casemate in Grenoble because it is aimed at a specific audience, an age group generally not taken into account in urban projects. Here the Living Lab approach has been adopted to make cultural mediation.

The actors of these Living Labs, organizations, associations or local authorities have different issues. The term innovation often comes up in the presentations of each project, however we have seen that the participation has existed in France for several decades. The novelty lies in the way people are involved, and in the new stakes of this participation.

At Sevrans the creation of 12 jobs for a population of 50 000 inhabitants looks more like an excuse to raise awareness to the stakes of the ecological transition, and like the creation of a link between social housing and sustainable development issues. At Caen and Nancy the local authorities try to empower people by giving them the feeling of being actors in their own spaces, the design of communal premises and the participatory workshops serve more to persuade the inhabitants that their opinion is taken into account. This concerns especially some audiences who may feel they are not heard, such as young people. This generation can express itself through the use of new digital tools, especially when they are available in places for young people, both distant and integrated in the city.

In France we are in a strong top-down scheme, and the borders between research/planning and public/private seem watertight. But this is not necessarily the case in the cases of Sevrans and Caen la Mer. They are presented as top-down schemes, but they derive from the problems of inhabitants, showing that institutions listen to them. The users are at the centre of the project.

On the other hand, the Living Labs open up discussions, cross frontiers, bring university tools and implement them with actions. The main production in these cases is not necessarily the production of knowledge, but the method and the contribution to local policies. The questions we can ask would be how do we transfer the knowledge of researchers to the designers? How do we question the knowledge we have used until now? And how do we bring the tools of research to a certain spot in the right temporality, in order to make our knowledge accessible to the actors of the project.

As far as the methods concerned, we have seen they can focus on valorising skills, learning by doing, and especially mutual learning. When we imply inhabitants, we learn how to co-learn things by doing. Architects think before doing, but inhabitants don't necessarily act in a similar way. This reminds us of Levi-Strauss's notion of "bricolage". The "bricoleur", or handyman practices re-employment, diverts materials from their primary use, while the engineer designs and builds elements according to a previously defined plan and aim. The handyman engages in a dialogue with a set of tools and materials to choose the best answer

to his problem. While the engineer questions the universe, the handyman addresses residues. "Bricolage" is the skill of using whatever is at hand and recombining them to create something new.

In the cases presented inhabitants "are doing" to express themselves and learn by doing. By observing patterns of "doing" and "learning by doing", architects and researchers can develop new insights on how to design a space.

## Living Lab, an umbrella term

*Serge Wachter*

It is not easy to give a simple and unequivocal definition of a Living Lab. Certainly, a certification exists, issued by an organization (ENOLL created in 2006), based on a series of standards and properties in accordance with objectives and rules of operation. It is a platform or club networking its various members, which encourages benchmarking, disseminates rules of good conduct, best practices of guide lines and supports the various initiatives to create Living Lab in European Union countries and beyond. This label has been overwhelmed by an all-out proliferation and Living Labs have multiplied in recent years outside the format created by ENOLL. This results in a heteroclitite and diverse landscape. Originally anchored in the field of science and business, these approaches have spread to all sectors of society and a rising tide of Living Labs in the fields of urban planning and land use - and housing - has been observed. In Europe, many cities - and their dismemberments - and other actors of the local scene have followed suit.

A comprehensive portrait of this field is impossible because, as experts point out, "there is no consensus on how to define Urban Labs". In addition, the word is confusing: the Living Lab, Urban Lab, City lab... are umbrella words that attempt to identify a variety of experimental approaches conducted in an urban context"<sup>40</sup>. It is certain that this can encompass a wide range of cases or experiences of a sometimes quite different nature. In truth, living labs are a "big family." Thus, it should be noted that "urban labs incorporate a wide variety of methodological and conceptual approaches that capture urban complexity by promoting new platforms to experiment with collaboration and participation of citizens"<sup>41</sup>.

In the same vein, urban labs "are geographically located arenas or forums that develop approaches to foster collaboration between researchers, citizens, businesses and governments to promote joint projects"<sup>42</sup>. Extending the scope and broad scope of these definitions, other inventories and typologies indicate that "this label can be identified anywhere in the world across different platforms and adapt to a variety of contexts and target objectives specific goals." At this stage, we are faced with a nebula that can encompass an infinite number of organizational forms, actors' coordination devices and urban situations.

## Typologies and taxonomy: Aristotle and the Living Labs

Let's continue this overview of the definition essays of Living Labs: equipped with the authority of academic knowledge enriched by a repertoire of empirical studies, professors point out "that Living Labs are partnerships between sectors (often between Public, Private and Populations) where universities play a key role while other observers see them as entities or organizations producing pilot and demonstration projects aimed at developing tools for private actors and helping them commercialise their products, services and technologies. But Living Labs can also stand out as arenas of debate and projects geographically and institutionally circumscribed promoting experimentation and collaborative approaches between researchers, citizens, companies and local governments"<sup>43</sup>. To add to the discomfort of fuzzy definitions and indeterminacy, let's finally add a quote on the territorial levels at which Living Labs or Urban Labs can operate to indicate that "they are capable of being instituted at any scale from the neighbourhood to the entire planet"<sup>44</sup>. All in all, it cannot be said enough, "the extensive use of the Living Labs concept and methodology has led to a Living Lab world containing a wide variety of objectives, activities, structures and organisations."<sup>45</sup>

As can be seen, the criteria of scale, those relating to the qualities of the actors, the methodologies used or the characteristics of local contexts, taken in isolation or combined, these elements are unable to offer a single definition under agreement consensus. Unfortunately, Living Labs do not allow themselves to be easily modelled by a series of parameters that could allow them to be identified in a pure and universal form! A final and optimistic note must be added to the picture: according to the testimony of a researcher, no doubt, Living Labs "are fantastic research tools because they reflect the realities experienced by ordinary people"<sup>46</sup>. This is fair and can generate enthusiasm, but let's go further. On closer inspection, the idea of focusing on reflections and "knowledge productions" on the needs of ordinary people in cenacles or discussion forums is far from new. Indeed, the latter are the best connoisseurs of the realities related to their daily life and as such, their involvement in Living Labs' efforts to know their needs can only improve the relevance and usefulness of these same approaches. There is no doubt that the opinions and testimonies of the final recipients of public actions, in particular contexts of existence, are valuable tools for evaluating and perfecting them. This basic truth was conceptualised by Aristotle that "those who must respect the Law are better judges than those who do it." In other words, when brought back to the subject we are interested in, it means that the production of knowledge about uses must come from the expression and revelation of individuals' preferences. In

this spirit, practice and use underpin the quality of judgment. This is why the inhabitant and the user, residing in a given territory, are the main figures that Urban Labs or Living Urban Labs are looking at.

At this stage, it is reasonable not to dramatise and give too much importance to all these inaccuracies and uncertainties, the object which we are interested in being able, in the first approach, to observe and analyse in situ and characterise, in the broadest sense, coordination of actors, more or less institutionalised, oriented towards social activities focusing on experiments and innovation efforts and focused on people, as we have said, on the inhabitants and users. Nevertheless, given the successes of Living Labs or Urban Labs, in the business, public and academic research circles, at the sectoral and territorial levels, it is necessary to elucidate, to “clarify why Urban Living Labs’ approaches are attractive and new”<sup>47</sup>.

As we can see, the general properties and the very broad understanding of the term Living Lab lend themselves to multiple interpretations. The concept of Living Lab is adaptable, it is polysemic and refers to diverse and diverse human, political and institutional approaches, purposes and “ecosystems”. It should also be noted that “each Living Lab develops in a unique and unique context and focuses on certain challenges and games of interest, but they all aim to improve the living conditions of urban populations”<sup>48</sup>. Again, this definition covers a wide range of functions and organizations whose purposes are to increase the well-being of users or residents.

### **Metropolis and territorial morality of Living Labs**

However, it is important to emphasise that, according to Y. Franz, the counts and typologies drawn up so far on Living Labs’ approaches and experiments, indicate that very few have so far focused on social housing neighbourhoods<sup>49</sup> - and rural or “peripheral” low-density areas. Looking at the establishment of Living Labs in the metropolitan area in France, we can see that the latter are mainly located in rather “favoured” sectors, those where the clusters and other innovation ecosystems. Of course, several indicators should be added together to verify this finding, but it is clear that this geographical distribution only marginally concerns social housing neighbourhoods<sup>50</sup>. Living Labs are an urban or metropolitan fact par excellence. Indeed, a recent census indicates that 65% of Living Labs in France and Europe are located in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and 50% in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants<sup>51</sup>. In fact, “based on a geographical analysis and previously unpublished surveys carried out as part of a research programme (2015-2016) on territorial knowledge and innovation in the conduct of public policy in France, Living Labs are, at the

image of the geography of knowledge, eminently metropolitan objects and devices”<sup>52</sup>.

As we can see, Living Labs or Urban Labs accompany the phenomenon of metropolisation. Worse, they participate in the process of urban concentration by helping to polarise services and activities of the upper tertiary sector in the largest urban areas. In other words, they contribute to fostering the process of concentrating knowledge and strategic functions in metropolises and in doing so, increasing territorial inequalities. Obviously, it would be very risky and even wrong to place a heavy responsibility on them in this process. In addition, it would be necessary to know in detail the content of their “portfolio of activities” to judge their contribution to these phenomena of polarization. Nevertheless, they emerge from the field of knowledge economics, and as such are part of the functions that are mainly concentrated in metropolises. Let us mention again the researchers who investigated the thematic and territorial specializations of Living Labs in France: it appears that the latter “appear more appropriate and inscribed in the software and practices of metropolitan thought intermediate and rural territories. Moreover, it can be seen as an expression of a disparity or discontinuity in the way territorial innovation is thought of; we can also see it as a hybrid and emerging form of metropolitan development thinking, not without some paradoxes and potentially negative effects: specialization, “technologisation,” segregation. Researchers who have searched for and found one of the reasons for Living Labs conclude in an interrogative way: “Are Living Labs a minority of an elitised minority?” We see that we are far from the social housing districts where the “standard” model of the Living Lab is unlikely to have reasons to establish itself.

In truth, Living Labs are tools that track the urban locations of the “creative class” in the words of Richard Florida. The territories of technological excellence call for professional and more broadly social elites, spearheading the vanguard of “trendy” or “trending” neighbourhoods. But there is more: according to E. Roux and Q. Marion, Living Labs and Urban Labs have seen a rise with the generalisation of New Public Management approaches in Western European cities - and elsewhere. Indeed, these approaches are often accompanied by the creation of prospective and strategy cells to guide and monitor organisational reforms and adjustments related to the application of revenues from the modernization of public services. These cells develop experimental and innovative approaches and often display philosophical and methodological closeness to Living Labs. As such, Living Labs are also related to entities or agencies responsible for modernising territorial public management.

In light of all the above, should it be agreed that the geography of Living Labs embraces the lines of power of globalization by giving a

premium to international influence and directional functions exercised by large agglomerations?<sup>53</sup> This is not in doubt for Living Labs operating in the private sector whose function, as marketing tools, is to test the relevance of goods and services intended for markets. This type of Living Lab has flourished in recent years due to the outsourcing of the research and development functions of companies in a more distributed landscape of these same functions. This accelerates the rise of open and cooperative innovation approaches opening up a juicy market for Living Labs-stamped platforms. It goes without saying that this phenomenon is less pronounced for the Living Labs or Urban Labs territorial or urban, born of partnerships between public actors, and whose vocation is to promote innovations in the supply of collective goods and services for the benefit residents or users.

In any case, Living Labs don't appear to be very moral beings that benefit the geographical areas and types of populations already the most favoured. Of course, let us not confuse the Living Lab which is only an instrument and its social and political uses, as one should not confuse the car with its driver. On the other hand, let us not dramatise by designating Living Labs as enemies of the people and territorial justice! In the final analysis, it must be admitted that Living Labs or Urban Labs are flexible and malleable "substances and materials", their qualities and virtues residing in their high adaptability in the contexts or ecosystems in which they establish themselves.

For this is the ambivalent nature of Living Labs: these are instruments for coordinating collective action that can be put at the service of various causes and purposes ranging from the pursuit of profit to the strengthening of oligarchic powers of some actors, but which are also able to contribute to a wider supply of goods and collective services and a more egalitarian and open participation to local democracy. Like Janus, the Living Lab or the Urban Lab is a tool or a means and it offers both sides that reflect conflicting visions, results and hopes. In this, it is a typical social production of the risk society that generates threats and uncertainties produced by society itself, dangers arose from the use of tools and techniques created by the process of modernisation and the search for more efficiency in the allocation of resources.

Nevertheless, following the observation that the Living Lab is seen as the telling and striking expression of a metropolitan fact, it is paradoxical to note that tools to help the regeneration of working-class neighbourhoods - or other fragile or marginalised neighbourhoods - produce perverse effects that exacerbate spatial disparities at national or even European level. Of course, this critical angle takes the broad-based view of the scale to denounce the ambivalences of the geographical distribution of

Living Labs, without losing sight of the view that their effects can produce very positive externalities in territorial circles; where they are located, including in large social housing neighbourhoods.

This being noted, we see that it would be futile and ultimately sterile to want to reduce this diversity of the Living Labs landscape by placing it under the empire of a single figure or model, looking for a unique and pure form that could match it. From a more open perspective, the Living Lab can be viewed methodologically as a standard ideal, as Max Weber defines it, a concept with limits sufficiently stretchy and flexible to group various marked expressions, yet still having fundamental common traits.

It should be noted, however, that the Living Lab's approaches and modus operandi are inspired by the same matrix which is considered, by general agreement, to be at the origin of the emergence of a "paradigm shift" for the mind and practices of development. In particular, the Living Lab's experimental, cognitive, heuristic and participatory tool brings together qualities that lend themselves to local and urban approaches that chart appropriate pathways to govern ecological and Energy. In doing so, it responds to leading contemporary challenges at the top of the city policy agenda. In summary, "in a context of declining civic engagement, social fragmentation and the need for institutional flexibility, Urban Labs are emerging as tools to stimulate social, political and economic innovations in cities"<sup>54</sup>.

Despite the ambiguities and indeterminacy that have been identified, similar traits identify Living Labs for territorial and urban purposes. Several typologies exist that can be found in the specialised literature.

### **Urban Labs' Diversity and Properties: A Tropism for Ecological Transition**

Thus, a first ranking distinguishes a trilogy:

- Living Labs "of general scope" that aim to improve the quality of services of the daily lives of users or residents. Initiators can be businesses or citizens;
- The purpose of "technology-oriented" Living Labs is to evaluate services and products, some of which may have been "co-designed." The initiators are the same as in the previous case;
- Finally, "socially oriented" Living Labs are characterised by local and urban roots, they aim to share urban policy objectives and urban service choices with coalitions of actors but are concerned with fostering co-creation and empowerment involving users and inhabitants.

A second typology is worth mentioning. It stems from a body of work on the role of Urban Labs as tools for governance of ecological transition

in several European cities<sup>55</sup>. These are distinguished:

– Urban Labs with a strategic purpose: they are created and managed by public authorities or private actors of a certain size, their scope of interest corresponds to the entire jurisdiction of the city and they carry multiple and diverse projects. This first category may be open to variable geometry “PPPP” (Public/Private/People Partnership). These Urban Labs are capable of hosting sectoral urban reflections or on specific places or spaces deserving of specific interest or treatment. Moreover, the broad territorial and thematic spectrum covered by this type of Urban Lab can also lend itself to prospective and programmatic approaches questioning the future of the city according to more or less distant temporal horizons.

A large number of cities and metropolises in the countries of the European Union have set up this type of Urban Lab - virtual and physical places - designed to conduct strategic reflections and develop agendas for ecological transition. In fact, according to researchers, the tool represented by the Urban Lab, an asset for cities seeking to position themselves as leaders in the race for “decarbonisation” and, at the same time, an organizational guarantee to secure long-term financing in order to embark on the path of sustainable urban development. This model is illustrated by the Antwerp City Lab 2050 created in 2015 by the city of Antwerp and piloted, within the municipal administration, by the Department of Energy and Environment. The aim here is to carry out strategic reflections by 2050 to put the city of Antwerp on a “low carbon” trajectory<sup>56</sup>.

Of course, a forward-looking dimension “Designing the future” is one of the main methodological strengths of the exercise. To do this, the major ingredients of the programmatic approach of City Labs are brought together: an open forum gives the floor to all players to build a sustainable future of the metropolis; initiatives and contributions from bottom up and the grassroots level are encouraged; The City Lab is the linchpin of the development of a charter or “concerted plan” entitled “Sustainable City for Everyone”; the local government is committed, through financial and regulatory incentives, to foster innovation, experimentation and the creation of prototypes in the area of resilient and sustainable city planning policies and promotion. The themes on which the programs are focused are all-round urban sustainability. Let’s mention without completeness: the greening of the city, sustainable housing, green energy, the circular economy, sustainable food, the creation of an experimental district “carbon-free” and tutti quanti...

Around each of the themes of the “task forces” are formed to create coalitions of ad hoc actors who can develop programs efficiently and participatoryly with a specific agenda. These task forces have the ability to launch calls for projects in their areas of expertise. This system can also use the expertise and support of the administrative services of the city of

Antwerp, which will, at the same time, coordinate actions by putting the municipal organization in motion and to the test of cross-cutting issues related to the environmental crisis.

In many ways, it must be recognised that the example of Antwerp is instructive even if one can think, under a critical eye, that this device has a "déjà-vu" look and seems imbued with ideas and patterns in vogue and in the air of the times. That said, Antwerp City Lab 2050, to our knowledge, does not claim any of the leading position or exclusive and patented model of combating climate change. This approach may have been inspired by the Guide lines or catalogues of good practices disseminated by the European Union, which have an effect of standardisation and commoditisation of urban models of ecological transition. Nevertheless, from our perspective of listing the properties of type cases belonging to the large family of Living Labs or City Labs, the example of the approach launched by Antwerp is undeniably illuminating: it testifies to the strategic role that is assigned to these platforms to promote collaborative planning practices focused on highly contemporary issues of climate change.

– Civic Urban Labs: leaders can be cities, universities, urban development agencies. They focus on sustainable economic projects at the urban level and are co-financed by several partners. This second type emphasises the leadership needed to launch and sustain the Urban Lab. Indeed, an actor who, as an agent or "in his own name", takes over the start-up, promotion and management of the programs must commit to a time cycle long enough to ensure the credibility of the ambition carried by the project. Urban Lab's collective. According to authors familiar with the "science and practice of Living Labs", they "represent both high-level bodies of expertise and cooperation, but also, increasingly, vehicles for secure funding to achieve the ecological transition"<sup>57</sup>. Of course, this longevity is also necessary for the enhancement and dissemination of results. On the other hand, it goes without saying that it must also ensure the continuity of a budget allocation or other form of funding to ensure the operation and actions carried out under the Urban Lab.

– Grassroots Urban Labs, run by non-profit civil society actors. They operate on a wide range of projects, both economic and oriented towards offering collective services to the inhabitants. They have a predilection for micro-projects and have limited financial resources<sup>58</sup>.

These different formulas, according to the authors of this ranking, can position urban public authorities according to three more or less proactive attitudes or strategies marked by different degrees of involvement. Indeed, they either play a role of promoter by initiating, funding and implementing the programs of the Urban Lab. That is, a role of benevolent facilitator creating a favourable ground for the establishment of Urban Labs. That is, a partner role managing equally with other actors the duties

and obligations related to the management of the Urban Lab and sharing the functions of leadership and participation in the common project.

A complementary overview of Urban Labs' areas of interest indicates that they operate in broad and global fields, but these can be grouped into 6 themes that intersect with the challenges of inclusive urban economic growth and ecological and energy transition : innovation for urban sustainable development, digital technologies in their applications to the energy, building and mobility sectors, sustainable transport and mobility, urban social integration and values of collective identity that accompany it, the rehabilitation of the building and urban renewal neighbourhoods in decline. We see that these registers of interventions intersect a wide range of policies carried out by municipal or intercommunal authorities.

In addition, certain conditions must be met for City Labs to provide the most convincing results. A non-exhaustive list has been developed that includes the most important factors.

First of all, the innovation process must be open, and for that, the entrance fees to the City Lab must be flexible. Setting criteria that are too demanding for admission to a Living Lab could involve sawing the branch on which you are sitting. Partners who can enrich approaches and visions and whose objectives align with those set collectively are eligible and welcome! This allows for a freedom and a wealth of interactions between partners, and above all, the consideration of the demands and needs of users, pivotal partners and objects of the City Lab. The result of this composition is a plurality of perspectives represented by an assortment of actors. Without completeness: academics, private companies, public authorities and users or user associations...

Second, a realistic approach should guide the activities of the City Lab. Indeed, the "out puts" it designs and produces must be able to stand the test of the markets and meet demands and needs corresponding to situations, behaviours and aspirations observed in reality. Urban Labs should not indulge in abstract programs developed in offices or university cenacles. Indeed, one of the criteria that marks the specificity of Living Labs is that of the confrontation to the test of the reality of the services and goods offered. This condition reinforces the experimental nature of the production and manufacturing processes of outputs. This salutary pragmatism differentiates City Labs from other types of open innovation approaches in contexts of "co-design" of services or products. Ahead of this concrete component of Living Labs can be an apprenticeship, a true maieutic that allows actors to jointly produce knowledge, to appropriate it reflexively by learning from past and ongoing experiences while critically questioning their own attitudes and contributions. There is a dose of collective intelligence in this process of cooperation giving rise to the

production of added value distributed among the actors in a mutually beneficial way.

The empowerment of users must be a key principle of the “praxeology” of City Labs, one of their *raison d’être* being to test the creative power of user communities. It is therefore necessary to promote by all means the capacity of individuals and target groups so that clear and explicit formulations of their desires and needs emerge. To this end, various tools can be used: focus groups, prototype tests, interviews, in-depth investigations... In short, all possible techniques for revealing preferences must be used.

Finally, spontaneity must be a central value of City Labs. The consideration of this propensity or “volition”, as the cognitive philosophy of the 18th century calls it, is necessary to collect the authenticity, the truth of the desires of users and inhabitants. This does not mean probing the depth of the unconscious from a Freudian perspective or the psychology of the depths, but accepting the consideration of testimonies, speeches expressing the aspirations, the hopes of individuals, and aggregating them, communities living in neighbourhoods<sup>59</sup>.

At this point, a new general definition of City Labs can be put forward to summarise or synthesise all the features that have been listed. This definition establishes a more precise and convincing scope of properties capable of better individualising, functionally and strategically, the nature and roles of these entities: “City Labs can be distinguished as a category describing or analysing situations of urban experimentation from a governance perspective. This concept aims to understand how hybrid or border-based organisations (boundary position) produce knowledge and learning in contexts where various partners, including local government, apply experimental approaches to solving problems using multidisciplinary approaches”<sup>60</sup>.

### **Places and people, risks and excesses of Urban Labs**

Let’s go further: after examining many urban or territorial configurations in which urban or territorial Living Labs can flourish, there is a regularity: the absence or critical lack of private partners from the business in management or coordination bodies. Such a gap is striking for Urban Labs operating in social housing neighbourhoods. This deficit has the effect of greatly reducing the exploitation of economic opportunities present in the urban or metropolitan environment. This is a serious lack or handicap, as the issues of the integration of the unemployed or precarious workers into the labour market are not, by far, one of the key priorities and actions carried out by the Urban Labs - especially those implanted

in the working-class neighbourhoods. Such a direction poses a risk that threatens to largely specialise its scope in compensation, reparation or social assistance programs. This has two consequences. On the one hand, the dissemination of support values to fragile populations that can become a "customer", if not a permanent one, at the least a regular one, of the devices put in place. On the other hand, the specialization of the Urban Lab's project team in intervention registers relating to social assistance or assistance to the most needy. Moreover, it is not certain that these actions benefit the poorest as a priority, because experience and evaluations show that they generally benefit the better informed. This is nothing, in itself, deplorable, except for the perverse effects that result from it. But this trend can profoundly mislead, over time, the vocation of an Urban Lab whose initial objectives could be centred on a series of "open innovations" involving re-qualifications of housing or public spaces or on interventions on neighbourhood physical infrastructure, not initiatives and programs to help and subsidise the most vulnerable residents.

According to the classical distinction, an unfortunate deviation can result from a confusion between "places and people". According to Jacques Donzelot, the city's policy in France "has improved the vision of the place rather than the fate of the people to fight against the "ghettoisation" of the suburbs"<sup>61</sup>. This relationship has focused mainly on the re-qualification of the physical infrastructure of the neighbourhoods. Thus, the recent demolition/reconstruction programs launched in 2003 by the PNRU and focused mainly on the premises, have not lived up to expectations, to use a euphemism, in terms of promoting social mix and improving the fate of populations in sensitive neighbourhoods. Certainly, over time, oscillations have indeed occurred between the two terms of the relationship places and people and "the city has been well penetrated into the city but, however, has not succeeded in ensuring that the inhabitants of the city can enter the city." It should be noted, however, that the regeneration policies of sensitive neighbourhoods, of course, have always combined actions on physical spaces and social programs for the benefit of the inhabitants. This dialectic tipped the scales sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other side. But the ambitious goals of significantly and concertedly improving the situation of neighbourhoods and the condition of their inhabitants have never been achieved. However, experience has shown that the failure of regeneration policies is even more resounding since the social support programs for urban renewal focus mainly on people through actions mainly geared towards compensation and assistance.

In this regard, it must be recalled, schematically, that the doctrine that has forged the spirit of interventions towards working-class neighbourhoods in the United States takes on board this fundamental

separation between “places and people”. In the philosophy and logic of these interventions, requalifications of places and buildings are of course planned and necessary. But the direction of the programs towards people is different. Indeed, the latter aim, as far as possible, not to root them in poverty in the places where they reside but to offer them means that can lead to residential mobility from the perspective of a professional project allowing emancipation and social promotion. This is the case with the program initiated by the Obama administration in the 2010s, Choice Neighbourhoods, which placed a strong emphasis on not only on residential aspects but also on the social mobility of residents, in support of educational and employment services.

If not exclusive concentration, at least heavily marked towards repair programs aimed at “people” can lead to a drift: the assimilation of urban Lab team members to social workers. Functionally this is not always self-evident, as “institutional” social workers do not always heartily welcome initiatives walking on their turf. Entering this environment requires diplomacy, seeking alliances and compromises. Such specialization of Urban Labs is not deplorable but should correspond to a deliberate choice and assumed by the interested parties - and accepted by local welfare professionals. *Ipsa facto* this deviation leads to enshrining their actions in the directory of the provision of local assistance and assistance services to fragile populations. This can also lead to the institutionalization of Urban Labs if not in permanent wickets of the local assistant, redoubling or complementing the actions carried out by the social services of the city or the district, but at least as mediators and small craftsmen of local supply of social policies. This can be achieved in good conscience, with feelings or impulses of generosity and with the certainty of conducting just, legitimate or even innovative actions. Nevertheless, this process raises broader questions about the ethics and the meanings and purposes of these interventions. Of course, it is glorious and moral to work for social justice. This internalised sentiment shared by Urban Labs managers or animators can justify activism and commitment to programs that provide access to city resources for the poorest.

But above all, we must admit that Urban Labs are not tools or devices that emerge from redistribution policies and social justice. They would have such a mountain of problems and complexities to overcome that they could only act on the margins, with limited means, for random results. They do not, in principle and as a *raison d'être*, have an active and proactive role in reducing social inequalities by applying, for example, the principle of positive discrimination. Nor is their vocation to become charitable institutions. In the light of Hayek's point of view, they should be limited, including in working-class neighbourhoods, to “negative

actions” that create conditions for the exercise of individuals’ free choices to improve their situation and that of their living environment. This vision does not mean giving blind trust to the invisible hand of the market, but it is necessary to cultivate, at this level, a principle of modesty. Nor is it a question of deluding oneself about the self-management abilities of the poorest. Of course, this may sound like a simplistic formula derived from a liberal economic catechism, but this rule is a basic moral basis that can help to circumscribe the scope of redistributive and social assistance policies, including locally. In the contexts of interest to us, this means, for example, providing infrastructure and means for people to act on their own to improve their homes and outdoor spaces. Another way is to encourage them, through financial incentives, to achieve residential mobility in another neighbourhood. And not to build programs that are often complex to manage, costly and renewable in which it is necessary to incorporate, volens nolens, inhabitants and users. This proactive and interventionist inclination is based on the theory of burden: one must agree to devote a growing part of the wealth produced to the care of the most fragile populations and the fight against poverty. This must be considered inevitable. In other words, in contemporary societies, even those that have significantly reduced the social state, it is impossible to avoid dragging this burden. It is the flip side of progress that, by its very nature, leads to social inequalities. The local or territorial effects of this process are the most discriminating and socially fragmented in large social housing neighbourhoods.

In these neighbourhoods, “social” Living Labs face all concentrated forms of social inequality and disaffiliation. This carries the risk of cumulatively adding up assistance and assistance programs to the poorest. Of course, it is not a question of equating Living Labs, which have a narrow local base and limited means to develop, for example, vegetable gardens with locals or organise cooking classes, to “gas plants”. But a leap forward in compensation programs, even on a small scale, is more likely to satisfy the interests of the structures set up and their facilitators more than the populations needing to be helped.

### **Tomb of city politics**

As we can see, this vision joins a liberal approach of Living Labs oriented towards empowering individuals, exercising their free choices and taking charge of their destiny. Of course, this should not be reduced to a monomaniacal orientation but can help to take into account also, and perhaps above all, the need to encourage individual initiatives in favour of the creation of jobs and value productions market-oriented additions.

Nor does it mean giving in to the sirens of a radical economic liberalism considering actions in favour of neighbourhoods as being purely and simply a matter of assistance and that it should be strictly limited to simple measures of exemptions Tax. However, it must be recognised that positive interventions, like the French-style urban renewal policies that have become sedimented over time, can, in the end, cause even more injustices by their “generous intentions” in superficially and temporarily hindering the spirals of poverty and maintaining or even amplifying urban inequalities between neighbourhoods<sup>62</sup>. Many evaluations have pointed to the low contribution of city policy to social justice when it is not itself a factor of injustice.

Through positive discrimination, these policies have created exceptional zones, and created ever-increasing expectations and demands for compensation from the populations concerned; they have focused the attention of public opinion and the media on these “exceptional territories” by broadcasting ads and messages that are grandiloquent and pompous in the fight against poverty and have spread beliefs of effectiveness, if not erroneous, at least disproportionate, on the possible achievement of performance and results. Thus, “Ending the Big Ensembles” or “Launching a Marshall Plan for the Suburbs” are formulas that have illustrated, in turn, the proactive, incantatory and chimerical aspects of city politics characterised by “words that succeed and policies that fail.” Let’s continue the enumeration: these policies have contributed to the establishment of structures and devices that have stacked up cumulatively and have most often led their managers and managers to sustain their service offerings over time and to “increase the surface area of their offices”; they have reinforced the neighbourhood effects that have engulfed in devaluation spirals an increasing number of residents of large social housing complexes increasingly associated with images of places of relegation and ghettos; they have disseminated egalitarian messages in the name of abstract principles such as gender diversity and, because of their failures and promises without tomorrow, have fuelled a growing rise in resentment and frustration. This has led to a rise in communitarian reflexes and recurrent waves of violence caused by disenchanting visions, disillusionment and a growing rise in perceptions and lived experiences of worsening inequalities... The list of critics could be extended ad nauseam. These reports are known and no one shoots an ambulance. But they cannot be ignored when trying to think about improving the tools of the regeneration policies of impoverished and degraded neighbourhoods. They constitute, in a way, a negative directory of Guide Lines, a counter-instruction manual or even a blacklist of guidelines and measures to be outlawed.

In this respect, such actions can only provoke analyses and positions

in total break with their moral and political orientations by giving water to the mill to liberal or even libertarian approaches of the state. Thus, by repeating to the letter the canonical criticisms of the welfare state, it can be said that a drift of Urban Labs towards an "overtly social inclination" can contribute, at the level of the territories concerned, to the diffusion of a culture of assistance among the most vulnerable populations. This is commonplace, but this positioning and this drift towards assistance are all the more assertive as they can result from tendencies that can result from the state's significant withdrawal from the field of social policies, at least one outsourcing of a set of redistributive and compensation services that he had previously provided to local authorities, associations or other charitable actors. Such a deviation, as we can see, poses a particular threat to Living Labs or Urban Labs located in working-class neighbourhoods with a large number of social housing and populated by fragile and disaffiliated populations. In these contexts, it seems that a periodic reflexive evaluation of the Activities of the Urban Lab is beneficial so that the offer of projects and mediation or management initiatives overcome the pitfalls of excessive if not total specialization in "pilot projects" related to assistance and social assistance.

From this perspective, one of the key missions of Living Labs because of their often-recognised - and claimed - "grey matter" endowments, certified by the presence of professors and academic researchers within them, could be to conduct think stakes, in the manner of the Think Tank, to rethink the social aspect of urban regeneration policies and to formulate recommendations and Guide Lines in this regard. In the absence of this critical and reflexive setback, one could make the same "reproaches" to the "Social Living Labs" as that addressed to residents of sensitive neighbourhoods when they are asked about their living environment: a simplistic phenomenology bearing only a look at the superficial problems and dysfunctions they face on a daily basis without seeing the springs and root causes they result from: for example, focusing on day-to-day inconveniences such as the questionable cleanliness of the premises or the deterioration of services related to the maintenance of residences or dwellings or the distance of shops from places of residence... In other words, to see only the tree that hides the forest, without reducing the essential reasons of this "pathology of daily life" to more general and political issues. Of course, it would be absurd to despise such knowledge of use and spontaneity of the inhabitants and users, which constitutes the basic food of sociological surveys carried out in the neighbourhoods. That said, reading between the lines, it is not uncommon to find in some testimonies the deeper springs at the origin of the process of impoverishment of marginalised neighbourhoods. One can think, for example, of the new

“market oriented” strategies of social donors, the rise of socio-spatial inequalities in urban areas and the resulting injustices for working-class neighbourhoods or the neo-liberals turning points chosen by a growing number of cities and metropolises... in short, a series of scholarly and external judgments that turn their backs on a comprehensive and contextualised analysis of approaches from sociology or anthropology.

In a better world, populated by Urban Labs having done their examination of conscience, it would be desirable that these offer two facets. A first reflecting a propensity to develop initiatives in terms of job creation, especially for the market, the dissemination of entrepreneurship and other learning of “Business culture”. A second guided by an offer of compensation and care programs for fragile populations.

### **Ways of Redemption and Resurrection of Living Labs**

Such abuses of Living Labs engaged - deliberately or unbeknownst to them - on the road of a transmutation into welfare agencies can be avoided or curbed in a preventive way. This is possible through organizational and procedural arrangements that allow, at the same time, the requests of the inhabitants to be taken into account through different channels, a more accurate disclosure of their preferences and a better representativeness of their deliberation and decision-making bodies of local governance. There is no miracle cure in this area, but some successes can be cited as examples that are rich in teachings. A religious vocabulary would say that these virtuous examples can chart possible paths of redemption for Living Labs caught in the shackles of social assistance.

This is the case with the German “Social City” program implemented in the early 2000s. In this program, the projects have been defined at monthly “neighbourhood forums” where all stakeholders are represented (elected, social donors, residents, traders, etc.). The implementation of the projects is the responsibility of a steering group responsible for mobilising and coordinating, at the municipal level, the various administrations concerned. “Neighbourhood management teams” thus play a role of mediation and coordination between these levels. Thus, the aim is to broaden the circle of those who prepare the decision: alongside experts and technicians, there is room for concerned citizens who have usual expertise. They are understood if two conditions are met: sufficient mobilization around their projects to create a favourable balance of power and coherent proposals, seriously formalised. But people from working-class backgrounds can only achieve this by being accompanied and helped. This is the role of “Neighbourhood Management” and Community Social Work (Gemeinwesenarbeit). It is worth stressing here the decisive

nature of the establishment of this intermediation body to assess and manage regeneration projects collectively. Indeed, the managers of the district ensure the interface between the municipality, the inhabitants, the technical stakeholders... It is a form of public service delegation to a local association or study office. As soon as the project is launched, an evaluation system is put in place to help steer and reframe the action. This system is quite cumbersome, with a lot of back and forth between evaluators, local authorities, stakeholders and locals. Nevertheless, it allows the debate to begin on the basis of reasoned observations and not approximate personal impressions<sup>63</sup>.

In addition, to promote the expression and involvement of the population, committees of inhabitants have been set up, to which specific funds have been entrusted (empowerment funds). Their positive effects on empowerment and the rigorous management of which they were the object were highlighted by the evaluators. The Soziale Stadt program has become a European benchmark for urban policies, as the Leipzig Charter pointed out at the beginning of 2007. In total, its cost amounted to more than 3 billion euros between 1999 and 2010, spread among 600 neighbourhoods located in 400 cities. In addition, "the available evaluations of the Soziale Stadt programs show the extent to which participatory public action promotes citizen engagement, improves relations between local residents and actors, and at the same time leads to positive effects on mental health, feelings of insecurity, the satisfaction of living in the neighbourhood and living it together." According to the consecrated formula, what is true in France is not necessarily so beyond the Pyrenees... It is true that the German experience of the Soziale Stadt cannot, *integris stibebat*, be duplicated in our country. But it has obeyed organizational devices and arrangements that could be, if not transposed, at least experimentally tested in certain contexts of urban regeneration.

The example of the policies in Britain towards working-class neighbourhoods in the early 2000s is also worth mentioning: in this experiment, the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods targeted by the NDC (New Deal for Community) were 40% in the local management bodies of the program. Downstream, they were also called upon to speak in thematic committees. A special fund has even been made available to involve the groups furthest from public speaking (including women, the disabled, the elders and young people). To give local partners more flexibility in project design, no budget allocation had been planned. For example, each of the 39 neighbourhoods targeted, with an average population of 9900, was allocated 76 million euros over a ten-year period. The NDC monitoring system has been able to measure very favourable developments in the perception by residents of the change in actions taken: over the period of

observation under review, from 2002 to 2008, the fear of crime decreased by 14 percentage point, while the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood increased by 10 points.<sup>64</sup>

This picture of living labs' possible paths to redemption deserves to be enriched by an example described by J. Talpin on the development of a participatory budget in the 11th arrondissement of the city of Rome that began in 2003. That same year, the district elected a communist mayor, close to the alter-globalization movement, as its leader, who set the municipality's agenda for "deepening democracy" at the top. This approach has led to a deliberative and empowerment process for the inhabitants, which was the subject of an ethnographic survey conducted from 2004 to 2006<sup>65</sup>. For example, 54 public meetings were followed and observed and provided material to study the social dynamics of participation.

It should be noted, first, that the principle of the participatory budget is to promote access to active citizenship through the inclusion of the citizen in the decisions of the Municipality. It is a way, adopted by a growing number of cities, to involve "ordinary residents" in the budget cycle of a public community. It thus provides an important co-decision power to residents and users and makes the issue of politicisation of participants and citizenship education a central objective of the scheme. In the case described by J. Talpin, an allocation of 5 million euros - 20% of the municipal investment budget - was decided by the inhabitants. Despite a low turnout and a defection of the most marginalised segments of the population of the district, it allowed a non-political competence, linked to the daily life of the actors, to access arenas of collective discussion. Despite the fact that members of political parties or associations were over-represented in the Participatory Budget, the inhabitants were able to highlight a common knowledge that fuelled the debates, guided budgetary choices and the allocation of resources. Moreover, it has allowed some inhabitants to gradually acquire an aptitude for argument in the context of successive debates and deliberations. In doing so, they were able to appropriate technical skills over the course of the meetings to discuss on an equal footing with municipal experts. On this point, J. Talpin in extenso states: "The Participatory Budget deals, for the most part, with urban planning issues (roads, urban development, local development, etc.) relating to municipal competences. Discussions in the assemblies were therefore often technical, requiring the use of plans, diagrams, precise figures, to determine where and how to build a gymnasium, bike path, parking lot, green space, or how expand the neighbourhood school. The meetings thus involved participants without any particular technical skills, and others who, through their professional activity, had important knowledge on specific issues, and municipal engineers whose few interventions appeared

to be real lessons in urban planning. Technical learning is therefore mainly done through discursive interactions between citizens and experts. Participants were thus able to acquire some technical expertise on urban planning issues, they now know what are the legal constraints to the realization of a particular type of urban development, the costs of certain projects, the technical pros and cons of different types of road work. From this point of view, participation in institutions of participatory democracy seems to be able to narrow the gap between experts and lay people in the construction of public policies. Regular participants also learn how to manage a budget, with its inputs and exits, the need for balance, etc. The BP thus allows for greater transparency in the allocation of public funds, as budgetary complexity is no longer a hindrance to the understanding of political choices, this “fiscal pedagogy” is also seen by elected officials as a means of doing understand the difficulties of their task and silence the demands.”

In addition to access to technical knowledge, the Participatory Budget has opened, in parallel, spaces of sociability that have played a decisive role in the politicization of actors. This provided an opportunity to create formally open public arenas allowing the expression of knowledge and know-how generally excluded or marginalised or excluded political game. Thus, a common knowledge, mainly derived from the personal experience of the inhabitants, has emerged and has fuelled the debates. This process has cleared the way to achieve active citizenship that allows for a democratization of access to civic skills. This resonates as a formula or slogan to the glory of this approach but also refers to a major issue that is that of the political socialization of individuals from the working classes and their access to scenes of public deliberation. In the final analysis, isn't the ambition of Living Labs, especially in social housing neighbourhoods, to integrate a common knowledge into the design of the actions and services offered and to stimulate an empowerment that brings responsibility, compliance and citizenship?

Of course, limits related to the implementation of the Participatory Budget were observed: demobilization along the way and high turnover rate of participants, monopolization of public speech by consultation professionals, disappointed expectations, disenchantment or even the rise of a cynicism resulting from too long delays that do not allow us to see progress or the beginnings of implementation of the projects debated and selected. This participatory budgeting experience has suffered setbacks and setbacks. This reflects all the difficulties, tensions and often disillusionment with the participation processes. Nevertheless, despite these imperfections and shortcomings, this experience is hopeful, it draws promising and encouraging lines of strength to broaden the scope

of democracy in working-class neighbourhoods.

As we can see, organizations created on the model of "Living Labs" and seeking to promote experimentation and innovation within social housing neighbourhoods can find their place in the participation schemes that have been to play an active role and make a contribution. This does not mean that Living Labs must align themselves with the model of participatory budgets or other virtuous and formatted approaches to citizen participation. These examples are sources of inspiration, guidelines that could appear on glossy catalogues of best practices. But there is no doubt that Living Labs have the task of articulating with existing devices at the local level, and beyond, to provide specific added value resulting in a useful and possible innovative service offering to locals. They have to integrate into the existing landscape, even if it shakes it up. They can thus be mediators and provide an interface between the inhabitants themselves or their associations and the local or regional authorities responsible for the economic and social aspects of regeneration programs. In this articulation, they can provide a spur role and propose innovations, foreshadowing pilot projects. A positioning in this general architecture could avoid a slippage and specialisation in services geared towards assistance. At the same time, it would allow Living Labs to draw a profile of intervention to their measure and within their reach, in support or in a pioneering position in relation to the functions performed by other players in the requalification. Of course, it is not their competence or their responsibility to put in place these institutional structures and new ways of coordinating stakeholders within the framework of policies aimed at the economic and social development of the major social housing neighbourhoods. These are responsibilities that fall under constituent policies, belonging to the register of law and regulation. This responsibility rests with metropolitan or regional decision-making bodies, but above all, because of the importance of funding, the state, whether national or federal. Moreover, in their field, national policies are also endowed with an active power of innovation and experimentation. "Top down" policies that have inventive or creative virtues should not be brushed aside. It goes without saying that the State also has financial or regulatory incentives to apply means to push cities and other local authorities to embark on innovative programs.

In parentheses, taken in the literal sense of the word, "a Living Labs activity", conducted by a prospective and strategy cell and mandated by the relevant partners, could be useful, at the appropriate levels, to think and formalise these new institutional arrangements. This underlines the challenge and the need for an overall vision of urban renewal policies in terms of administrative and institutional arrangements and the correlative

coordination of actors, at the appropriate scales, in arrangements Consistent. In these "virtuous institutional scenarios" the duty of Living Labs is to find an ad hoc and legitimate functional space to carry out their missions.

### **Digital technologies: a fuel for City Labs**

A third ranking, which only partially overlaps with previous typologies, is worth mentioning. It distinguishes three types of Urban Labs by emphasising an interesting last form close to the "community organising" model. The latter case is illuminating because it refers to practices that seek to establish a favourable balance of power in favour of actors and interest groups involved in setting up an Urban Lab. Indeed, this "model" describes the spirit and modus operandi to put in place the ways and means to make the voices of the most disaffiliated inhabitants of working-class neighbourhoods, those whose probability of mobilization and protest of the established order is one of the weakest. In other words, to use the categories of A.O Hirschmann, those whose natural reflex or habitus are more "exit than voice"<sup>66</sup>. One can recognise as follows<sup>67</sup> :

The Urban Labs with a technological vocation: they want to test digital solutions and services with users or residents to verify their use, relevance and acceptability. This is most often done by setting up digital sensors or sensors that lend themselves to quantitative measurement of people's reactions and changes in the habits and behaviours of individuals in the face of new offerings of digital tools and services. This may include testing and experiments in areas ranging from housing to mobility and multiple other urban services. In this minimum version, these tests may be similar to those performed "in vitro or in the laboratory" aimed simply at collecting raw data that could then be analysed and interpreted.

Urban Labs that intend to give individuals tools and means to actively transform their environment. This approach can be materialised by the manufacture and distribution of "ToolKits" lends itself, for example, to the measurement of various and varied pollutions present in the neighbourhoods or sub-neighbourhoods where the people concerned live. The aim is to equip the inhabitants with these measuring instruments with the intention of making them aware of the state of their environment and to build an assessment or expertise that is concurrent with those officially disseminated or by homologated organizations. Residents and users produce urban data in a "passive" way, so to speak, through their connected daily activities that are recorded electronically. But they are also able to actively produce data for collective and civic purposes. In this regard, digital tools can be a lever to spread a culture of citizen expertise

through the creation of platforms that combine data to defend and promote the interests of the inhabitants of a territory or of a neighbourhood. It is about putting people "capable" of diagnosing, in certain aspects, the qualities and disabilities of their home territory and this involves the use of new technical and cognitive tools that produce information that can weigh in on an argument or negotiation. This process can lead to the creation of smart communities with skills that can be converted into compromised pressure sets. In fact, any citizen with - or "enhanced with"- the new faculties of the smart citizen has ad hoc technological means to activate mobilizations for causes aimed at improving the living environment of localised communities. Manipulated in the right direction and put at the service of the cooperation of residents at the neighbourhood level, the Internet can prove to be a powerful tool of local democracy and citizen inquiry.

As Antonova Paskaleva points out, the meeting between participatory governance and the digital revolution is hopeful and it should be stressed that "new urban media promote the empowerment of citizens through the democratization of and the availability of digital platforms"<sup>68</sup>. Some authors summarise this virtuous process as "enhanced governance." It cannot be better said, and this opens up new avenues and possibilities for action, but let us not dream: it must be recognised that the appropriation of digital tools is far from having won over all sections of the population, especially in the popular neighbourhoods<sup>69</sup>. Not all the inhabitants who live there are *deus ex machina* who have integrated technological rationality as computer robots. Not all of them are "enhanced" citizens made smarter, more responsive through digital technologies. A digital divide exists, it marginalises the fringes of the population that keep away from the benefits - and harms - of the digital revolution. Nevertheless, the potential of the use of these tools and their increasingly advanced penetration rate, regardless of age and social background, must be considered. If we can't make all the residents of these neighbourhoods potential smart citizens, we can at least introduce them to practices that digitally allow to improve their daily lives, to better know service offerings that can help them and, as much as possible, to participate in local life. In this way, they need to be made aware of the issues related to the digital transformation of cities and territories and the opportunities that can result from them in everyday life. To this end, we must identify the locks and barriers that hinder or limit the digital inclusion of the inhabitants. In other words, attempts must be made to correct their inability to join participatory experiences conducted through Living Labs to test the relevance and acceptability of digital services. On this point, an action research called Smarter Labs has tried to list, with pragmatism, the main obstacles that stand in the way of

the inclusion of populations, especially the most fragile or disaffiliated, in Living Lab<sup>70</sup>. Thus, one of the axes of this research aims to familiarise, via a Living Lab, the inhabitants of a disadvantaged district of Bellinzona in Switzerland to the use of a smart phone application for the use of mobility services, non-polluting if possible.

This pedagogy and upgrading in the field of computer science can also provide a basis or starting point for engaging or militant conduct on civic or political ground. De facto, these new tools offer empowerment opportunities at all levels of collective life. They also have hopes for building a more inclusive city. Living Labs can be a good relay or platform to familiarise residents and users with the use of computing and its applications in the fields of communication. Indeed, "digital innovations are today a means of promoting initiatives from below - bottom up - and the self-organization of populations and communities"<sup>71</sup>.

This is especially the case of Hackatons, which are likened to collective mobilisations multiplied by the internet and social networks and often taking place in the form of events, one-off events organised in various places. The Hackatons have mostly as initiators of private actors but especially public authorities wishing to embark on open innovation approaches to bring about projects. The aim of these mobilisations is to propose, following brain storming sessions and workshops open to all and highly interactive, actions aimed at improving the conditions of the daily lives of the inhabitants. Such sessions may use the "ideas contest" formula or, in a more framed way, the call for projects. In addition, the launch of the Hackatons can be facilitated and framed methodologically by providing participants with "toolkits" or starter kits to benefit from a manual or a procedure to follow offering accelerated learning to grow and make contributions<sup>72</sup>. As such, these approaches also galvanise the development of civic skills. The informal and almost playful side of Hackatons is attractive. It invites users or residents to get involved in participatory approaches where freedoms of expression and initiatives differ from official and standardised procedures for consultation. At the same time, this allows us to short-circuit the routine of these approved forums, which are often nucleated by the systematic presence of the same representatives of associations and professionals of the consultation. These emerging actions are likely to be aggregated, taken into account and integrated into policies carried out by local authorities or to receive funding for their implementation. Thus, urban powers can "recover" - or orchestrate - this type of innovative actions, most often located outside their usual scope of intervention. The "hybrid" positioning of these initiatives, on the periphery of the ordinary field of local policies, is a resource for fostering new approaches focused on innovation.

This open innovation process leads to a new variety of collaborative planning and citizen empowerment, boosted by electronic communications. Of course, the latter are only means, but they are a powerful lever for mobilisation. In addition, Hackatons can lend themselves to Experiments conducted within the framework of Living Labs, of which they can also be auxiliaries and tools, and thus help to open new avenues for instituting participatory governance. Of course, these innovations represent strategic opportunities for urban public authorities wishing to demonstrate initiatives to encourage and promote, in the eyes of all, and in particular the media, new experiences of the local democracy. As such, “modernist” or strategically-sensed urban authorities do not consider “Civic Tech” and other forms of citizen mobilisation activated by electronic communications as coalitions plotting behind the scenes and other spaces of counter-power threatening or hostile with the aim of censoring or neutralising them. On the contrary, they encourage, by various means, their emergence and their activities by adhering to their “disruptive” manifesto. They also often provide the logistics and means to enhance the digital innovations produced by these new approaches to local democracy.

For several years, for example, the municipality of Paris has been periodically organising Hackatons aimed at structuring and mobilising the capital’s start-up ecosystem and setting up citizen forums to design digital services for improve the daily lives of Parisians. Recently, an open innovation session entitled with humour “Hackaton nec mergitur” aimed, for example, at “co-designing” new solutions for emergency management and public information in the event of a crisis and especially a terrorist attack<sup>73</sup>.

Another remarkable example of Living Lab to test innovations socially in collaboration with users is the experience of the TUBA (urban experiment tube) in Lyon. This experimental space, created in 2014, aims to play a platform role for the public and professionals to test, evaluate and debate innovative urban devices: sensors, digital information terminals, mobility applications, connected objects, projects based on public data from Greater Lyon (transportation, road traffic, energy, etc.) and private data from large groups (Véolia, EDF, Enedis, Keolis). This place should allow businesses and city dwellers to have a “playground” to co-build the services of the city of tomorrow. “This 600 m<sup>2</sup> Living Lab is located in the Part Dieu district of Lyon, it is located close to the station and therefore benefits from a large mass of potential testers (about 500,000 trips per day). It includes an experimental and demonstration space on the ground floor, Le Lab, open to the general public from Monday to Friday. A co-working space, the Mix, is located on the first floor. It is composed of different sub-spaces that allow to diversify the situations of encounters and exchanges (the Bocal, the Muscu

Room, the Ring). Since November 2014, TUBA has accompanied many project leaders with the assembly of some thirty collaborative innovation files. At the same time, he has played an important role in the development of some twenty Start Ups (City Lity, Copark, For city, Green on, Karos...) specialising in fields as varied as energy, mobility, health, social ties and leisure activities"<sup>74</sup>. We see that this space of intermediation is more than a Living Lab in the strict sense. It is a component of an innovation ecosystem. It assembles other functions, downstream from those of a Living Lab, to power a resource centre providing resources and a springboard for the hatching and development of Start Ups; this third place is versatile. De facto, by offering spaces for science-society interaction, TUBA provides an essential function of "middleground". It organises regular events (forums, barcamps, hackathons, thematic workshops...) that allow the socialization of knowledge and innovations between the "Uppergound" of administrations, firms, research laboratories and centres of technology transfer and the "Underground" of the inhabitants, users and cultural and artistic spheres." These moments allow the meeting of actors of various professional skills and backgrounds and create conditions of "temporary proximity" between very diverse social universes. In this regard, it is interesting to note that these "Super Living Labs" are defined less as places than as "interfaces," "innovation platforms," "network hubs," "hybrid spaces" located at the crossroads of the search innovation, entrepreneurship and creative culture."

Let's add an important point highlighted by R. Besson. According to him, the example of the TUBA distances itself from the top-down and techno-centred model of the Smart City. The latter aims to transform the city into a *deus ex machina*, to create a digitalised city subject to a dictatorship of technology. This trend mainly benefits internet giants and their specialist subsidiaries. Such a model professes and applies a "broadcastist" - from the top-down - scheme of computerization of society, by contrast, the TUBA model is "interactionist": it advocates "urbanising - and socialising - technologies. This is possible and achievable through the establishment of a framework and incentives that allow the creation of a decentralised and territorialised innovation ecosystem of "horizontal" collaborations between stakeholders.

### **Digital empowerment?**

As we can see, the virtues of the Internet and electronic communications open up new perspectives for civic engagement and citizenship that can be channelled and multiplied by the methodology of Living Labs. They can also become essential components or parts of new ecosystems, new

mediating mechanisms between technologies, institutions and society to better integrate the uses, the needs of people in these Interactions.

This is not all: contrary to popular belief, the use of digital technologies and the Internet does not have the sole effect of dematerialising and disembodiment electronic communications by projecting them into a virtual and planetary space. On the contrary, it is known that the latter also have a powerful geographical anchorage allowing the strengthening of proximity links. They strengthen strong links to use the expression of Mark Granovetter. These strong links are often at community level and localised. In this way, electronic exchanges form a relational foundation inscribed in the physical space of proximity and lend themselves to interactions conducive to mobilisations, collective actions and solidarity at the neighbourhood level. In doing so, they constitute a digital infrastructure, a software that can be exploited by Living Labs as information platforms and networks of connections on the opportunities offered to residents in order to participate in their approaches to collaborative design innovative services<sup>75</sup>.

Moreover, these active transformation stakes in the environment and the living environment can also be distinguished and materialised by the dissemination of "methodologies" and "operational guides" giving the skills and means to the inhabitants of "co-designer" and to develop public spaces or develop greening programs through the installation of green spaces in their neighbourhood. These Urban Labs defend a certain idea of "empowerment" by making individuals actors in the transformation of their living environment, if not as activists of the ecological transition. In addition, this second type of Urban Lab is likely to create favourable ground and ad hoc learning to conduct experiments of tactical urbanism, Kickstarter urbanism and other forms of "urban hacking", i.e. appropriation more or more less sustainable buildings or spaces by individuals, professional collectives or associations in order to carry out a common project of development or ephemeral architecture.

An observer of these new urban or territorialised devices, in which Living Labs have an active function, perceives in these experiments the emergence of "cognitive urban systems"<sup>76</sup>. These are similar to Experimental Laboratories testing new ways of "manufacturing" the city. These are places of citizen innovation that generally develop in wastelands or vacant spaces in changing neighbourhoods. These are places where new knowledge and practices are produced simultaneously. This generates collective intelligence, synergies and mutually beneficial resources. They have not been the subject of an explicit planning strategy decided by the municipal authorities but are most often the result of the spontaneous momentum of ordinary citizens and often highly qualified

collectives involved in the fields of economics, collaborative ecology or social urban planning.

In this movement, architects-planners and defectors or members of associations, especially from the cultural world, frequently play an important role. In their founding charter, they claim to be high places of social inclusion. It should also be noted that these places are strongly imbued with digital culture, their modus operandi based largely on the use of the various forms of electronic communications enabled by the rise of the Internet and computer reach of all."

In these schematic features, we will also have recognised an expression of certain forms and practices of transitional urban planning or "tactical urbanism" that have spread everywhere in recent years. These laboratories have flourished and multiplied in European cities - and elsewhere - and appear as tools or vectors for a renewal of planning policies. They are also recognisable as third-places and readily cultivate collaborative visions and practices whose purpose is to design and produce goods and services for the inhabitants and users outside the logic of the Market. Moreover, according to Ray Oldenburg, the founder of the third-place concept, third-place venues play an essential role for civil society, democracy and civic engagement. These open and bottom-up innovations thrive in hybrid places that are not a matter of home or work and are between public and private space. But beware, these are physical places and located in neighbourhoods even if they also operate in the form of platforms and resource centres connected on digital networks. In fact, third-places are now seen as new collaborative spaces adapted to the era of the knowledge economy and the information society. Moreover, they are spaces of interaction between technology and society, centres of scientific and technical culture where digital learning can then infiltrate social practices to "embed" them in the daily lives of Individuals. These steps are also aimed at familiarising them with the use of computers to avoid or prevent the famous risks of the digital divide.

The visions and modes of action of the Citizen Laboratories are generally structured around the fashionable theme of "commons". These can be defined as collective uses generated by multidisciplinary and multi-actor co-design approaches focused on the uses and needs of the inhabitants. These commons are collectively produced and appropriated without obeying the restrictions and exclusivity inherent in the rules of the market and private property. In this way, these laboratories have common philosophical roots with the Living Labs, which they integrate frequently and physically into the spaces and premises they invest and

in their programming. In addition, they generally claim to be militant in the sustainable and supportive city and develop activities related to urban agriculture, citizen gardeners, short circuits and other forms of circular economy and all-azimuts vegetation, in reference and reverence to the sacrosanct sustainable city. But make no mistake, these laboratories are not mere places of "technological tinkering". They also claim, like clusters or other scientific cities mediated by the specialised press, the quality of innovation ecosystems. From this point of view, they present another characteristic that can be seen as an asset producing a form of geographical externality: instead of being concentrated on specialised sites and on a large number of hectares, such as technopoles or other technology districts located on the outskirts of cities and on dedicated monofunctional areas, these laboratories and third-places are integrated into the urban fabric within the dense or moderately dense areas of the Settlements. They establish themselves in vacant places and wastelands and, diffusely, animate the neighbourhoods by guaranteeing a functional mix. In addition, they work in a network. In this way, they contribute to the regeneration of tissues, they promote urban renewal. Moreover, they do not rely on spectacular and totemic architectures to attract high-tech researchers and companies. They combine, in existing and often disused fabrics and buildings, practices using a hybrid mix of high tech and low tech in new forms of creative activity and innovations geared towards the collective and the sustainable development.

This is now fairly well known and widespread and these experiments, or at least some of them, have a key operating principle based on the intensive use of digital technologies. First, many of them have a space for the production of objects made through digital printers. Indeed, productions from Fab labs almost always constitute an invariant of the offer of citizen laboratories or experiments of temporary urban planning. In this regard, a common practice is to manufacture, from free licenses, prototypes and modular furniture from recycled materials intended to animate, to develop public spaces. The architecture designed according to these digital principles and sustainability is also concerned. In this regard, we can mention the spectacular example of the Fab Lab house in Barcelona, created in 2010, an icon and prototype of eco-construction that illustrates the possibilities offered by digital design and manufacturing techniques. These steps illustrate the desire for broader, open and democratised participation in deliberations aimed at the development of development projects.

But there is more: they also show a determination to actively participate in the construction of urban infrastructure through co-design

activities and physical productions affecting public space and urban furniture. This collective production must have a visibility, an observable and palpable materiality in the different parts of the urban fabric. It is not intended to confine itself to a presence in places confidential and inaccessible, let alone revel in the virtual world of the Internet. As R. Besson points out, a new right to the city stems from these new visions. This new right "is not limited to defending equal access to the city's resources and spaces or the participation of residents in public debates on, for example, the future of an urban agglomeration. It goes beyond the right to the city enshrined by Henri Lefèvre. It concerns the very infrastructure of cities, "urban hardware." It is a question of co-producing, beyond social, educational or cultural life, the public space of cities, furniture and other urban infrastructure<sup>77</sup>.

This right can be granted through hacking practices that may alter or divert from their functions the physical elements of urban landscaping and furniture. A "soft" version of these practices has long been translated into the allocation, via municipal authorities, of surfaces, facades or ad hoc walls reserved for Street Art. Urban Hacking can be equated with a form of 'as-d design'. This protest activism was not widespread until recently, but it has recently become a certain turnout. In these practices, Fab Labs have led to play an important role through co-design and prototype manufacturing practices to be implanted in the public space. However, we see where such acts, the visions, threats and disorders that they are capable of engendering if they are not strictly supervised could lead.

Secondly, the approaches of citizen laboratories rely largely on a digital culture and on forms of collaborative learning from the Internet network. In truth, they are not against digital innovations but are diverting and using them for the purposes of civic expression and urban, socio-economic and environmental innovation." For example, collaborative digital platforms play an essential role in the self-management, networking and visibility of Citizen Laboratories (sharing tools, methods, projects, experiences, and best practices). Similarly, the crowdfunding tools and digital manufacturing techniques of Fab Labs allow the development of many projects." All these ingredients are building true innovation ecosystems. But they do not produce technological added values, in terms of goods and services that are appropriate by the private sector. These added values have, on the one hand, the peculiarity of having been created on the basis of the uses and needs revealed by the inhabitants. On the other hand, they are "commons," collective uses produced to serve the community. From this point of view, these approaches blithely deconstruct and crack the popular theories of innovation based on proprietary technological excellence and other approaches to the Creative Class,

paragon of a globalised urban elite.

As we can see, the "cognitive urban systems" described by Raphaël Besson have points of convergence with the spirit and practices of Living Labs. They are user-centred, generate knowledge and acculturation from an elaborate project, carried out and managed collaboratively; they are driven by values claiming to adhere to sustainable and supportive urban planning. Indeed, "based on open innovation methods and the potential of digital tools, Living Labs defend the idea of urban planning that is no longer the exclusive heritage of experts (engineers, architects or urban planners) but that is co-produced with city dwellers and users. They also defend a right to urbanise technologies to integrate them socially and to divert them from cultural, socio-economic or environmental purposes." Let us add that this collaborative vision of the net is just lying down with approaches to ecology, including that of deep or radical ecology that advocates slowness, frugality, decay, not to say austerity and abstinence. In other words, a reversal of values once considered "progressive" but now considered amoral and destructive of natural environments. The rise of digital use can be a source of remedies to deal with the environmental crisis. De facto, the use of the internet and electronic communications has the power to "boost" recycling practices, the circular economy, non-market cooperation. It lends itself to the spread of all-round lifestyles towards reducing the carbon footprint of human behaviour in order to secure the future of the planet. Make no mistake, the digital revolution does not necessarily rhyme with inordinate love of smartphones, enslavement to social networks, programmed obsolescence and consumer frenzy to choose the best deals on the internet on the day of the "black Friday!"

On the margins of the excesses of commercial capitalism that is unleashed with the digital revolution, a "social philosophy" of Living Labs and third places exists. It is also nourished and multiplied by the internet and social networks but in a different direction. The resulting approaches benefit at a high level from the various forms of pooling of projects made possible and multiplied by the rise of Web 2.0. These digital practices resolutely turn their backs on the achievements and moral orientations of the Smart City. They do not see the city as a technical body digitalised and governed or "monitored" by experts in white coats operating in control rooms with their eyes glued to screens or dashboards to regulate urban metabolism - and to put in place widespread surveillance. The cooperative approach to the Web is resolutely opposed to a digital-dystopian world led by GAFAM. To this top-down and techno-centric vision they oppose a collaborative use of the Web promoting joint and shared projects. As such, they are rather heirs to the first or initial vision of the Internet developed

by its pioneers: a computerised system of communications and data managed by free software and a vector of cooperation and solidarity between communities and individuals<sup>78</sup>.

### **Community Organising, a model for Urban Labs?**

Urban Labs to create platforms that promote self-organization of groups or communities of interest deserve special mention. On closer inspection, the challenges of self-organization for more inclusive planning have attracted the attention of experts for some time. The analyses and reviews that have examined the issue converge to emphasise that the interference or even the mere presence of local governments in collaborative planning experiments are often at the root of their misdirection and, ultimately, their Failure. This intrusion produces "addiction paths" that hinder or distort the authentic and grass roots dialectic of bottom up initiatives<sup>79</sup>. Trust in local institutions with the likelihood that they will include citizens' demands in their programs and agendas being weak, if not zero, and democratic counter-powers should be resolutely put in place.

Usually and by conditioned reflex, the public authorities select, within their toolbox, standard solutions to apply them and then disseminate them automatically, often in the form of guides, instructions and other recipes in reference to a directory of "best practices." Critical public policy analysts argue, in this regard, that this process leads not to problems requiring solutions but, conversely, to a formatted supply of problem-seeking solutions. These tools are not always "comprehensive", they laminate or level local specificities, censor or inhibit innovations and creative approaches. Approaches in terms of self-organization intend to emancipate themselves from this straitjacket to take flight and reflect, without institutional filter, the demands emanating from society. In this process, planners have a key role to play in coordinating the wishes of stakeholders and subtly matching project procedures and funding by striving to bring initiatives from the field to the forefront, requests and proposals from people.

Community Organising is in that perspective. On the one hand, the experiences that claim to be this name give a key role to planners or to the mediators responsible for aggregating the demands of the inhabitants, trying to rationalise them and bring them to fruition. At the same time, they must carry out an intense mobilization work on the ground to try to raise awareness among the inhabitants and activate citizen inquiry. On the other hand, the ultimate goal of Community Organising is to weaken local government in order to actively engage residents in the design and implementation processes of development projects. This

requires initiatives and strategies that give them access to administrative and policy decision-making processes and networks. It is a matter of putting concrete and different means on the powers in place in order to advance interests. In particular, opportunities for citizen inquiry should be increased by trying to give voice to the most disadvantaged sections of the population. These steps use various means to achieve this goal: counter-expertise of development projects carried out by official bodies, private or public developers, demonstrations, actions before the courts, active activism to denounce and oppose a project or to promote an alternative project desired by users or residents<sup>80</sup>. Some of these actions, particularly counter-expertise, had already been developed in the United States, as early as the 1960s, as part of advocacy planning efforts to defend and advance the interests of residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These Urban Labs are otherwise the direct heirs of Community Organising, at least they have taken up and updated their visions and strategies. Indeed, they intend to place themselves on political ground and use the tools and means of the political struggle underway in democratic regimes. The aim is to defend interests by establishing a balance of power that can be favourable to the inhabitants, especially the most deprived, capable of generating negotiating capacities that offer the chance of success in bringing projects or projects to fruition Claims.

Urban struggles exist and it is a matter of directing and organising them in order to obtain, in the face of the established powers, concessions, compromises, advances. It also means creating alternative places for political and citizen deliberation independent of the official spaces for discussion of local democracy. The formation of a counter-power must result from these militant commitments and postures, counter-power capable of influencing the deliberations and choices of the local government. In the run-up to this third type of Urban Lab, inspired by the spirit and practices of Community Organising, "it is a matter of building on the collective and autonomous self-organization of working-class neighbourhoods by aiming to create a balance of power with institutions, only to sit at the negotiating table after having made its demands heard through collective action (demonstrations, petitions, media outings, etc.). These approaches therefore almost always involve a conflicting relationship with institutions and elected officials. This does not mean that, in a second stage, these organizations cannot enter into a more cooperative dynamic to reach compromises on programs or projects"<sup>81</sup>. It should be added that these approaches are mainly aimed at combating any form of instrumentalisation of Urban Labs, having only a purely utilitarian or technological scope, and which would have the consequence of depoliticising the commitments of the inhabitants by hindering their "metamorphosis" into protesting

citizens and activists.

However, there is a threat to these types of mobilizations. They aggregate, in fact, an audience whose chances of accessing the forums of deliberation and protest activism are usually the lowest, in other words the fractions of the population whose resources of economic and cultural capital reach the lowest levels. Leaders or agents of activation of these social struggles - community organisers - who initially do intense field work can, in the long run, empower themselves from the base they claim to represent and discipline to transform themselves, when movements are structured and "routine" as professionals or "bureaucrats" performing functions of managing and coordinating social struggles. This is the classic and universal process, one might say, described by Max Weber or Roberto Michels of professionalization of the executives of political parties or trade unions becoming structured and hierarchical organizations, executives who cut themselves off from midfielders and activities of field activism through which they had subsequently moved to positions or positions of management and management.

It should be noted that the empowerment of the mobilised subjects can also add, along the way, a more acute awareness of the political issues on which the demands are based. This step forward is likely to lead to adherence to more global and ideologically oriented visions of the political and social world justifying reforms such as distributive justice or the distribution of wealth. Such awareness opens a path that must lead to a growing ability to make arguments in the public space. As we can see, this last formula of the Urban Lab combines both the "grassroots" dimension of the project, that of empowerment and reflexivity leading to citizen mobilization and collective action, that of the coordination of the protagonists and stakeholders and the political strategy to put pressure on the networks of power and decision-making to oppose a project and possibly carry an alternative project, defend interests and make claims.

### **Splendour and misery of Living Labs**

The time or "lifespan" criterion of a Living Lab also distinguishes two categories: Living Labs, which aim to offer innovative services to users or inhabitants who are most often from devices operating in the short term. This formula provides a means to test prototypes and evaluate preferences for offering a service or product. These tests must be validated by concrete results measurable by economic, ecological and social acceptability indicators. This first category of Living Lab can be used on an ad hoc basis, "as needed" and as a technical measurement instrument that can be stored, put to sleep and reactivated. This "algorithmic" neutrality is

nevertheless able to provide data that can be debated in forums planned as part of Living Labs' activities and agenda.

But beware, we must know how to recognise the "real" Living Labs, which play an effective role and act sustainably according to missions that have been set for them and those whose names appear on the organizations of private companies or public authorities but which either no longer exist, or are simple ephemeral creations that have only been put in place for a targeted activity and for a limited time. To see it, the landscape of Living Labs is dotted with splendour and misery, cycles of grandeur and decline. Indeed, there are Living Labs in operation or "on the move", others adulterated and still others that have locked the door, of which we have no news, and have been active only the "time of a spring". Indeed, according to a recent search on the database from ENOLL, it appears that "Living Labs cover very different realities and can be active or totally inactive. Thus, nearly 25% of Living Labs are likely to be just display or empty shells." To this table must be added an even more edifying if not worrying observation: according to a study recently published exploiting the database also provided by ENOLL, it appears that the mortality rate of Living Labs reaches the high score of at least 40%. This may, if not, cause some dismay, at least raise questions about the roles and functions that Living Labs perform - or not - in specific contexts. In any case, according to researchers who have explored the subject, this mortality deserves to be elucidated through comparative empirical studies to provide the causes and reasons<sup>82</sup>. In particular, this raises questions about the ontological question of urban or territorial Living Labs: to be or not to be? It also questions "the potentially ephemeral nature of the fashion effect of these devices and how local authorities actually seize them to rethink their metropolis"<sup>83</sup>.

Another category is more akin to the urban labs gender, which are part of a longer period of time and lend themselves to the creation of platforms for debate, discussion and cooperation between the players who can then benefit, on this chronology, from the production of shared knowledge opening an easier path for collective action and reflexivity. This long-term criterion is unanimously recognised as a necessary ingredient of territorial "Living Labs"<sup>84</sup>. These Urban Living Labs or City Labs are usually set up to accompany, control or "monitor" long-term changes with a view to governance of these changes or transitions. Such devices are most often supported and managed by a permanent cell or team, author or co-author of the "design process", whose role is to feed, in relevant data and analysis, the forums or transition arenas set up to urban or metropolitan scale<sup>85</sup>. These City Labs have "hybrid" organizational forms that allow them to lead, at least to participate in the "design" of planning policies

and ecological transition. Indeed, several characteristics lead them to play:

- First, they occupy boundaries, bordering on administrative services or executive functions in the official organization charts of companies or other institutions. Of course this applies to the public entities that are formed by cities and other local authorities. These “boundary positions” allow them to emancipate themselves from certain bureaucratic rigidities and to ensure informal coordination of tasks, missions and actors. In this scheme, Urban Labs can be considered “as hybrid niches positioned at the frontier of local governments and providing an interface with society”;
- Second, they contribute to the production of ‘learning environments’, action ecosystems that improve the cognitive abilities of actors and support cooperation that make the modus operandi and arrangements of local governance more efficient;
- Third, they propagate “habitus” of experimentation in the implementation of planning actions. These “habitus” follow incremental and “agonistic” logics that do not censor conflicts, controversies and discordant exchanges.

All these properties combine to create modes of cooperation and conflict resolution establishing a soft governance regime<sup>86</sup> capable of regulating the interplay of competition and cooperation between actors in contexts of ecological transition and threats, risks and uncertainties, but also opportunities to innovate and implement new action programs.

These types of Urban Labs, whose longevity can be a guarantee of success, nevertheless raise the more general question of the evaluation of their results on the one hand, and the Business Model on which they rely on the other. Because even those who are not market oriented must have the resources to operate and are also subject to performance obligations.

### **How do I keep a Living Lab alive?**

One example illustrates the varied situations of Living Labs that are not always known and listed. In principle, waves of investigations are carried out and updated regularly by the “head of networks” or the “flagship” ENOLL which keeps the civil registers of Living Labs. Of course, this database does not list Living Labs of all flour sets and backgrounds but only those who have been admitted into the enoll club’s closed circle. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that this platform does not systematically record the death certificates of its members. Evidence of this is provided by a 2014 study that randomly selected three Living Labs from the ENOLL database and affiliated with the association, a study designed to analyse their “portfolio of activities.” The title of the article summarising the results of the survey is revealing and makes us perceive an astonishing assessment, at least rich in teachings: “How to keep a

Living Lab alive?"<sup>87</sup>. The sample size of the survey is narrow and even very narrow, but the results are surprising. Of the 3 Living Labs contacted, "the first one was dead but still on the ENOLL website and still considered an active member. The second was alive but passive, without research activity and the last was alive but was not focused on innovation-oriented co-creation approaches." These results are surprising. They raise several questions, the first being the reliability of the data offered by ENOLL and the regular updating of information about its members or "members". In parentheses, in the survey cited, the sample is 3 Living Labs with a defection rate of 67%, which means, all other things being equal, that if 100 Living Labs had been surveyed, two thirds of them would have been found dead or without Activity. This means, logically, that Living Labs and Urban Labs are fragile beings, they can be victims of diseases, some of which lead straight to the cemetery. But ENOLL does not always record these deaths and does not pronounce a funeral oration, in other words does not indicate the causes of death.

One can conclude from this small example that a large household must be carried out at ENOLL to put order in the monitoring of the situation of its members and ensure the regular updating of its data. This is the least we can ask of a club concerned with its image and the well-being of its members. If the entrance fees at ENOLL are quite heavy in terms of file building and prestigious letters of recommendation that are required to certify the seriousness of the applications, one would expect that this organization or platform and its managers apply the same rigour to organise its internal affairs and provide reliable and serious information. But let's not shoot too many red balls on ENOLL because perhaps it is not its protocol and methodology that are failing but rather the object on which it looks that is a problem, that is, Living Labs or Urban Labs. Do they easily identify and list?

In truth, these results raise more fundamental questions about the nature of the living or Urban Labs' activity, their institutional positioning, the actors they mobilise and the type of services or outputs they produce on a more or less competitive market for services designed to foster innovation, whether in the private sector or in collective goods. Another factor that disturbs the game, that of the wide variety of Living Labs, - "the big family" - which makes it very difficult to establish unambiguous, reproducible and transposable criteria for evaluating eminently diverse and heterogeneous activities and in a wide variety of social and institutional backgrounds. In fact, the material that ENOLL must exploit is made up of atoms and particles very different from the other! This is why it is probably difficult to track and identify their activities in a comprehensive way and to establish typologies. Nevertheless, in the background of these questions, there is

the life cycle of Living Labs, their longevity and the causes that keep them alive or others that condemn them to certain, programmed or premature death.

The survey that was cited sought to define evaluation criteria for Living Labs market oriented or operating in business circles, but these parameters may also be extended, under certain conditions, to Living Labs public-private partnerships. These Living Labs must obey a business model more demanding than that applicable to those who mainly produce non-market goods or services such as those with a vocation to develop urban collective utilities. Of course, this scheme is even less for Living Labs, which have goals of regenerating troubled neighbourhoods.

That said, the authors of the survey, concerned about efficiency, developed a "Business Model Canvas (BMC), i.e. a strategic management instrument to verify the relevance of the evaluation parameters proposed by ENOLL in order to find out whether these deserve to be improved or increased"<sup>88</sup>. This auxiliary assessment tool is apparently widely used, easily understood by non-specialists and provides an adequate general vision to make the results plausible. It is methodologically close to another performance measurement tool that was applied to 32 Living Labs case studies in 2010<sup>89</sup>. It adds three additional parameters to ENOLL's battery of criteria: the cost of running the Living Lab, the target customer segment and the revenue generated. The main conclusions that emerge from this approach provide, if not definitive revenue, at least from the beginning of an answer to the question "how to keep a Living Lab alive?" It should be noted, of course, that the elective objects of these evaluations are services or prototypes primarily intended for markets but which may have been designed and produced also in the context of public-private partnerships. One thinks, for example, of the various and varied digital services and electronic applications offered by start-ups within the framework of innovation ecosystems in place with the participation of cities or other public authorities. These interface functions between research and business creation projects most often involve associations and financings with varying geometry between public and private actors. Just as today, the boundaries between consumers and producers, in certain contexts, if not are blurring, at least blurring, those between the public and the private sector, in the field of innovation in particular, are subject to the same indeterminacy.

Let's go back to research and the potions to be administered to Living Labs so that they can regain not the tone of their youth but more modestly to keep them alive. First, the approach emphasises the need for a battery of reliable indicators to assess Living Labs activity and evaluation tests must follow a regular periodicity. It is clear that the entrance exam is not

enough and performance measures are worth performing regularly over the life of the Living Lab. This seems self-evident, but is not a basic rule that is consistently followed by ENOLL's "internal regulation." Secondly, things get complicated because a formal and purely quantitative measurement instrument is not really suitable to evaluate, in all their dimensions, the out-puts issued by a Living Lab and even less by an Urban Lab. Indeed, the performance of the latter depends on the contexts in which they are operative and a multiplicity of parameters can influence their "productivity". In this respect, the key word is, of course, complexity and it does not allow itself to be formalised or modelled easily, let alone measure quantitatively. Third, Living Labs are evolutionary organisms, and as such, like biological beings, they are able to change or even mutate more or less radically over time. Like caterpillars, they can become butterflies. As a result, their "portfolio of activities" may change, expand or shrink depending on the time. While such variations are likely to be evaluated, this makes it very difficult to follow up that would not change its own assessment criteria on an ongoing basis.

We can see that we could continue to enumerate the list of methodological limits that give a risky character to any attempt at simple or unilateral measurement of the performance of Living Labs. To the question "how to keep a Living Labs alive" there is no obvious and self-evident answer and the authors of the above survey readily acknowledge this. Indeed, after relativising the relevance of a measurement ambition if not scientific at least exclusively quantitative, because of the obligation to take into account many qualitative factors not formalisable, they write, finely: "The sustainability of a Living Lab must be evaluated by a reliable model, based on a long-term strategy and which takes into account the funding provided, the target audiences and the revenues generated, among other important factors, to be appreciated not only on an ad hoc basis but continuously and in a dynamic process that incorporates all stakeholders"<sup>90</sup>.

This conclusion "doesn't feed you bread," as they say in French, and reflects the axiological neutrality and ethical relativism that academic researchers must observe. But it also translates, in filigree, the eminently political and socio-cultural nature of Living Labs, and even more of Urban Labs, marked and shaped by the singular geographical and institutional contexts in which they are located. The properties of these environments are far from modelable with the chances of isolating evidence of their chances of success and their functioning and transposable to other contexts or systems of action. This is not a great discovery and seems quite mundane because it has long been known that the specific properties of spaces and places, in their social, anthropological and cultural history,

exert a decisive influence on the operation and future of companies or institutions that are already established or established there. This also applies to Living Labs or Urban Labs<sup>91</sup>. An image of the productive systems and innovative environments of northern Italy whose competitiveness is far from obeying only standard factors defined by economic theory<sup>92</sup>, Urban Labs are "socially embedded beings" whose life and destiny are - and evaluation - escape any attempt at explanation given by simple a mathematical formula.

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# Milan

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# Towards the Urban Living Lab approach in marginal areas

In the last decade, in the Italian context, the field of urban regeneration referred to marginal and peripheral areas has expanded its boundaries and meanings, progressively including differentiated actors and approaches. Increasing importance was especially gained by local organizations and citizens, considered able to bring out local resources and competencies: an aspect which is considered essential in order to develop successful interventions in an era characterized by the scarce availability of public funds.

This trend could be connected with the transformation of the concept of participation, as applied in the Nineties to planning and urban regeneration in Italy (especially, for instance, within the Neighbourhood Contracts). Participation was progressively overcome by notions - such as the ones of social activation and social innovation - that question the mere information and consultation to which participation risked to be confined in the mainstream institutional approach to urban policies. Nowadays, as a result, local communities are assuming a more and more active and direct role in the transformation of their own environment and in the "direct" fulfilment of their social and cultural needs.

Given this general framework, as planners, we must question ourselves on the case of especially fragile communities, not always able to directly activate themselves to enhance local development processes. In other words, how do we prevent extreme competition, which exposes more fragile territories to the exclusion from projects and policies of regeneration? Currently, we can observe, indeed, how marginal territories suffer a lack of chances of bottom-up regeneration, due to the difficulties to access to certain languages, tools and resources.

In this sense, applying an Urban Living Lab (ULL) approach to territorial regeneration is seen as promising in terms of tackling the issue of empowerment of local contexts and populations in a more effective way.

As Concilio (2016)<sup>1</sup> points out, indeed, applying the framework of Living Labs (LL)<sup>2</sup> to urban issue is could contribute to: (1) increase the protagonism of local actors through knowledge co-production and the creation of knowledge creative context; (2) connect stakeholders and actors at different levels, since the LL assumes the characteristics of "cross-boundary objects/arena", capable to involve institutions, local actors and the so-called "users" (citizens, dwellers, communities), in urban regeneration.

In other words, to our opinion, it is interesting to analyze how the issues of knowledge co-production and co-creation of processes (which implies new governance models) are defined within the LL methodology, in order to better understand to what extent, it could help to set a more effective approach to urban regeneration in marginal areas of our cities.

Until now, indeed, as several authors have pointed out so far (Hakkarainen & Hyysalo, 2013; Concilio & De Bonis, 2012; Franz, 2015)<sup>3</sup>, even if considered to be valuable tools in developing smart and innovation strategies in the urban context, the academic debate on LLs in urban studies still remains underdeveloped. Moreover, a more socially-centred orientation of this approach still remains under-documented: LL approach has rarely addressed – at least concerning urban issues – deprived and marginalized contexts and superdiverse (Vertovec, 2014)<sup>4</sup> communities, characterized by severe conditions of social, cultural and economic exclusion.

Moving from these general statements, as Politecnico of Milan team we have started to question ourselves on if and how to “translate” (Franz, 2015) the technologically-centred approach to LLs to a more socially-oriented one addressed to marginalized contexts, starting from our own on-field experience<sup>5</sup> and from the analysis of similar experiences and cases studies referred to the Milanese context. Even if Mapping San Siro nor the other cases we will analyse were intentionally started as LLs, several elements could be identified – deeply connected one to another – that these experiences “share” with the LL approach.

## Opening up the field for a LL approach: insights from the Milanese context

Looking back at the last ten/fifteen years, indeed, it is possible to identify several “tools”, related to urban policies in peripheral and/or marginal areas of the city of Milan that progressively contributed to reconfiguring the very concepts of urban regeneration and participation through the creation of different kinds of urban laboratories.

What interests us the most here is to look at the characteristics of these spaces in order to better understand which kind of tools have been developed so far to interface with the regeneration of fragile and marginal contexts. Even if there was no significant evaluation of these tools nor a comparison among the different tools applied, it seems to us possible to draw a connection between them, which shows the existence of a new, yet still not clearly evident, approach to urban regeneration of marginal contexts. Not only in terms of institutional policy promoted but, more broadly, in terms of a shared approach between local institutions and other significant actors, such as the Third Sector, local communities, private (yet social) actors, etc.

First season	Policy promoter	Year	Neighbourhoods	Purpose /function
Laboratori di quartiere	Milan Municipality	From 2005 to 2016	Gratosoglio, Mazzini, Molise Calvaireate, Ponte Lambro, San Siro	Social management and participation Social animation
Laboratori sociali	Lombardy Region	From 2014	Gratosoglio, Ponte Lambro (Milan) (tot.15 projects within Lombardy Region)	Local services
<b>Second season</b>				
Laboratori per l'abitare	Milan Municipality	From 2015	Feltrinelli, Giambellino - Lorenteggio, Ovada, Quarto Oggiaro, Senigallia, via Padova	From the provision to the co-production of services / processes
WeMi Hubs and New welfare spaces	Milan Municipality, Third Sector organizations	From 2015	10 spaces (not only peripheral areas)	Activation and enhancement of local skills
Community Hub	Fondazione Cariplo, Third Sector organizations	From 2017	Adriano, Chiaravalle, Corvetto, via Padova	Hybridization of spaces and functions
Laboratori di quartiere	Milan Municipality	From 2018	Gratosoglio, Mazzini, Molise Calvaireate, Ponte Lambro, San Siro	
Laboratori sociali	Lombardy Region	From 2018	Giuffrè-Villani (Milan) (tot. 18 projects within Lombardy Region)	

Figure 1 Policies which implemented local laboratories in the last fifteen years in Milan

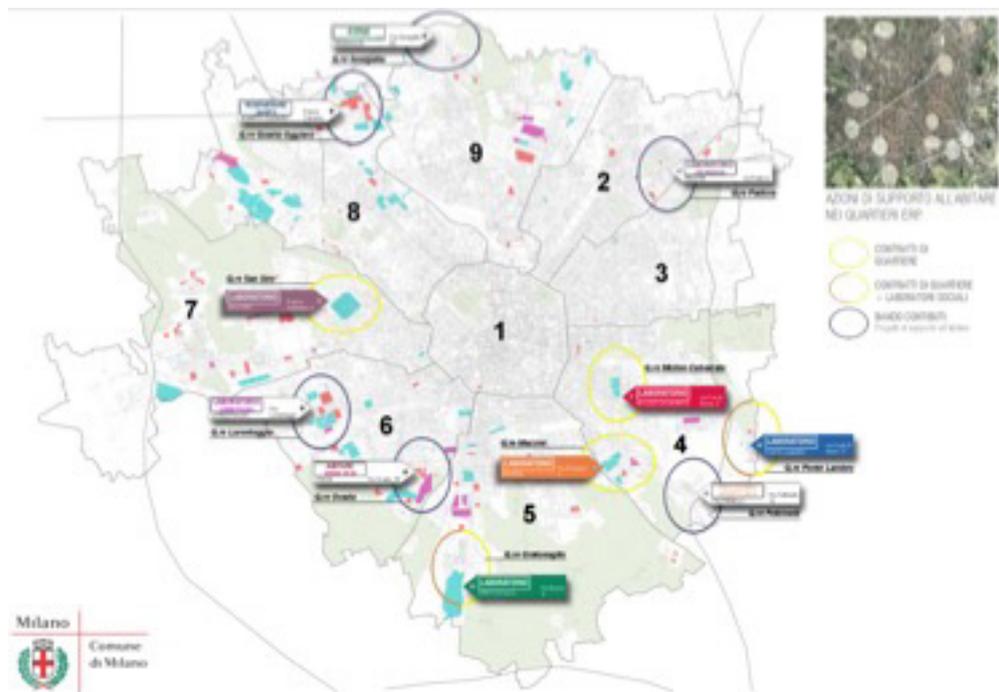


Figure 2 Dwelling support projects implemented by the Municipality (Laboratori di quartiere, Laboratori sociali, Progetti Abitare); elaboration by Municipality of Milan, 2016

Indeed, as Calvaresi and Pederiva pointed out (2016)<sup>6</sup> starting right from the Milanese case, today urban regeneration policies are no

longer produced by extraordinary programs: the financial and political conditions have dramatically changed in the last two decades and the era of structural programs has come to an end. Nowadays, urban regeneration arises from the recognition and combination of existing social practices, actors, opportunities and available resources, in the local field. Not acting in an "empty" space, urban regeneration policies should rather follow, accompany and enable what already exists, starting from the very local dimension. In this sense, the public sector should itself redefine its role as an enabler of processes, articulating integrated governance models.

Starting from this framework, the authors focus on the role that Neighbourhood Labs (Laboratori di quartiere) have assumed in the last fifteen years in the Milanese context and how, as the most structural tool within this field, they have played a role especially in the activation and regeneration of particularly fragile contexts.

Neighbourhood Labs (NL) were developed in five public housing neighbourhoods of the city, within the policy of Neighbourhood Contracts<sup>7</sup>. While Aler Milano (the Regional Agency for Housing) was responsible for the interventions on housing (since the chosen neighbourhoods were part of their residential stock), the Municipality of Milan, along with interventions on public spaces, developed the tool of NLs intended as front offices - managed for the Municipality by Third Sector organizations - to inform and communicate with residents and to develop activities related to participatory planning. Due to the extension of the interventions on the built stock, NLs remained active for a longer time than expected. After a first period (2005 - 2012), characterized by the accompanying of physical interventions (communication and interaction with dwellers), NLs were renovated in 2012 and until 2016. In this phase, NLs found themselves "by chance" (due to the inertia of the Neighbourhood Contracts policy as a whole) to be permanent territorial devices and, consequently, they needed to reconfigure their approach. With significant differences from one neighbourhood to another, generally speaking NLs became in this second phase a tool for social animation, social cohesion, local collaboration, communication and fundraising for further activities (especially social and cultural ones), promoted by the Lab together with local networks.

More recently, between 2017 and 2018, after a period of transition, NLs were protagonists of a more significant reconfiguration of their structure: the Municipality "internalized" and reduced the staff, building a team of people supposed to work on different neighbourhoods at the same time. New main objectives were defined, which outlined a role focused on a future transition towards a local management of NLs, which are expected to be led by local organizations and groups of inhabitants. That is why the approach became more focused on the improvement of local competences

and capacities of direct activation.

<b>Laboratori di quartiere – Neighbourhood Labs</b>	
<b>Main objectives/fields of action</b>	Social animation; participatory planning; communication; local development
<b>Started in:</b>	2006
<b>Duration:</b>	10 years; renovated in 2012 with a 2nd public call
<b>Promoted by:</b>	Municipality of Milan within 5 Neighbourhood Contracts
<b>Developed by:</b>	Third sector consulting organizations
<b>Developed in:</b>	5 public housing neighbourhoods (Mazzini, Molise Calvairate, Gratosoglio, Ponte Lambro, San Siro)
<b>Amount of funding dedicated by the promoting entity</b>	Around 500.000, 00 euro (per year)
<b>Nuovi Laboratori di quartiere – New Neighbourhood Labs</b>	
<b>Main objectives/fields of action</b>	Activate the transition towards a local management of neighbourhood labs, improve local competences and capacities of activation, information on work in progress of still open construction sites related to the Program, enhancing volunteers' activities within the Lab, attracting external events and managing specific projects/thematic working tables
<b>Started in:</b>	2018
<b>Duration:</b>	1 year/2 years
<b>Promoted by:</b>	Municipality of Milan within 5 Neighbourhood Contracts
<b>Developed by:</b>	Municipality (external experts contracted)
<b>Developed in:</b>	5 public housing neighbourhoods (Mazzini, Molise Calvairate, Gratosoglio, Ponte Lambro, San Siro)
<b>Amount of funding dedicated:</b>	360.750,00 euro (2017-2019)

**Figure 3** Neighbourhood Labs - Laboratori di quartiere (2005 - today)

Far from being able to evaluate this very complex policy, which lasted over a decade and changed significantly in the different phases, together with Calvaresi and Pederiva (*ibid.*) we would like to point out here several characteristics could be identified as distinctive of the approach, which we consider quite interesting to our analysis.

First of all, due to the already mentioned long duration of this policy, NLs became a stable device of proximity able on the one hand to follow the different phases of urban regeneration processes (design, activation, implementation, supervision, evaluation, Calvaresi and Pederiva, *ibid.*), on the other hand to gather an embedded form of knowledge of the local context. This was made possible by the presence of a physical space, located in the neighbourhood, which assumed the characteristics of an open place, hosting different functions and “speaking the language of people”. On the one hand, this aspect made it possible to build a relevant

relationship with the context (inhabitants and local organizations), a relationship of trust based on the fact that NLs were constantly in the position of giving account of their activities. On the other hand, it made it possible to experiment with a hybrid role: Calvaresi and Pederiva define professionals involved in NLs as “activist not giving up the reflexivity of the researcher” (ibid.). In other words, at least some of the NLs started to function as platforms of co-design between institutions and local contexts, mediating in introducing local knowledge and systems of preference in decision-making, and stimulating the local community to directly deal with the problems of the neighbourhood.

If we go back on the general overview of the policy tools (table 1) and if we look at the transformation which interested NLs, we can notice a series of progressive shifts:

- From the offer of local services to the co-production of services and processes with local communities and groups;
- From a “defined” space to more hybrid spaces;
- From the concept of participation to the valorisation of direct activation and the improvement of local competencies/local economies;
- From a more direct control of Public sector to a new role for Third sector and private organizations (with a social purpose).

# Redefining an approach towards urban regeneration: the case of Community Hubs and New Welfare Spaces

Among the different tools collected in table 1, we would like to briefly focus here on two tools that show a significant degree of self-reflection and analysis and that could help us to better focus on this “shift” which is contributing to defining a “new approach” to marginal contexts: Community Hubs and New Welfare Spaces (including WeMi Hubs).

In both cases a study was produced that analyse the quality and characteristics of the approaches, with a specific focus on the involvement methodology applied.

In the case of the Community Hubs it is a sort of manifesto, elaborated by practitioners and researchers directly involved in the implementation of a community hub; in the second case, it is an evaluation conducted by a research company on behalf of the Cariplo Foundation, financier of the program Welfare in action (Welfare in azione), which includes the WeMi spaces as regards the Milan case.

According to their manifesto, Community Hubs define themselves as an approach towards urban regeneration, identified as a complex field, which needs a sort of tailor-made and locally rooted attitude. Community Hubs base urban regeneration on the principles of proximity, multidimensionality and co-creation. They configure themselves as hybrid, relational, differentiated, place-based but yet connected spaces in which social innovation practices are combined with the production of public spaces, services, processes<sup>8</sup>.

We have defined here New Welfare Spaces the projects which have been included in the tender launched by Cariplo Foundation in 2015, which was named Welfare in action and aimed at redefining the role and characteristics of welfare spaces and policies with experimentations lead by the Third Sector in collaboration with local administrations all over the Lombardy Region.

Codici Ricerca Intervento, a social cooperative specialized in evaluation and action-research, elaborated a qualitative analysis of the projects which was recently published<sup>9</sup>, trying to trace some common characteristics that these experiences share in terms of approach to welfare.

In the table below, we have summarized some relevant aspects that show a deep connection between the two approaches, delineating a common ground of possible methodology addressed to the issues of urban regeneration/welfare development in particularly fragile areas/with particularly fragile populations.

	<b>Community Hub</b>	<b>New Welfare Spaces</b>
Definition of involvement and participation	Enabling	Enabling ecosystem
Hybrid space	Trading zones - biodiversity	Biodiverse ecosystem
Definition of innovation	Innovation of process	Innovation is rather related to process than product
Methodology	Adapting to uncertainty	Accepting inefficiency
Regeneration as...	Urban regeneration as new social meanings	Community welfare as rebuilding relational capital
Characteristics of the space	"Constituent approach": continuously adapting to change	Transience as a constituent element/places characterized by fluxes
Social platform	People, community, place	Community of practice/community of place

**Figure 4** Community Hubs and New Welfare Spaces: a comparison.

It is particularly interesting here to point out how the two approaches refer both to the objective of enabling or empower local contexts and populations, focusing more on the production of processes and competences, than the one of services or products. At the same time, it seems possible to delineate an approach which is based on constant redefinition of methods and objectives, and a certain degree of "uncertainty" or "inefficiency". This is mainly due to the complexity in which these experiences operate (marginal/marginalized areas) and to the very relational-oriented attitude they propose. In this sense, they both refer to a "constituent" approach, constantly subjected to redefinitions, adjustments, negotiations. Furthermore, place and space assume a central role in both approaches, because they seem to be the ingredient capable of connecting a community of people involved in a certain practices and processes. Innovation is here intended therefore as related more to the quality of the process (slow, relational, constantly redefined in order to be

more inclusive) than to the creation, for instance, of a new service.

It can be noticed then how, generally speaking, both institutional (yet not top-down) and bottom-up processes related to the field of urban regeneration are more and more orienting themselves towards a common ground which show similar characteristics: a focus on relationships as activators of processes of empowerment of especially fragile populations/ places, through a place-based (rather than area-based, Calvaresi e Pederivica, *ibid.*) approach: rooted but at the same time not hindered by boundaries. An approach in which space seems to play a key role in terms of gathering together an open, diversified community that takes care of a certain space, participating in its management as a factor of cohesion. It is interesting to see how, in this sense, there is a shift in the very concept of urban regeneration, which becomes more related to the social dimension than the physical one and which is more and more associated to the possibility of expand the access to certain rights to the city (Lefebvre, 2018) by direct activation. Of course, this shift is not given and it should be seen critically especially in contexts which are expressing a profound need of physical interventions on the build stock.

## From socially oriented LLs to ULLs in marginal context

To our opinion, to go deeply in how do we involve fragile people in this kind of processes, it is interesting to somehow juxtapose the tendency described above with the approach that Franz (2015) proposes regarding a socially-oriented interpretation of the LL theory and practice. The author bases her assumptions on the experience of the ICEC Project<sup>10</sup> - Interethnic coexistence in European Cities, developed between 2014 and 2017 to analyse neighbourhood development programs in superdiverse districts of the city of Vienna, Amsterdam and Stockholm (through a LL approach). The project aimed at evaluating policies in terms of their ability to tackle the issue of interethnic coexistence and participation in diverse contexts. Given that "Living labs oriented towards social research questions evolved from the idea of co-developing cities and urban living environments. The general approach includes catchwords such as empowerment, participation or co-creation and provides an open, participatory and do-it-yourself environment that includes citizens (users) and local actors (producers) as agents in processes of co-creation and improved living spaces", the author questions herself on "how far living labs can be used as a supporting instrument in those processes of connecting research with civic society and involving residents to gain knowledge at the neighbourhood level" (Franz, *ibid.*). She proposes to proceed in three steps: (1) translating existing terminology from the "technical field" of LLs. For instance, instead of referring to "real-life environment" she uses the locution: "spaces of encounter" to describe an experimental environment which is not artificially constructed with a top-down (even if participatory) approach, but which emerges from the encounter of researchers and users, where the overall outcome is not predefined; (2) contextualizing the approach with regard to space, methods and expected outcomes; (3) defining the phases of interaction. Here the author identifies four phases which she names as: get to know, involve, activate, co-create. It is quite evident here how LL approach, when applied to socially oriented policies, projects etc. shows significant similarities with an approach of action-research. In the table below (table 3) we have proposed a comparison between the two approaches. It can be stated that, when dealing with social issues, the similarities between the two approaches become more evident, since the LL becomes more process oriented than product oriented.

Action-research <sup>11</sup>	Living Lab Approach
It is integrated into natural contexts	Real-life setting
It is action-oriented	Co-design/co-creation
It is participatory	
It aims at producing local knowledge, at the same time usable by local actors and transferable to other contexts	User involvement and empowerment
It is based on a cyclic methodology of knowledge production	Spiral of knowledge
It is oriented to social change	It is oriented to social innovation

**Figure 5** Comparison between LL approach and action-research approach.

Franz (ibid.) again states that, indeed, the LL method goes beyond the methodology of classical social research, especially in virtue of active and interactive involvement methodologies which are supposed to prepare a fertile (real) context for co-creation (in her case co-creation is intended as co-evaluation of policies among researchers and users).

It is also interesting to look at the critical points she arises:

Time and awareness are central elements to build a significant relationship with the context which is essential to consolidate the “co” associated to LL methodology (co-creation, co-design, co-research...). According to the author: “to ensure a contextualised and sensitive interaction, academic research must not apply established terms such as actors, sample or comparable data when referring to interactions with knowledgeable human beings” (Franz, ibid.). In other words, she argues that we should question our competences and methods in order to embrace really rooted and involvement-focused tools. It seems that the author identifies these tools more with an aware approach, which takes the characteristics of a responsible action-research, than with innovative methodologies.

Long term involvement with stakeholders is unavoidable. “Local stakeholders are necessary as a translating institution and as valuable actors in the field into which the respective academic research is embedded. Critical reflection is however necessary with regards to dependency on stakeholder collaboration and the duration of research. Social living labs should ensure authenticity and credibility. Both cannot be assured as long as research is limited to the duration of a specific research project. To create a trusting and collaborative interaction with local citizens, a shift in research strategy towards long-term engagement is unavoidable” (Franz, ibid.). It is interesting to notice here how the author questions herself on the duration of the research and on outcomes that it generates in the local context. When the outcome is not as self-evident as a product, it is

important to question the duration of the LL as a key factor of its "success".

Still, the involvement of underrepresented voices and issues is crucial: far from defining a solution that could guarantee their inclusion, it seems that the author suggests an attention and tension towards continuously aiming at a more open and inclusive process, learning from on field activity. Here again, an open, shared "space of encounter" is seen as a promising tool in this sense.

## **Mapping San Siro: open questions and issues related to the development of a ULL in a marginalized neighbourhood**

Coming to Mapping San Siro (MSS) experience, in which we are currently involved in as researchers, first of all it is important to point out that, as the case of ICEC project, but unlike the other examples, MSS is a university-driven experience. A factor which implies significant differences firstly regarding the role of knowledge co-production which is placed by MSS at the very centre of all the different activities that are led by the Lab. Secondly, MSS was not conceived as a project with a defined duration: this aspect gives a somehow unique characteristic to the experience and seriously questions its replicability, as we will see further on.

Originally started as a workshop activity, MSS developed through the years as a stable action-research lab in San Siro neighbourhood, especially thanks to the assignment in 2014 by Aler Milano (the Regional Agency for Housing, owner and manager of the public stock in San Siro) of an empty space on the street level (Trentametriquadri). It was the beginning of a new phase for the group: inhabiting a space and becoming a locally rooted actor, on the one hand developing embedded research and teaching activities on three main topics – home and dwelling conditions; courtyards and public spaces, non-residential vacant spaces – and, on the other hand, trying to tackle the urgent issue of promoting participated local change, in a neighbourhood characterized by abandonment, exclusion, distrust and inertia. Even if Mapping San Siro was not intentionally started as a ULL, in 2017, with the beginning of the SoHoLab Project, the group started to question itself in a more structured way on the tools, methods and approaches developed throughout the years spent in the field, especially trying to produce possible guidelines to orient future ULLs that would deal with marginal contexts and urban regeneration.

In the table below (table 4) we have tried to briefly summarize the different phases of our experience, in order to make it easier to understand how it developed through the years, at least in general terms<sup>11</sup>.

Years	Phases	Main activities and objectives
2013	Interdisciplinary educational workshop in the field	Investigate the role of the public city in the contemporary city Challenging a hyper-negative representation of public housing districts through complex mappings Questioning University's social responsibility
2013 - 2014	Itinerant research activities	How to answer the research questions expressed by the neighborhood? How to get together with a complex representation of the neighborhood? How to make knowledge accessible and usable by local actors? How to produce change?
2014 - 2016	Trentametriquadri: a space to inhabit	Research-action and on-field teaching Focus on three themes: home and dwelling, common and public spaces, non-residential empty spaces First pilot projects
2017 - today  (2019)	SoHoLab project  Off Campus 2019: a new space to inhabit	Reflection on the role of space in action-research Developing pilot projects as a methodology: local competences, empty spaces, public space Strengthen the local network as an active subject Defining a role of mediation and "promotion" of the neighborhood with the institutional level/city level

**Figure 6** Mapping San Siro: the different phases of the action-research.

Given the analysis and overview of the different experiences that we have produced in the previous paragraphs, we would like to focus here on a few key points that question our practice and more broadly the approaches that we have pictured so far, allowing us, in our opinion, to better focus on the critical issues related to developing a LL approach addressed to the complexity that characterizes marginal contexts and their regeneration. Elements that challenge, on the one hand, the competencies that we should develop as researchers and practitioners involved in the processes, on the other hand, the possibility to activate processes able to produce a durable and scalable change in terms of local development/regeneration of such contexts.

(1) Declining co-creation as co-research for co-learning and co-design.

In our experience, when coping with marginalized and fragile contexts it is crucial to focus on the different phases that the so-called co-creation, which LLs are based on, implies. Co-creation is first of all co-research: identifying and highlighting a shared and co-constructed vision of problems and resources, significantly linking scientific knowledge with common knowledge (Dewey, 1938)<sup>12</sup>, produced by the so-called everyday-makers (Bang & Soresen, 1999)<sup>13</sup>, identified both with residents and local

organizations. In the approach proposed by Franz (ibid.) it could be identified as the phase of getting to know, which, however, to our opinion, as to be intended as the first step to involve “the locals”. Co-research implies in this sense a mutual learning process (co-learning) in direct and constant relationship with the phase of actual co-design, since it opens up the possibility to collectively identify spaces and fields of possible intervention. Co-research is so relevant because it establishes the basis of a common language, understanding, vision of the context and because it makes space for unheard (marginalized) voices to emerge.

(2) Developing an innovation ecosystem focused on the quality of processes.

Technically designed LLs have usually oriented to product based innovation; Franz (ibid.) has already pointed out that, for instance, co-created and improved living spaces could be identified as significant outcomes for a socially-oriented ULL in marginal context. As also stated in the cases of Community Hubs and New Welfare Spaces, we usually have to expect to generate innovation in terms of processes rather than of products. More specifically, in our experience the most relevant outcome so far could be recognized as a significant community empowerment, defined both as the strengthening of bonds among local actors, the ability to collectively project and plan a vision of change – that could be then officially acknowledged by institutions in policy design processes – and to the competence of appropriating of research tools (we refer here to the concepts of “right to research”, proposed by Appadurai, 2006<sup>14</sup> and of the one of knowledge as a “condition for development”, Freire, 1970<sup>15</sup>). Here again knowledge is seen as a crucial element of empowerment, where both the recognition of other forms of knowledge (non-expert ones) and the fact that common knowledge becomes usable are key elements of the empowering process.

(3) The ability to create cross-boundary arenas where many diverse actors and organizations can interact (Concilio, 2016)<sup>16</sup>.

In many marginal and marginalized contexts institutions are seen, at the local level, as distant and incapable of producing significant changes. In this sense, a ULL should be conceived more as a tool capable to engage institutions again in the local level, configuring itself as a context of inter-institutional-territorial learning. To our experience, University driven ULLs could play a significant role in this regard, since their capacity to act both locally and at a city (or at least broader) level, connecting then institutions, civil society actors, city-level actors (other Universities, cultural institutions and groups...) and group of citizens on specific projects and issues (Castelnuovo & Cognetti, 2019<sup>17</sup>), locally defined. In our experience, we have identified the phase of co-design of pilot projects

as a powerful tool to reach this purpose since it operates as a device to build a learning-friendly context, fertile to acquire the capacity of working together and experimenting new forms of governance that could then be scaled up.

We refer here not the notion of broker, as a metaphor to describe the possible role of planners in ULLs, as declined by Concilio (ibid.): "Johansson and his colleagues (2011) focus on the brokers: they enforce, activate and take care of relations that can be observed and/or developed between the objects and the activities or situations composing the process itself. Brokers act as third parties with respect to the organizations involved, although they may belong to one of them. They can be intentionally or casually in charge of process caring and keep the cross-boundary context active by being intermediaries of the objects between the involved actors. Crucial for brokers are the ability and aptitude to recognize the opportunities for linking objects to specific situations. Also relevant in this perspective are actors acting as boundary crossers, key mobilizers of social capital, who provide leadership and cross the boundaries between the different involved organizations and worlds through their relationships. They understand the organizations' different capacities and can lead actions to build and use these capacities inside cross-boundary environments (Kilpatrick et al. 2014)".

#### (4) Situating: spatiality and time matter.

Coming to more critical points, we define "situating" the practice of activating an embedded research through the opening of a space in the neighbourhood. In this sense, "owning" and above all taking care of/inhabiting a space in the neighbourhood could be considered the core of our activity since it helps to practice contingency (Castelnuovo & Cognetti, ibid. referring to Karvonen & Van Heur, 2014<sup>18</sup>): a collective process of learning – related to the "here and now" – grounded in facts, relationships and situations directly experienced and shared with the research field. Contingency is a condition connected to proximity, which help to structure a relational and rooted kind of knowledge and of action. As also demonstrated by the experiences of Milanese context that we have explored above, we could state, then, that to set up a ULL in a marginal context to have the availability of a physical space matters: "being local" helps to build significant relationships, trust and reliability – both towards the institutional level and the local level – and it opens up access to different forms of knowledge (local one, institutional one, scientific one, etc.). However, situating requires first of all a significant amount of time: our experience as MSS started in 2013 and it is still going on. We obtained the first little outcomes in terms of changes activated (pilot projects) only in the last year and half. Secondly, it requires to embrace a vision of planning

which includes its declination as loving attachment (Porter, Sandercock et. al., 2012<sup>19</sup>) to people and place, intending love in its multiple dimensions of trust, commitment, care, respect, knowledge and responsibility (ibid.)<sup>20</sup>. We recognize that a rooting process demands availability of time and capacity to engage in a deep relationship with the context and, then, we question ourselves: at which conditions is it possible to activate a “situating” process in a ULL? Which competences then, as planners, do we need to develop further in order to effectively work in a ULL in marginal contexts? Is it possible to quantify an appropriate amount of time to spend in the neighbourhood, or do we have to imagine that the ULL becomes a stable presence in the local context, assuming different characteristics through time?

Coming back to the space, we also ask ourselves which characteristics must it have in order to become somehow part of the neighbourhood? For instance, to our experience it was important that it was an open space, free to access, situated on the street level, which was also open, in specific situations to free educational activities.

#### (5) Potentiality and limits of a local scale.

Attachment and engagement to the local unfold two more aspects: on the one hand, they seem to be a condition capable to produce little but scalable change in the way in which institutions and local dimension interact, plan and produce local policies. On the other hand, still, they pose a question on how not to be “trapped” not only on the local scale but in very minute issues. For instance, in our case, the fact that we were “forced” to start from the (little) transformation of public space (GreenLivingLab San Siro) in a neighbourhood where housing is the most urgent matter, is something we are critically reflecting on. To which condition is a ULL capable of establishing “real” priorities which are at the same time feasible?

Besides, this issue more broadly questions the Living Lab approach, tackling the matter of how to create a durable and significant change, even if starting from a very small/local dimension. Regarding this aspect, Concilio (ibid.) refers to the concept of frugality elaborated by Molinari: “[...] experimented solutions use small amounts of resources and are frugal (see Molinari, 2016) from two different points of view. To begin with, they are developed with resources available in the specific problem contexts and do not require relevant additional economic or physical resources (citizens are more prone to mixing resources than professional designers). Secondly, they are developed and tested in spaces of proximity, localities. They are situated and consequently frugal in dimension and do not require large investments. This frugality adds to these solutions being reversible and effective in urban environments”.

If we intend, as stated before, a ULL as place to experiment with new and shared forms of governance and co-designed solutions to local problems, testing ways of co-producing knowledge and effective forms of working together, at which conditions, then, is this process scalable? Is the ULL capable of trigger this scaling process? Or do we have to intend local regeneration in these contexts exclusively as an incremental process?

Living labs in general (Pascu and Van Lieshout, 2009)	Technically oriented living labs	Socially oriented living labs	Urban living labs in marginal contexts
<i>Initial situation</i>			
Service improvement	Product/service development and evaluation	Co-development of city and living environment	Participated urban regeneration
<i>Aims</i>			
Improving development of useful services through interaction in "daily life" setting between developers and users	Higher acceptance of product or service through co-creation	Involvement of affected people to create higher acceptance of, e.g., policies and public services; gaining richer insight information	Improving the quality of spaces and services and their accessibility (especially for people in need)
<i>Approach</i>			
Mutual shaping – user-centred innovation	User interface design – user acceptance – co-design – service and product creation	Empowerment – participation – co-creation	Empowerment – participation - co-research, co-design and co-creation
<i>Actors</i>			
Citizens, firms	Stakeholders and users/consumer/citizens	Local actors, citizens	Local actors/institutional actors/citizens/local and city-level stakeholders
<i>Environment</i>			
Geographically bounded innovation environments	Collaborative, multi-contextual and multi-cultural real-world environments	Open, participatory, do-it-yourself	Open, adaptable, temporary, hybrid, permeable
<i>Outcome</i>			
Co-created and improved services	New/adapted products or services	Co-created and improved living spaces	Co-created processes, improvement of competences, co-created spaces / pilot projects

**Figure 7** Characteristics of general, technically and socially oriented living labs (Franz, 2015); characteristics of urban living lab in marginal contexts (elaboration of the authors).

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## Endnotes

- 1 Concilio, 2016.
- 2 According to Enoll (European Network of Living Labs), Living Labs are defined as user-centered, open innovation ecosystems based on systematic user co-creation approach, integrating research and innovation processes in real life communities and settings.
- 3 Concilio & De Bonis, 2012; Franz, 2015; Hakkarainen & Hyysalo, 2013
- 4 Vertovec, 2014
- 5 Supported by the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies and by Polisocial Program (Politecnico of Milan public engagement program), Mapping San Siro is located in San Siro neighbourhood, one of the largest and more problematic public housing settlements in the city of Milan. Started as a workshop activity in 2013, Mapping San Siro involved the participation of a group of students, researchers and teachers, interested in challenging the stereotyped and negative image of the neighbourhood (usually promoted by the media) and involving local actors in the co-construction of shared and “usable” representations that could effectively trigger local change. In 2014, Mapping San Siro obtained from Aler – the Regional Agency for Public Housing of the Lombardy Region, which owns and manages the housing stock – the possibility to re-open a vacant shop in the neighbourhood, located on the street level, which became the headquarters of the group and was named Trentametriquadri – 30 square metres – in virtue of its size.
- 6 Calvaresi & Pederiva, 2016
- 7 See SoHoLab Report, referred to the description of the Panning context.
- 8 For a classification and a list of practices see: <http://www.osservatorioriuso.it/cgi-bin/documentazione/Community-Hub.compressed.pdf>
- 9 Reference: <http://www.fondazioneocariplo.it/static/upload/qua/0000/quad-32-welfare-in-azione-web.pdf>
- 10 <https://icecproject.com/>
- 11 For a deeper analysis see: Cognetti F. & Padovani L. (2017). New meanings for public housing through the co-production of knowledge. In: Bargelli E., Heitkamp T. (Eds.), *New developments in Southern European housing*. Pisa: Pisa University Press.
- 12 Dewey, 1938
- 13 Bang & Sørensen, 1999
- 14 Appadurai, 2006
- 15 Freire, 1970
- 16 Concilio, 2016.
- 17 Castelnuovo & Cognetti, 2019
- 18 Karvonen & van Heur, 2014
- 19 Porter et. al, 2012.

20 “The point I would like to argue is that we in fact can substantially enrich our understanding of planning by taking advantage of the unique insights that loving attachment to people and places of our research can yield, knowing there are moral and perspectival challenges to address.” (Umemoto, 2012 in Ibid)

# Brussels

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# On regeneration and participation

The SoHoLab quest for tenant participation in the regeneration of large-scale social estates contains several ambiguities. Historically, architect and planning praxis has been characterized by the ubiquitous role of the spatial professional, “knowing best” how space should be produced, and therefore also, how society should look like (Holgersen, 2015, p.9; Sandercock and Attili, 2010). This line of thought reached a high point during African colonialism and was pursued in the global north by the modernist movement that originated in the late 1920s. Although ideals for a better society were at the base of the movement, it failed to understand that the values and beliefs held by the planner are not the same as those they are planning for.

The post-war reconstruction spawned the need for housing construction, leading to the rise of technocratic experts conceiving plans to produce the most rigorous outcomes. During this period, the ideals of modernism were reduced to an economic efficiency logic of standardization and rationalization. The construction and proliferation of high-rise social estates can be situated in this logic. Regardless the generous prospect of making housing quality accessible to lower income segments of society, high-rise social estates have been suffering from top-down and undemocratic modes of planning. Partially also due to the nature of social housing in itself: a ‘solution’ to the housing question imposed on the powerless by the powerful (Schuman, 1987). It is no surprise that the strongest critiques on technocratic planning resurfaced during this period.

Following Henry Lefebvre’s notable work on the right to the city, contestation movements of May 68 shared the conviction that participation in the organization of the city should be an enforceable right. Next to their critique on policymakers the movements pointed at the social and political responsibility of architects and urbanists. They criticized the latter for only serving the interests of the elite. The authority of the architect was also questioned from the inside. Already in 1953, Team X was created, a group of architects that challenged the modernist doctrinaire approach to urbanism.

In the meanwhile, in the United States, alternative architect and planning practices originated that recognized the political role of space and pursued a democratization of planning. They advocated for the interests of the oppressed, usually excluded from planning processes. Rather than one supposedly neutral comprehensive plan, often benefitting the powerful elite, they envisioned a plurality of plans (Davidoff, 1965). Participatory

approaches to architecture and planning have been growing in importance ever since, under different labels, such as radical or insurgent planning (Friedman, 1987), communicative planning (Inness, 1995), just planning (Fainstein, 2010), and collaborative planning (Healey, 1997), extending their influence on public planning discourse (Healey, 2007). Indeed, in the western European planning context, resident participation has become the new 'way of doing' planning (Atkinson & Eckardt, 2004). However, although significant variation in breadth and depth of participation exists according to different historical, social, political and legal traditions of each country, in many cases, resident participation is reduced to a mere consultation (Krivy and Kaminer, 2013).

In addition, the withdrawal of the Western-European welfare state after the restructuring process since the late 1970s has led to changing relationships between the state and citizens. As the state is not capable to fully guide planning processes, a transfer of former state domains to individual citizens or private initiatives has been taking place, conceptualized as 'a shift from government to governance' (Le Galès, 2003). While the reliance of a greater involvement of individuals and the local level have the potential to generate socially inclusive practices in urban governance, it is vulnerable for contemporary economic efficiency logic, in which the state unloads budgetary and other responsibilities to citizens or a hierarchically lower government level (Gonzalez et al., 2010).

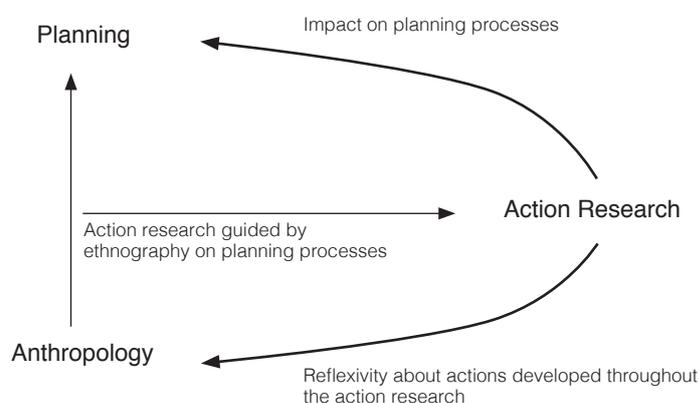
As tenant participation has often been an unfulfilled promise, the Brussels SoHoLab project seeks to understand and test how a profound understanding of a large-scale social estate can contribute to promote more inclusive regeneration strategies. By doing it wants to contribute to a counterhegemonic image of such areas. It wants to do this through an action research that combines anthropology and novel participatory approaches to architecture and planning. The choice for the discipline of anthropology is driven by the aim to develop in-depth, situated cultural knowledge, while action research relates to an ethical and voluntarist stance. Indeed, in this research we aim to produce 'usable knowledge' (Karner et al., 2014), entailing both 'knowledge to understand' and 'knowledge for change', addressing the transformative capacity of knowledge. As such, in this report, the following disciplines will be discussed in direct relationship to (large-scale) social estates and action research: planning and anthropology. This will help us to define their strengths and limitations, and potential margins for intervention by the SoHoLab. While within our discussion on ongoing debates within participatory planning, we will especially focus on power relationships, in our description on changes within the discipline of anthropology we will especially touch upon ethical dimensions. Three cases will then showcase how such margins and political-ethical considerations are played out in

practice. In these cases, both the positionality of the researchers/spatial professionals/artists and their actions will be discussed. The latter will give an answer to the questions 1. 'what were the roles and objectives of the agents involved in regeneration practices' and 2. 'what were the results of their actions'. We will conclude this report with themes that link the theoretical discussions to the cases. It should be noted that this report is developed in parallel to our action research, which implicates that the reflections developed throughout the report are largely inspired by our own actions.

# The SoHoLab action research

Action research has been conceived as a means to engage with the social realities and communities a research operates within. It has been developed as an answer to critiques on the hegemonic position of the researcher within research, who 'steals' knowledge from studied subjects. It starts from the stance that such knowledge should be co-produced. In order to do so, the action researcher tries to develop an egalitarian relationship with its study subjects, engaging non-professionals as co-researchers in the process of knowledge production and evaluation. He/she positions him/herself within a community, often composed of groups dealing with epistemic injustices (Tlili & Delorme, 2014), such as ethnic minorities, marginalized communities, women and black people.

Rather than comprising one single research discipline, action research has emerged out of a broad range of research fields (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003). Action research is neither a methodology but refers to an ethical and epistemological position within research (Saija, 2014). There is no real consensus on the exact components of action research, but agreement exists about its "commitment to the democratization and demystification of research, and the utilization of results to improve the lives of those affected by it" (Breitbart, 2016). It thus wants to improve the situation of those that participate in the research as co-producers. As such it includes "data collection, critical inquiry" and "action", and this within an iterative cycle, instead of a chronological order. Each component has a specific relationship with the two disciplines used in the Brussels SoHoLab, planning and anthropology, the first obviously more action oriented than the second one. The three research stances have a specific role within the SoHoLab research, summarized as follows:



**Figure 1** The Brussels SoHoLab set up

We apply methods of anthropology to understand the planning process in the context of our case study Peterbos. This allows us to take a more active stance after one year, focused on improving certain situations in the planning field. Throughout this 'action research', we again use anthropologic methods to develop a profound reflexivity about the actions. We will now focus on the disciplines of planning and anthropology, first by defining some margins for intervention in the context of the regeneration of large-scale social estates, and second by reflecting on positionality within the disciplines and links with action research.

# Methodological contributions to regeneration practices

## Planning

A first discipline targeted and applied in the SoHoLab is urban design and planning. Large-scale social estates are the result of large-scale government planning. In order to get hold on this, we give a small overview of the different planning paradigms and governance strategies that have emerged during and after their construction. Naturally, different and opposing views on democracy can alter the planning process (Van Wymeersch et al., 2018). Although the SoHoLab is especially interested in novel approaches to planning, we recognize that the planning perspectives discussed below—collaborative, antagonistic, and subjectified—are not mutually exclusive but might coincide or supplement each other.

### *Rational planning*

Large-scale social estates are symbols for the belief in progress and the rise of Modernism in the post-war period. In this period, the old industrial paradigm, based on liberal capitalism, changed into a paradigm characterized by welfare capitalism and mass production. Welfare capitalism embraced Keynesian principles such as full employment and a broad political support. In some countries, it went along with a large-scale immigration from former European colonies and a strong housing need. The modernist movement sought an answer to this by establishing 'ideal' environments surrounded by green space and air, relying on the latest technological and industrial progresses. The environments were an antidote to the strongly congested city centres and slum settlements around major cities. Planners were framed as apolitical experts, pursuing the best for the general public interest. Obviously, the planning discipline was not free from narrow-minded interests and alliances between political parties, private entrepreneurs and planning offices. But in general, the planning paradigm of the modernists was perceived as "value free" and "rational" (Hall & Rowlands, 2005 p. 49).

The contestation movements after May 68 and the proliferation of participatory planning practices gradually led to more attention for local participation in planning. This period also heralded the crisis of the Fordist project and a new economic era. This era, framed as 'Post-Fordism', has been marked by the rise of a knowledge-based economy, globalization, a

flexibilization of the economy, the fragmentation of work, a consumption-based society and globalization (Hall & Rowlands, 2005). Those tendencies would entail a shift from a "state-led provision of public goods and services to a new paradigm characterized by the participation of a wider array of stakeholders – the government, business and civil society" (Le Galès, 2003). "The system of 'government' that evolved during the certainty engendered by economic growth following the Second World War [would be] displaced by a new flexible form of multi-agency governance more attuned to the uncertainties of a period of social, economic and political change" (Mugnano et al., 2005). Globalization eroded political and economic power of the individual and undermined its traditional forms of identity. This created a division between the policy elite and the general public, resulting in increased dissatisfaction with representative democracy, exemplifying the need for a multi-agency governance. It is within this period of increasing diversity, uncertainty and fragmentation that the assumptions underpinning "the planning, development and management of the large estates" seem to have lost their relevance (Hall & Rowlands, 2005, p.50). In the context of their regeneration and the post '70s economic turmoil, a number of related perspectives arose under denominators such as 'communicative' planning, 'participative' planning and 'collaborative' planning (Hall & Rowlands, 2005). It could be argued that these perspectives constituted a new paradigm in planning theory (Healey, 1997).

### ***Collaborative planning***

The collaborative planning approach intends to be an ultimate act of place-making in a world devoid of certainty, uniformity and homogeneity (Healey, 1997). Healey's agenda of place making (as mentioned in Hall & Rowlands, 2005, p. 51) incorporates the following dimensions, largely coinciding with the SoHoLab agenda:

- A coordination between different policy domains, both spatial and 'aspatial';
- The development of long-term strategies rather than time-limited, project-specific partnerships and networks;
- Stakeholder involvement;
- Local knowledge as key resource;
- Relation-building between stakeholders, based on both institutional reform and capacity building of non-experts such as inhabitants.

The core aim of this normative form of planning is to democratize planning and to integrate plural community discourses and value systems, formerly excluded from planning practice. At the basis of this aim is the belief that different stakeholders within this process can achieve mutual understanding and collaborative consensus through inclusionary argumentation (Maginn 2007). Building upon Habermans' theory of

communicative action, the collaborative planning paradigm builds on the idea that by engaging in an open, 'rational' debate, the different stakeholders can become self-learning entities, becoming aware about each one's cultural practices, beliefs and aspirations. In addition; the collaborative planning approach aims to be inclusive, environmentally sensitive and acceptive for the mutual interdependence of state and market (Hall & Rowlands, 2005).

### ***Insurgent / empowerment / citizen-initiated planning***

The collaborative planning approach has faced many critiques, especially for its loose attention for power dimensions within planning processes. In the context of large-scale social estates, one of the greatest obstacles to participation is the reluctance of local politicians to share power with local lay people. In relationship to Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969), examples of non-participation through manipulation or therapy are still dominant. The political will to go higher on the ladder, is often limited to information or consultation. "Successive studies of local involvement agree that, in most participatory programmes, communities have remained on the margins of power, even when they are relatively well-organised" (Van Beckhoven et al., 2005, p. 236).

In critical studies on collaborative or other participatory planning methods, Foucault's work on governmentality has become influential (Miraftab, 2009; Hall & Rowlands, 2005; Foucault, 1991). Foucault has taught us that decision-making, and thus power, are not a given fact, distributed equally between actors, "either on housing estates or within the wider decision-making forums that influence life on the estates. (...) Decision-making is based on networks of power relationships formed between key actors that can include or exclude, increase or decrease the power of actors within the decision-making forum". (Hall & Rowlands, 2005, p.56) In relation to the involvement of inhabitants in the regeneration of large estates, it is clear that "institutions within this process hold power over unorganized individuals" (Hall & Rowlands, 2005, p.56).

In addition, as Foucault has attempted to explain, those in power have the capacity to conceive the norm, the accepted way of acting or bearing oneself. They have a 'normalizing' judgement, enabling them to impose dominance through different forms of punishment or warning. Those who lie outside such normalized judgement are considered to be 'anti-social' or at the 'edge' of society (Hierzer and Schörkhuber, 2013; Hall & Rowlands, 2005). In order to reach such 'normalizing judgement', those with power, notably the government, "apply technologies to construct, act upon and regulate populations. They identify those in need of intervention by classifying populations and their behaviours" (Hall & Rowlands, 2005,

p.58).

Last decades, governance in Europe has been infiltrated by neo-liberal strategies and corporate interests, carving out representative democracy and further impacting on governmentality (Wacquant, 2008). A typical consequence of this is the emergence of governance strategies that shape subjects as 'active' agents, granting them responsibility for their own life outcomes. As McKee (2011, p.5) articulates, "no longer is the state required to plan and solve society's needs; rather its power is to be redirected towards empowering citizens in order governance be made more decentred, diffuse and participatory. Government rationalities are not to be achieved through direct intervention, but by re-aligning subjects' identities with governmental ambitions – what Foucault labelled 'technologies of the self'". The participation of a wider array of stakeholders, notably civil society, can as such be interpreted as a depoliticization of communities' struggles. Indeed, a body of literature has documented how the routinization of community participation has extended state control within society (Miraftab, 2009). Due to this co-optation (Jordan, 2003) or mainstreaming, there is a widening gulf between the rhetoric of participation and the actual practice. Added to this, these agencies are often required to compete for funding and, functioning as competing, de facto private market entities (Krivy & Kaminer, 2013).

In this context, new planning perspectives seem to emerge aiming to socially and politically challenge governmentality. They go back to the roots of advocacy planning and radical planning approaches that originated in the aftermath of '68. Miraftab (2009) for instance has argued that during processes of state decentralization, the state has tried to contain grassroots struggles by developing local formal channels for citizen participation and claims. But, in contrast to these efforts to contain struggles, the internal contradictions of such channels have stimulated grassroots organizations building radical participatory processes from below. Through persistent counter-hegemonic practices, such movements could expose and upset the normalized relations of dominance. In a similar vein, Saija (2015, p.195) has addressed the notion of empowerment planning. Such planning would apply participatory techniques in order to "enhance people's capacity of perceiving and acting outside of the influence of dominant discourses". Rather than putting forward an ideal model for participation, empowerment planning would stimulate people to reflect on the way to relate to others politically. On a more moderate note, Boonstra & Boelens (2011) state that planners should not impose participatory instruments or strategies but rather develop coalitions with self-organized movements and self-initiated participation. This requires them to adopt an outside-in perspective, participating in the lives and concerns of movements, instead of an inside-out view. In line with this,

numerous spatial design practices have emerged that embrace the idea of citizenship and direct democracy. They act as spatial 'agents' of self-organization and bottom-up involvement. They develop coalitions with activists, move between bottom-up practices and top-down planning approaches, put themes on the policy agenda or develop counter-projects for contested pro-market developments (Lofvers & Devos, 2015).

These new planning perspectives could be framed as 'antagonistic' oriented planning, building on Mouffe's notion of 'post-politics' (Mouffe, 1999). In (ant)agonistic planning, political subjects become politicised through the development of counter-hegemonic narratives that transform existing power relations. In such process, a group formation takes place in the sense that political subjects become aware of oneself, as a group, find a (common) voice and impose their weight on society (Van Wymeersch et al., 2018).

### ***Cautious, modest, pragmatic and messy reworkings of space***

A collaboration with self-organized movements is not evident in the context of large-scale social estates. In such disadvantaged urban settings, people are often overwhelmed by their life circumstances (Coit, 1985). This makes them less able to collectively organize themselves and to find a common voice. Due to the scale-level of social estates and the daily problems inhabitants face, the necessary social cohesion and needed supportive associational networks are often lacking or too fragmented (Taylor, 1999). Some studies contradict this, by showing that social tenants' aversion to participate is mainly explained by the little confidence they have that their neighbourhood will actually improve (Hall & Hickman, 2011; Angels & Gallego, 2002; Docherty et al, 2001).

Interesting in this sense is Foucault's notion of 'free subjects'. McKee (2011, p.2-3) has indicated that Foucault (2003) "carves out a critical space in which to consider resistance to governmental ambitions, for central to his perspective on power is the notion that power is 'exercised only over free subjects', who have an inherent capacity to think and act otherwise. Power is therefore not the antithesis of freedom and human agency: it presupposes it. This draws our attention to the way in which governing practices can be adapted, challenged and contested from below and from the top, thereby emphasizing that both 'the governors' and 'the governed' are capable of exercising power. Moreover, it fundamentally rejects the idea of resistance that has predominated within the social sciences, which conceives it in terms of liberation from an oppressor. The assumption that resistance can somehow transcend and overthrow power relations not only ignores the diffuse nature of power in society, but also its productive nature, as reflected in the 'activated' subject's sense of agency. For Foucault,

resistance has much more modest ambitions. It represents a challenge to, and the adaptation and re-invention of current governing practices (McKee, 2011, p.2-3). As Rose highlights: These minor engagements do not have the arrogance of programmatic politics – perhaps they even refuse their designation as politics at all. They are cautious, modest, pragmatic, experimental, stuttering, tentative. They are concerned with the here and now, not with some fantasized future, with small concerns, petty details, the everyday and not the transcendental. In relation to these little territories of the everyday, they seek to engender small reworking of their own spaces of action” (Rose, 1999, 279-280 in McKee, 2011, p.3).

Some authors see yet another planning perspective in this awareness for subjectification in planning. They have used Jacques Rancière’s notion of ‘political subjectification grounded in equality’ (Van Wymeersch et al., 2018; Boano & Kelling, 2013). Building on Foucault, Rancière defines governmentality as a form of ‘police order’, creating order in society by determining “what can be said, seen and done in a particular context by a particular person” (Van Wymeersch et al., 2018, p.3; Boano & Kelling, 2013). Contrary to Mouffe, Rancière sees a political struggle not as a battle between enemies or an identification with a particular group, but rather as an individual dis-identification from society’s symbolically constituted order. Such dis-identification is based on short-lived moments and precarious acts, giving ways to new forms of identification and setting equality. In addition, Rancière also opens up perspectives for aesthetic or artistic practices within planning. To Rancière, aesthetic practices can serve as forms of visibility that can themselves serve as interruption of the given partition of the sensible. Aesthetics that create a break with common sense, can reconfigure the way in which subjects are heard and seen. It can allow the sensible object to be emancipated from the implicit police order (Boano & Kelling, 2013).

In sum, such more ‘realist’ governmentality perspective and its attention for forms of resistance, minor engagements, short-lived moments, precarious acts, cautious attempts and here-and-now small reworkings of spaces, can possibly positively inform participatory planning perspectives. Building on Rancière’s notion of ‘aesthetics’, it also creates opportunities for more interventionist acts of planning, reconfiguring the way in which subjects are heard and seen. It is clear that this ‘third’ planning perspective does not have to exclude other forms of participatory planning perspectives, but that its critical potential offers opportunities to explore and reveal new issues of power and resistance that cannot be ignored in the context of large-scale social estates. It is through a strong engagement with the empirical reality, the petty, the messy and the subaltern in planning process, that such knowledge might be enhanced and integrated in planning processes.

### ***The Brussels Capital Region: democratization vs rationalization***

The regionalization of Belgium into three regions, each responsible for its own spatial and housing planning policy, and the increasing power of the municipalities ensured counterhegemonic movements that originated after May 68 were politically backed-up. The latter has been called the 'first turn' in Brussels development, in which citizen organizations (such as ARAU, Inter-Environnement Bruxelles and BRAL) succeeded regrouping requests of citizen committees in the context of massive national slum clearance programs and pro-car spatial development. After the Belgian regionalization, several actors within these committees started working for spatial planning administrations. This would eventually lead to a democratization of Brussels planning policies through public participation in major development plans (for instance the Regional Development Plans) and neighbourhood contracts. However, by stabilizing state-citizen relationships, the former radical demands did not necessarily lead to radically democratic policies.

This is epitomized by the regionalization of the housing policy. Indeed, the 'first turn' also had its impact on the social housing sector. With the development of a regional umbrella organization, new management rationales and actors entered the field, amongst others publicly supported NGO's for developing social cohesion projects and supporting tenant boards; and private companies for performing specific tasks, exemplifying a slight shift to multi-agency governance. On the one hand, several 'democratization' measures were developed to increase resident participation and to bring about a more socially engaged housing policy. On the other hand, the umbrella organization organized a 'rationalization' of the housing sector, imposing merger processes to social housing companies to increase their 'efficiency'. This example of 'new public management' rationale entering public administrations, decreasing the bond between local administrations and neighbourhoods and thus inhabitants, is opposed to the democratic measures explained above (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2017).

Within the context of the 'democratization' of the social housing sector, two types of publicly supported resident participation programs were developed. An 'active', or 'direct participation', on the one hand, including resident participation in the social and cultural life of the neighbourhood, has been stimulated through the support of 'social cohesion projects'. A 'decisive' or 'institutional participation', on the other hand, in which residents are legally incorporated in decision-making, has been promoted through the support of the establishment of tenant boards (Cocolo). Social housing companies are nowadays obliged to contribute to this establishment and to include two representatives in their

management committee. However, due to the relatively low attendance and interest in the tenant boards and the dominance of seasoned officials in the management committee, this measure hasn't had a big impact on citizen participation in the governance of the companies.

The participation of local inhabitants in the regeneration of social housing estates can be situated in between these two types of resident participation: it consists of actions and discussions that imply a certain extent of delegated decision-making in order to include residents in the design-process. In the Brussels Capital Region, there are very few programs promoting such participation: the regeneration of social housing is especially based on technical and financial concerns and requirements. The implementation of 'spatial programs' such as the neighbourhood contracts in social housing estates in the city centre, and now also in Peterbos, are therefore exceptional. These are the only programs that have the explicit target to develop an extensive participatory trajectory throughout the regeneration process. Through collaborations with community organizations, their aim is not only to contribute to a renewal of the built fabric, but also to install social and economic cohesion. However, in case of social housing estates, they are exclusively focused on public space regeneration and the integration of new facilities. In addition, as has been noted in other European cases as well (Hall & Hickman, 2009), the participatory promise of the neighbourhood contracts strongly varies across various projects and municipalities. In the Brussels case studied in the last report, the interventions that resulted from different neighbourhood contracts did not correspond to the concerns and requests addressed by inhabitants and associations during the workshops and general meetings. The relatively weak participatory dimensions within an overall institutional setting that fails to address the basic concerns and needs of its clients, show that in the Brussels region, the 'collaborative planning' stance has only partially infiltrated in governance strategies, and, especially on a theoretical level. It also shows that the participatory dimensions are especially aimed at pacifying rather than stimulating local agency.

However, through small-scale engagements, efforts and actions, specific stakeholders, such as social workers and housing administrators operating within the context of Peterbos seem to be willing to carve out critical spaces for challenging the structure of power relationships and sustaining inhabitants' agency to act 'otherwise'.

## **Anthropology**

A second methodology applied in the SoHoLab research is

anthropology. Anthropology is a discipline oriented at studying people in their own contexts, by methods of data collection which capture social meanings and ordinary activities. Anthropologists participate directly in the setting and local activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner.

Large-scale social estates have been subject to numerous sociologic and anthropological studies. Within this research, the relationship between the built environment and social phenomena such as cohabitation, criminality, stigmatization have been addressed. Without doubt, the most seminal and comprehensive work with strong relevance for the stigma-related objectives of the SoHoLab research is the one of Loïc Wacquant on the French banlieue. In his research, Wacquant sought to discover the causes and effects of the negative image of these areas. Although tackling a completely different scale-level, this work is of extreme importance when considering stigmatization within large-scale estates in Belgium. The French banlieues suffer a negative image associated with drugs, immigration and unsafety. Interrelated with the decomposition of former working-class territories under the dismantling of the welfare state, precarity on the job market and racism, these problems exceed the actual areas. Wacquant showed that the negative image is not only the result of actual crime-related events, but also has to do with 'an undesired differentness' of such estates and their inhabitants from 'normals'. Although actively leaning on Bourdieu, this line of thought has many parallels with the concept of governmentality of Foucault: authoritative agents and institutions strive to impose a definition of the social world best suited to their interests. In contrast, areas of disrepute such as the banlieues have become nationally renowned as emblems of disintegration and moral inferiority. As an effect, Wacquant showed that the spatial stigma has been the most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those living in these areas. They become aware about their stigmatized position and its effect on their place in society. Furthermore, the psychological effects that come along with it decreases social cohesion within these areas. Inhabitants will make use of one of the following strategies; they will avoid taking part in social life in the neighbourhood; accept dominant discourses on their neighbourhood and take distance from their neighbours; or search for recognition among 'those at the edge of trouble' (Power and Tunstall, 1997). The latter, which goes along with conflicts, crimes and intimidation, reinforces the negative image of the neighbourhood, entering into a negative cycle of stigmatisation. This 'boys problem' within large-scale estates sometimes leads to an unsolvable distrust between the police and inhabitants, who have connections to these youngsters or are afraid of their retaliations.

Wacquant's analysis on large-scale social estates has been subject to

several additional sociological researches. Some of these studies counter Wacquant's observations and argue that the strategies of vandalism and crime deployed by youngsters, or specific forms of resistance are inherently political as they are results of a struggle against police violence or psychological violence caused by stigmatization (Lefrançois & Porchet, 2010; Le Breton, 2000). As such, they show attention for subjectivity, or at least for acts of contestation to governance strategies.

While some sociologists have been focusing on large-scale social estate regeneration strategies such as demolishing/reconstruction, privatization and increasing social mix (Le Garrec, 2014; Lelévrier & Noyé, 2012; Donzelot, 2006), few anthropological or social studies have been focusing on the 'planning issue' of renovation in itself. Apart from dealing with stigmatization, it is especially this major omission we wish to tackle with the Brussels SoHoLab.

# Positionality

We will now highlight some differences and similarities respectively between action research and planning, and action research and ethnography. This will give us clues about the different positionalities this combination of research strands in the Brussels SoHoLab can lead to.

## **Action research and planning: 'engaged planning research'**

Action research originates from the same theory innovations and postmodern shifts that in previous decades impacted the planning profession (Saija, 2014, p. 192): "after centuries of mutual disconnection, diffidence, and open disagreement, both philosophers and scientists are finally converging on the fact that 'knowing' is always a process of mutual modification between the knower and the known". Before, planners were expected to individually identify and frame the most pressing social issues, and to determine how these should be addressed (Saija, 2014). The postmodern shift challenging both the hegemonic position of planners and the linearity of the relationship between knowledge and action, led to new positions and roles for planners. Concretely, this has been epitomized by a shift in 'theories in planning' to 'theories of planning'. Such theories reject the idea of being able to identify general solutions or universal models of action. They can reveal uncomfortable truths, describe several possible future scenarios and confer notoriety to invisible practices.

Planning and action research start to coincide when planners are highly intentional about his/her ethical/cognitive starting point, the kind of change he/she wants to promote and by maximizing his/her 'modifying' power. It implies that he/she is aware about the web of social relationships of the world he/she act within, and thus the collective and political nature of this challenge. As such the planner/action researcher becomes 'one of the actors' undertaking a process with a high level of reflexivity.

The two strands cannot be equated, however. Both contemporary (participatory) planning perspectives and action research are driven by the commitment to engage in the reality they work on and the implication of end users. But action research implies double change, as knowledge sharing is inherently part of the process, while this is not necessarily the case in participatory planning.

Another difference is the involvement of end users. Participatory planning approaches such as collaborative planning are engaged with acknowledging all stakeholders. Action research, contrarily, is often developed with smaller groups (Tlili and Delorme, 2014). The intensity of

the action research process and its commitment to co-produce knowledge from the outset is more likely to be developed in such smaller groups, as it avoids creating unreachable expectations.

Being highly aware about the necessity for a continuous reflexivity and power imbalances, participatory planning approaches such as antagonistic and subjectification planning might be closer to action research. In the case of empowerment planning, part of the commitment is also to stimulate collective learning processes, making people aware about the role of power within planning processes.

### **Action research and anthropology: 'engaged ethnography'**

As had happened within urban design and planning, after the late 1960s, also the discipline of anthropology entered a critical phase. Until then, many cultural anthropologists had been largely operating in colonial regimes, transferring local knowledge without integrating the local populations within their reflections. As such they contributed to reproducing the paternalist position applied by these regimes. Influenced by postcolonial, subaltern and feminist studies, increasingly within anthropology, voices were raised for a more socially and politically engaged practice (Hemment, 2007; Harrison, 1991; Hymes, 1972). Tendencies such as globalization, racism, growing inequalities and the transformation from welfare capitalism to neoliberal capitalism obliged anthropologists to move away from the conceptualization of the world in terms of separate and distinct 'cultures' (Hemment, 2007). Rethinking or considering power relationships has been key to this; within the population under study but also between him/her and the population under study.

Within the shift from the 'classic' anthropological paradigm into a 'critical' anthropological paradigm, 'a more active', 'voluntarist' or 'participatory' stance has however remained relatively out of the limelight. There seems to be a reluctance of taking a more active stance as this would be contrary to the non-interventionist methodologies used by anthropologists. A voluntarist stance also assumes that stakeholders would be interested to be involved in the research, that it is always possible to 'improve' a certain situation and or that people would be interested in such improvement.

Some however note that such discussions are detached from the anthropological fieldwork reality, as engagement is inherently part of it. As Pierre-Joseph Laurent (2011, as cited by Hagberg & Oattara, 2012) has argued '[engagement] is an obligation and non-engagement a methodological error, because scientific validation in anthropology is done through the engagement to objectify one's subjectivity in order to establish the facts of reality according to one's interlocutors'. In other words, a

deep emphatic engagement with the lives of the research subjects is at the heart of participant observation. It then depends on the researcher, who continuously reflects about the relationships and interactions he/she develops within the field, to decide how far his/her commitments will go, defining his/her own ethic. Some authors have suggested that this engagement is mutual. As Chambers (Chambers, 2000, p.860) notes, 'ethnographic research strategies may be more accessible than other strategies, and, might provide kinds of data that are more convincing to those participants and community members who are not trained as social scientists'. As such, anthropology could be considered as very 'complementary' to action research.

Caution is however warranted to the instrumentalization of anthropology. Anthropology should not be reduced to a method giving access to other research approaches and as such to end users, as this would ignore the cultural and ethical process that makes research ethnographic (Maginn, 2007).

## Three cases

We will now go into the three case studies, each dealing with the context of social housing and applying methods used in action research, anthropology and (participatory) planning, to a variable degree and extent. The case studies do not only illustrate the combined application of disciplines, but also serve as inspiration for the actions developed throughout the SoHoLab research.

### Construire ensemble - Boulogne-sur-mer



Built in 1975  
 60 dwellings  
 Renovation started in 2010  
 Owned by Habitat du Littoral  
 Surface: 5.000 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Budget: 2.300.000 €  
 excluding VAT (460€/m<sup>2</sup>)

**Figure 2** Rue Delacroix, plateau du Chemin vert, Boulogne-sur-Mer

Located in a potentially lucrative environment on the coastline of Boulogne-sur-Mer, the social housing company in charge of the 'Cité de promotion familiale', initially envisaged to demolish the strongly degraded neighbourhood (Bouchain & Collectif, 2016). The majority of former fishers and settled travellers that make up the population lives from social allowances. Since the establishment of the neighbourhood, the population was proposed to invest in these non-conventionalized housing, enabling to set utterly cheap rents (Bouchain & Collectif, 2016). The almost inexistent rents and institutional investments came along with a very limited and dehumanized organisation and administrative management of the site. Cut off from the urban fabric through the coast line and a modernist large-scale estate, over the years this had contributed to an isolation of the population; not only economically and socially, but also geographically (Hallauer, 2015).

Plans of ANRU to replace the population or to demolish the area were not welcomed by the socialist mayor and president of the housing company, Frédéric Culvillier. The mayor, for whom the 'housing question'

had been crucial since his appointment as a deputy mayor in charge of housing, realized the destructive outcomes of such intervention on the social housing stock and the inhabitants of the area, who had been living there for nearly 33 years. Instead, he sought for alternative modes of regeneration, by looking for ways to renovate and improve the management of the street. In his search, he stumbled upon the agency 'Construire', of Patrick Bouchain. The mayor had learnt about their experimental program '*Construire Ensemble le Grand Ensemble*'. The idea of the program was to work on the transformation of social housing starting from the lived experience of the space, through a 'permanency' of a number of actors, including inhabitants and builders. For their program, they were searching for sites to experiment their methods. Bouchain and the mayor thus shared an interest in novel modes of doing regeneration. The young architect Sophie Ricard, who had been doing research on living conditions in social housing and a *bidonville* during her studies, completed this exceptional team. Bouchain asked her to do her internship for their office for this specific project. Her former experiences and personal engagement on the site were key for the success of this architectural permanency experiment in Boulogne-sur-Mer<sup>1</sup>.



**Figure 3** The street before the intervention (Sophie Ricard)

### ***Construire Ensemble le Grand Ensemble***

The experimental program '*Construire Ensemble le Grand Ensemble*' emerged as a critique to the regeneration of large-scale social estates (Julienne et al., 2010). More specifically, the demolition programs and the failure of participatory approaches supported by the French government prompted the office Construire to reconsider past approaches. The lacking spontaneity, collaboration with builders on the site, account of history, user knowledge, habits and daily life in the current production of urban space were at the heart of their critique.

Against this current production, the office places 'the architectural

permanency'. The architectural permanency builds on the culture of the 'artist in residence', in which artists reside in a certain place to create pieces on and within a site. It is also inspired by the 'floating observation' developed by the anthropologist Colette Petonnet. Rather than focusing on one specific object or event, the 'floating observation' aims to approach a site with an open and ever-available perspective, allowing information to penetrate without a filter, until reference points, convergences and underlying rules emerge (Petonnet, 1982). These references were used by 'building in inhabiting' and 'inhabiting in building' social estates. By changing its position, and temporarily becoming an 'inhabitant', the office wanted to be confronted to the social and institutional reality of the site, immersing and taking part in the life and daily practices shaping the neighbourhood. As such, it aimed to reintroduce ways of living and collaborating together. In the case of Boulogne-sur-Mer, the improvement of the individual dwelling unit was at the heart of this aim.

The office approached this target with a multitude of actions. Sophie Ricard lived and stayed in the neighbourhood, before and during the renovation works. During three years, her house became a reference point for inhabitants and outsiders; a place to develop workshops, an atelier, meeting place, cafeteria and conference room. An active democracy was supported, by enabling everyone to participate in the conception, execution and management of the renovation works. To organize collective events throughout the renovation process, partnerships were developed with cultural and social associations. Inhabitants were also involved in the renovation process of their own house. Building contractors were imposed to insert them in their building team.

### ***Three years of permanency***

At the start of Sophie's endeavour, she developed a planning with three main phases: a diagnostic, a participatory conception and construction phase (Agence Construire, 2010) according to the very simple principle of developing a slow rehabilitation of the neighbourhood, at the same price of its demolition.

After the renovation of one house, which would become the place of the architectural permanency, Sophie moved in the neighbourhood. Her move to the neighbourhood permitted the architect to gain, little by little, the confidence of neighbours. This was not easy, as she was first considered as someone from the social housing company, 'spying' on the diverse illegal traffics and non-officially subscribed inhabitants. During the first year, Sophie developed a social and architectural diagnostic, making use of the 'observation flottante' (Hallauer, 2015). In order to get to know and to

encounter people, Sophie initiated small workshops including gardening and craft activities for children. Through her relationship with the children, she could approach their parents. This enabled her to develop a survey and state of play of each house and the inhabitants' relationship with it: the quantity, nature and renovation priorities. It's here the 'participation' of inhabitants started. As she identified that people were very good in counting, re-using, making sure to not to spend too much money, she also defined the household's budget, their priorities, the works they could do by themselves. By co-creating a sheet for each house, with a picture of inhabitants, their situation, what they want, like, what is important for them, she specified the different regeneration possibilities (Hallauer, 2015). These individual visits and direct participation of inhabitants in the development of the sheet, contributed to developing a vision for a 'home', going beyond a shelter. At the level of the neighbourhood, the architecture office established collaborations with associations, a landscape architect, a moviemaker, an artist and building contractors for specific projects and activities (Hallauer, 2015).



**Figure 4** Example of individual house/household description (Sophie Ricard)

As for the construction phase, the building enterprises were obliged to involve inhabitants eligible for a local insertion plan. This insertion plan provided a form of 'construction training' to inhabitants. For this work, Sophie Ricard put into contact interested people, social services and enterprises helping interested inhabitants to update their cv. In order to facilitate a good relationship, the architecture office opted for local and familiar enterprises. This specific set-up allowed for very cheap renovation works, of around 400 euros per square metres (which is a third of the usual renovation costs). The direct participation of inhabitants in

the conception and renovation was not only of economic value. It put into question and redefined the contemporary conception of social housing: the improvement and transformation by inhabitants of the heating system, the painting, the isolation and decoration, reaffirmed the core importance of the use value of social housing.

After 3 years Sophie Ricard moved out of the neighbourhood. Unfortunately, this move was too abrupt, and inversely proportional to the success of the renovation<sup>2</sup> (Hallauer, 2015).

### ***Spatial professionals as ethnographers***

The 'architectural permanency' touches upon both the methodologies used in the discipline of anthropology and the 'pragmatic and cautious reworkings' expressed before.

By situating the architect in the middle of the lived experience in a neighbourhood, the 'permanency' goes beyond a top-down and bottom-up dichotomy. Based on their engagement to act otherwise, Construire left its hegemonic posture and became 'one of the actors' within the renovation process. Rather than imposing a redevelopment agenda or trying to 'overthrow' power relationships between the social housing company and the residents, the office tried to remain close to the existing nature of the area, modestly developing a dialogue with both inhabitants and institutions and pragmatically engaging with the possibilities offered by the site and the stakeholders. In relationship to the collaborative planning paradigm, this allowed to create some bridges between domains, institutions and logics, spatial and 'aspatial'.

Such approach is far from evident, as beyond the professional capacities, this demanded a whole range of social skills and personal sacrifices. In this case for instance, the architect was strongly supported by the mayor but had to win the trust of inhabitants and to continuously convince the housing company about the used approach and about the necessity to finance it. Being able to profit from this internship of the architect, who accepted to only gain 1% of the total budget while spending 3 years on the site, the office did not make any profit with the project.

The focus on the messy reworkings and adaptation of existing way of governing the site was enabled by a clear architectural mission of the office: the renovation of the dwellings. Although applying floating observations and actions in the public domain, this clear architectural mission implied a strong deduction of the ethnography and rehabilitation of the site. As a positive consequence, the architect in charge was able to have a substantial impact on the spatial quality of the neighbourhood, while avoiding issues she was not able to (and not asked by inhabitants to)

deal with, for instance 'illegal' traffic or 'unaccepted' appropriations. This prevented her from being put into an 'uneasy' position, which could have been perceived as both protective, by the institutions, and paternalizing by the inhabitants involved.

## Droixhe

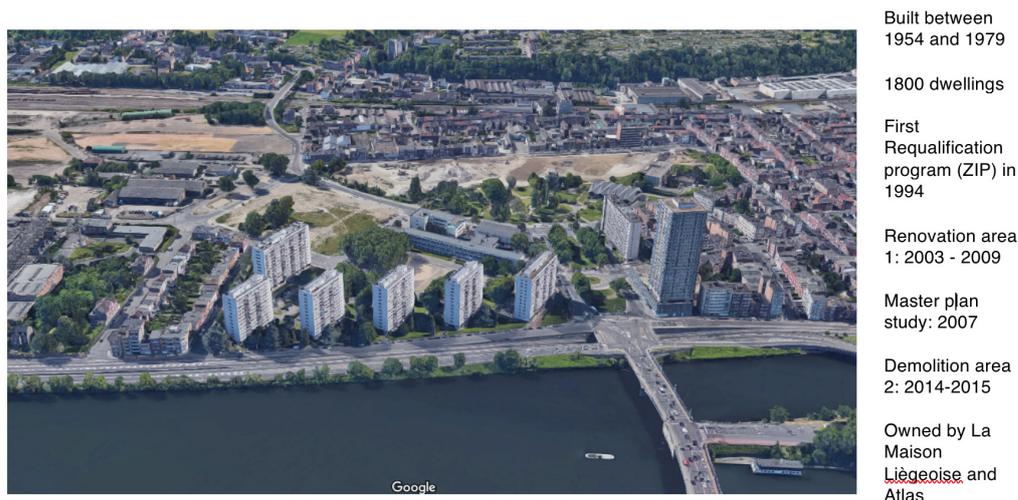


Figure 5 Droixhe

Located on the right bank of the Meuse River, the social estate 'Droixhe' marks the boundary between the city of Liège and the industrial area of Herstal. The estate was built on the former Champs de Manoeuvre, by EGAU architects. Historically branded as 'the most modernist estate' of Wallonia, the housing estate is one of the few large-scale estates in Belgium entirely developed according to CIAM principles. The dwellings were among the first that combined the luxury of a bathroom, central heating system and a standardized kitchen with furniture. They profit from a maximal natural lighting, through the east-west orientation of the blocks. The liberation of the ground floor went along with the design (and development!<sup>3</sup>) of a park and a wide range of qualitative equipment. Seemingly repetitive and homogenous, different ensembles with a specific identity and personality created a strong variety. The authorities in charge of its renovation however, talk about a downward spiral of the area since the 1980s, arguably caused by the legal decision to align the rent to the incomes of the inhabitants<sup>4</sup>. In 1994, the area became part of the 'ZIP type 4', aiming at a requalification of the site. The office Projénor was hired to develop a first economic, social and architectural study of the site. The study proposed to renovate buildings, while demolishing others, to develop a social mix and to consider the participation of inhabitants in the

requalification. Based on this study, the estate was divided in 3 zones. The first zone, Truffaut-Liberation, was considered for an inhabited renovation. The architects in charge, Dethier and associates, planned a light renovation, including works in the apartments, collective spaces and facades. The works in the 435 housing comprised a replacement of the chassis, the heating system, the electricity, lavabos, toilets and baths. In the collective spaces, the elevators would be replaced, while the walls, ceilings, floors and stairs would be refreshed. Ceramic panels, created by the artist Jean Glibert would improve the isolation and design of the facades, respecting the aesthetics of this typical 1960s architecture. The architects appointed a research team composed of a sociologist, historian and political scientist from the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie de la Communication de l'Université de Liège to follow the inhabitants during the works. Their mission was to follow the construction works, to accompany and to communicate with inhabitants<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Three tracks***

The team developed a 'follow-up' methodology around three tracks:

- a constant presence and contacts on the site through a fixed working space;
- the development of specific communication tools to inform about the works;
- sociological reflections to help architects and politicians to understand the site.

The team executed these tracks through a long-term commitment: the historian and sociologist worked part-time on the site between 2000 and 2007. The political scientist worked part-time for only a few years. The renovation works were executed between 2004 and 2009. This delayed start was caught up by two full-time social assistants from the social housing company, who remained on the site during the 5 years of renovation (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005).

#### ***1. Permanency and visits***

Between January 2000 and April 2003, before the delayed starting date of the works, the team visited the 435 units. The visits were necessary in order to carry out a technical survey of each apartment, but for the team it was a unique occasion to develop personal contacts. The collection of inhabitant's doubts, questions and observations, allowed them to reflect and adjust the next steps of the follow-up process. The visits made them

aware about specific profiles like night workers, babies, animals, on whom the renovation works would have different impacts. It also allowed the team to introduce themselves as 'intermediaries' between inhabitants and landlords, before and during the renovation works, a role meant to break down existing barriers based on distrust. The individual, time-consuming visits to each inhabitant set the tone of their project: the team opted for an individually oriented trajectory, rather than a collective one. This decision was partly influenced by the aim to respect the intimacy of each tenant, partly by the nature of the renovation works, in which individual units were renovated one-by-one (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005).

From 2003 onwards, the team settled an *appartement témoin* (pilot apartment) (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005, p.5) on the site, in order to be able to give continuous information and to support inhabitants during the full 4 years. As usually construction works are unpredictable, messy and difficult to plan, it was necessary to deliver a continuous and reliable information. According to Frankignoulle<sup>6</sup>, the tool of the pilot apartment was very useful as it offered a permanency to the researchers, but also a clear illustration of what was about to happen with the apartments. As he explains, "inhabitants were passing by, sometimes to share a coffee, sometimes to resolve other issues with the company. We were dealing case by case, often directing inhabitants to the right services, but sometimes also solving their questions".

The permanency was especially individually oriented. It did not lead to the formation of a movement of tenants, such as a neighbourhood committee. Nevertheless, it facilitated the development of collective dynamics in response to shared struggles. For instance, rapidly after starting the renovations, some tenants started to gather and convoked the press to denounce the renovation project and the difficulty of occupying an inhabitant renovation. Indeed, the renovation of each apartment, during which the minimum comfort (no kitchen for some weeks for example) was not provided, lasted 6 weeks. Supported by the research team, the inhabitants proposed an alternative in the form of a temporary drawer operation. This led the social housing company to give households the possibility to stay in the already renovated apartments in the first building during the works (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005).

## **2. Communication**

Throughout the permanency, specific additional communication tools were developed. First, the quadrennial journal 'Le Nouveau Droixhe', published in 4 different languages (French, Arabic, Turkish, English), diffused information on the construction works, social, cultural and

associative activities.

Second, when the renovation works started, the team organized focus groups and 'Dazibaos'. The Dazibaos were posters that displayed information on ongoing works in a more concise way in each block. The focus groups were organized per column of buildings, in order to enable inhabitants to express their expectations and fear. However, they did not happen on a very regular basis, limiting its potential to stimulate cohesion or to go towards a more shared experience of the renovation process (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005).

### ***3. Aligning different logics***

Apart from the concrete actions detailed above, the research team tried to develop a sociological study on the site. Their reflections nourished exchanges, both with the architects, landlords and building enterprise in charge of the renovation and between them and inhabitants.

The researchers had frequent meetings with the building enterprise and architects to transfer information. The researchers could explain the concrete, everyday impact of their decisions and warn them for certain choices taken. The contact with the enterprise was more complex as the enterprise did not welcome them in their site meetings.

The researchers also functioned as intermediaries between inhabitants and those in charge of the renovation process, on a practical level but also in terms of support. As Frankignoulle<sup>7</sup> explains, "the architects were super relieved we were there, because, you can imagine, it was not their role to say to people to put their furniture in the middle of their apartment... these kinds of stuff." In case of defects, the researchers ensured the information of inhabitants went up to the enterprise and architect. "Our mission wasn't to defend the tenant, but we quickly realized that some people would need some support in the relation with the builder and the company." This 'intermediary' position included a continuous endeavour for aligning different logics, institutional, lived and technical ones. As Frankignoulle<sup>8</sup> states, "we were always between different logics and we always had to battle against the 'enterprise' logic, and even the 'political' logic in a way... (...). Do you know for instance when the works were launched, they put up a tent and invited all the important politicians of the Liège region and not the inhabitants... can you imagine? ... these worlds don't communicate... everyone has its own logic." In some situations, they had to actively defend the position of inhabitants, fighting against the increase of the rent after renovation or for obtaining a subsidy (for the wallpaper or paint) for each household to finish the renovation.

Unfortunately, the work of team has not been valorised, theorized,

nor used for the renovation of the rest of the site or similar initiatives in the region. The rest of the Droixhe estate was subject to a totally different approach<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Break the negative circle of stigmatization***

Also this case started from an intuitive, empathic and pragmatic site-based regeneration and communication approach. The team of sociologists expressed the need for first developing a sociological study before proposing and applying any tools. The visits as such formed the base for developing these tools. They were very aware about the limits of their mission, as the problems they found on site, could not be solved within, but were related to the society at large (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005). Nevertheless, they tried to contribute to the most convenient renovation for inhabitants. Although the team did not disseminate their work or develop in-depth reflections on their method and role within the renovation process, their long-term presence on the site taught them several points.

First, the team of sociologists inquired, questioned and observed the neighbourhood in order to better understand it. Part of these observations enabled them to differentiate the actual reality and the image created by outsiders (Bourdieu 1993). Of course, they observed dirtiness, incivility, degradations and sometimes violence, but they were less frequent than described by the media. They found out that this negative image of the neighbourhood imposed by outsiders had a strong impact on what was happening inside. On the one hand, inhabitants who were lacking cultural and social resources, were not capable of controlling their representation (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005). Whenever they would express themselves on the site and themselves, they would use a borrowed discourse, which was more dominant and present than their own. On the other hand, some inhabitants felt betrayed by the media and political power and responded to this through deviant behaviour.

Second, the architects in charge of the requalification of Truffaut-Liberation aimed to break the negative circle of stigmatization and to fight against the label of 'difficult neighbourhood' and 'ghetto', imposed by media and politicians. Through physical interventions, the architects hoped to restore the negative image of the site, both from an internal and external point of view. The sociologists were critical about this and expressed caution of a too simplistic 'spatial determinism'. According to Frankignoulle and Stevens (2005), social problems and deviant behaviours cannot be solved by solely working on the architecture.

Although the researchers did not academically valorise their approach, the actual aim, guiding inhabitants in this process has been

successful. The renovation works within the individual dwelling units brought several tensions, conflicts and questions. This was reinforced by the many delays before starting the process and the burden of living on a construction site, intruding their intimacy<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, inhabitants were glad to be able to stay put in their apartment, and to have the permanent presence of the team to express their questions, concerns and fears.

## Rabot



Built between 1972 and 1974

Composed by three 17-levels high rise towers (572 dwellings units)

In March 2009: decision to demolish

The demolition started in 2013 and -lasted until 2018; the new estate will be constructed between 2015 and 2023

Owned by Gentse Maatschappij voor Huisvesting (later "WoninGENT")

**Figure 6** Rabot

The three towers that make up the Rabot estate were developed between 1972 and 1974, as a modernist-style development. The towers accommodated 570 households, who could profit from the modern comfort (lifts, bathrooms, an American kitchen, central heating, large windows) and an optimal lighting quality through an east-west orientation<sup>11</sup>, typical for such development. Rabot is located in the centre of Ghent, in the first crown of the city. This central location of the estate has had an important influence on its planning history and the final choice to demolish the buildings<sup>12</sup>.

### *'The most cursed project'*

Already in 1984, only 10 years after their construction, the landlord used the following sentence to describe the project during an exhibition: "The ambitious housing and clearing policy led to a project that today, is seen as pure madness (...) but in Ghent the most cursed project is that of the 'three towers' at the Rabot site." (Publication, p90 in De Decker et al., 2015, p.12).

In 2002, the spatial planning scheme of the city identified Rabot as a rupture in the city in terms of scale, dividing the northern part of the

city with the inner city. In the document it was stated that “some of these landmarks, like the Rabot towers, pervert the cityscape. They are located in or too close to the city centre, creating a fracture between two parts of the city. (...) Verticality can increase the readability of the city, but to some extent, landmarks give a bad connotation to the area, because they are not in proportion, like it is the case with the Rabot towers.” (Spatial planning scheme, p90 in De Decker et al., 2015, p.12). The scheme was in line with the global pro-capitalist development tendencies, but also with the Belgian financing system of local authorities<sup>13</sup>, who are in need of prosperous inhabitants in order to increase their tax revenues.

The planning scheme became concrete in the neighbourhood of Rabot through the ‘Bridges to Rabot’ development project, dominantly developing middle- and upperclass housing. The ‘eco-friendly’ Tondelier project, for instance, which is part of this development project, was meant to attract the attorneys and judges of the new court house, installed next to the Rabot towers (De Decker et al., 2015).

In addition to these policy discourses, other narratives, such as the poor technical quality of the towers, the changing social composition, mergers of social housing companies, and a new financing system enabling the loan for the construction (initially due until 2030) to be waived, contributed to the policy preference to demolish Rabot. In 2005, a study was ordered for the regeneration of the Rabot towers. The study showed 10 different renovation/demolition scenarios. In 2009, it was decided to demolish the towers. This was followed by a tender to develop an architectural project for the site. The winning tender replaces the towers by 8 buildings with maximum 9 levels. The development includes approximately 360 social rental dwellings, less than two third of the original amount. The construction of the new estate is planned to be finalized in 2023.

It is in this context that the artist and theatre director Simon Allemeersch installed his atelier in Rabot. He arrived in the neighbourhood in 2009, through a friend working as a social assistant for the community organization Samenlevingsopbouw.

### ***Rabot 4-358***

Upon his arrival in the neighborhood, Allemeersch did not have a preconceived plan about what to do. He just wanted to witness the transitions and transformations during the emptying process of the Rabot towers, prior to their demolition. He introduced himself in the tower by what he calls “his first big mistake”<sup>14</sup>: he wrote a letter to inhabitants of the block and displayed this on the wall in the hallway. He did not receive any answer. After a while he realized he didn’t offer any reason

to inhabitants to get in touch with him, while a written text was not the best way to communicate. Therefore he decided to turn his apartment into a public space, where inhabitants were able to pass by and where befriended artists, students and researchers could meet this 'inner world' of inhabitants. Bit by bit people started to pass by, visit him, drink a coffee, have a chat or look at what he was doing. The apartment became his main working space, for meeting other artists and for discussing the data he collected in the block and the neighbourhood in order to start a discussion. Pretending to be there by chance, bit by bit, he started to get a clue about the daily life in the block. The material and discussions that originated simply by being there, providing coffee, cooking dinner would be used 'to do something' as a theatre maker. As he states, "it would have been inconsistent to come and propose to collectively develop a theatre play, to people that don't even read, 'where should I have started?'"<sup>15</sup> "Instead, his apartment became the centre stage of his theatre; "Would it be possible to transform an empty apartment into a studio generating information on the buildings and their inhabitants? Not really to collect a generic story that could be told in ten years, but rather to find the most little form of story: there is someone that is pianist, he says, there is someone who invented his writing, someone who cooks for others... To collect and show these objects, the apartment will serve as a stage: the living room becomes a cinema or a little theatre, a bedroom a place to write, the window becomes a television for the outside world and the apartment a window display."<sup>16</sup>

### ***Registering the lived space***

Initially interested to work on the 'transition phase' of moving out, he soon realized no single inhabitant was interested or talking about moving out of the tower. Taking almost 10 years, it seemed hard to imagine (or easier to ignore) the consequences.

Allemeersch quickly realized this project was not about a transition but about the way the building is appropriated and lived. Many sad stories and bad things were discussed during his meetings with inhabitants, but Allemeersch decided to solely focus on the subject on which he could have an impact: about people slipping through the net, about the controversial decision to demolish the blocks. "If you are in poverty, there is no private life, you are constantly asked about it. Private life seems to be a luxury; For the first time, I asked them, keep your private life, but let's rather speak about what you think about the architecture, the buildings... Can you explain why everybody uses the back side of the building?"<sup>17</sup> For 2 years, he dedicated his time to collect material, to meet people, to welcome them in his apartment. He started to identify some themes about the life inside the blocks, about the economy of the blocks, people's finances and other

personal narratives at the nexus of architecture, urban planning, history and design. Out of these themes he developed a movie, together with inhabitants. They helped him to record certain messages, to introduce him to others. But, he soon realized this movie was rather incoherent, not fully explaining the story of the buildings. He understood that if he really wanted to do something with this material he had to move out and to search for new input. This is how Allemeersch stumbled across the grand decay and demolition scheme of Prak and Priemus (1985). It helped him to deconstruct the 'why and how' of the demolition.

The end result of his work is a performance showing different forms of media: the film including narratives within and on the blocks, and a more theoretical part in which Allemeersch tries to grasp the controversial decision to demolish the blocks. The personal narratives are a rich source of internalized knowledge. The film fragment about Freddy for instance shows how this illiterate person has been able to communicate by developing his own system of writing. By showing this story in a tragi-comic way, Allemeersch exposes the struggle with administrative burdens of many illiterate people living in social housing. He also goes beyond the victimization of inhabitants and points at their rejection of the gentrification path taken by institutions and the city planning department. In another film fragment, a woman gives a very precise illustration of gentrification patterns within the neighbourhood, without knowing this specific term.

### ***Bridging worlds***

From the beginning, Allemeersch wanted to bridge the world of inhabitants and those interested in this world: befriended artists, musicians, university students, institutions. By inviting the latter in his atelier, he attempted to do so. As Allemeersch explains, "there is a big gap between people that live inside and educated, university students, who make a big mistake: if you cannot read or write and if students in front of you start taking notes of each sentence you say, you feel uncomfortable, you don't understand. Or the nice photographer that promises to send his picture afterwards, but never does and then has an exhibition in the city centre."<sup>18</sup> Another quote that highlights this gap is related to the technical evaluation of the building by university students, the police and administrators from the social housing company. "They say a lot of things about the apartments, they say there is not double-paned window, or stuff like that. But they don't have any clue about how it is to live in the private rental sector, it is far worse. They don't understand. They cannot understand why many people are so pleased to live here."<sup>19</sup>

It's especially this lack of representation of internalized knowledge Allemeersch wanted to remedy, by touring with his theatre play in several contexts, including in Rabot, and other social housing estates in Flanders and Brussels. The theatre play, which combines these diverse representations was lauded, also by social tenants. As Allemeersch explains, "at first, I was really anxious inhabitants would not understand the second part of the play, which is more theoretical. But afterwards (after screening the film) a guy from Rabot came to me and told me 'I especially like the second part, because finally someone is explaining something'"<sup>20</sup>.

### ***Revealing spaces of power and contestation***

Both the construction and demolition of the Rabot Towers have been subject to rational planning discourses, technocratic praxis and bureaucratic schemes (De Decker et al., 2009). The work of Simon Allemeersch, that engages with this topic by balancing between art, community work and anthropology, challenges these discourses and seeks to empower inhabitants to engender small reworkings of their own spaces of action. As such, De Decker et al., arguably see it as a Rancièrian "aesthetical act that breaks up the police order and creates a rupture in the order of legitimacy and domination" (De Decker et al., 2015, p.19). Such interpretation could be challenged, as in this case this act is initiated by an outsider. Nevertheless it can be seen as an act of claiming equality.

First, Allemeersch' work reveals current governance strategies aimed at a gentrification of this piece of city through a theatre play. The play uncovers the way decision-making in this case is based on networks of power relationships formed between actors, such as the city, social housing companies and private developers that can exclude social tenants from the decision-making forum. In relation to this, Allemeersch explains a typical example of an attempt by city officials to 'depoliticize' the work. "I turned the scheme of expectations about artistic intervention upside down, and that's when policy makers started bothering me. They wanted to pay me more money, even offer 10000 euro, in order to include me in their system of control. I chose to seek alternative paths. I used my own networks of cultural capital. (...) As long as I showed another reality and showed aesthetical images of the actually existing lives or Rabot Towers inhabitants, everyone seemed to be 'ok' with it. (...) That's why I made the second part of the theatre play: the map that sketches out my actual hypothesis about 'why' and 'how' of the demolition. I felt I had to do it... in order to bring about discussion about the demolition and removal."<sup>21</sup>

Second, the theatre play challenges 'the police order' by publicly showing the 'lived space' left out in these discourses, praxis and schemes.

Through his project, one becomes aware about the way governing practices can be challenged and contested from below. The simple act of showing inhabitant's ignorance about the demolition, the appropriation and attachment to the towers and the fact they 'actually like living there' draws our attention to a form of rejection and alternative lived experience by those subject to governance strategies. As such, they enter into a political field and claim their position within this story (De Decker et al., 2009).

# Conclusion

The discussion of the cases, the evolutions within the disciplines of anthropology and planning, in relationship to large-scale social estates and action research, allows us draw lessons for the Brussels SoHolab approach; inspiring us about our positionality in the research and distracting some margins for intervention. Although both are strongly related, in this conclusion we try to distract 3 themes for each point. They should serve as springboard for the next phase of our action research.

## Positionality

One main convergence between the fields of action research, engaged planning and anthropology is the engaged and reflexive stance of the researcher within the research. It is important to be aware about our ethical/cognitive starting point, and to be prepared to reconsider this throughout the research.

Ideally, action research involves stakeholders from the outset, which we originally planned to do in the SoHoLab research. However, we felt that several issues in the planning process of regenerating large-scale social estates, notably the different planning processes going on in the neighbourhood and the way they are lived by inhabitants, required a deeper understanding. This led us to conclude that we do share several ethical principles of action research but adapted these to the site and context we are working on. They are especially related to the themes presented here below.

## ***Individual vs collective approach: from individual to collective approach***

The fields of action research, planning and anthropology are all dealing with people, their cultures, practices and behaviour. When comparing action research with the fields of anthropology and planning, and the discussion of the cases, we experienced a friction between individually-oriented methods and methods that work on a collective level. While action research and participatory planning approaches involve a group of people (from the outset, in case of action research), anthropology is more individually oriented, in the sense that it often builds on one-on-one contacts. In the process of building contacts with inhabitants and diverse planning stakeholders in (large-scale) social estates, the latter seems important, in order to become aware about everyone's cultural practices.

Although also dealing with participatory planning and a form of

action research, the cases also started with one-on-one contacts between the actors and inhabitants, before considering more collectively oriented activities, which were often developed with a rather small group of people. This seemed to be essential to win trust and to develop a good relationship with inhabitants. In the case of Droixhe and Boulogne-sur-Mer, the visits to each individual dwelling also appeared to be a springboard for more collectively-oriented actions and activities, such as the fight against certain problems during the renovation works. In the case of Rabot, it allowed to be as open and receptive as possible for inhabitants' subjectivity; small concerns, everyday acts of disobedience and tentative forms of rejection of governance practices.

Furthermore, the cases also illustrate that such individual approach doesn't prevent from stimulating or pursuing mutual learning processes, by acting as an intermediary between technocratic and lived, top and the bottom, in- and outside, technical and social. In Droixhe and Boulogne-sur-Mer, this intermediary position was rather humble, trying to bridge worlds that don't communicate. Allemeersch went a step further in his project on Rabot. By touring with his theatre, Allemeersch wanted to create awareness, amongst both inhabitants and institutional actors, about power imbalances and governance practices and their impact on the lived experience of inhabitants.

### ***Interventionist vs non-interventionist approach: voluntarist but reflexive***

Another friction we perceived by comparing the methodology, especially between anthropology vs planning and action research, is the level of intervention. While anthropologists seem to be cautious about taking such more 'active' stance, both planning and action research take it as a starting point. We can finetune our method by selecting some aspects that seem to be an added value in the context of the regeneration of (large-scale) social estates.

In respect to planning and anthropology, action research makes us aware about the importance of being intentional and open about the change you would like to promote and about the potential to use your 'modifying' power as a researcher. This has been the case in all the cases discussed. In the case of Rabot, Allemeersch wanted to shed light on the development of a theatre play on the transition process, but subsequently used his 'modifying power' about the demolition of the building. In Boulogne-sur-Mer, the architectural permanency was proposed as an antipode to current regeneration processes of social estates.

Then, the cases show that the use of components of anthropological methods, such as participant observation and a long-term presence on a

site allow to study and reflect on planning processes (citizen participation in design and management estates, power imbalances between stakeholders, governmentality), before deciding the way to actually intervene. As a result, none of the projects involved inhabitants and institutional actors from the outset in the purpose of the intervention. This doesn't mean they didn't act on the site and made both institutions and inhabitants aware about their presence. But in each case, the ways to act and intervene were finetuned according to the study and the researchers' lived experience of the context, without asking stakeholders from the beginning 'what do you want me to study and change'.

## **Interventions**

To conclude, we repeat the potential margins from interventions for the SoHoLab, and their relationship with different stakeholders in the planning process:

### ***Participation of institutional stakeholders***

The collaborative planning paradigm and Healy's agenda of place making have a strong relevance for the participation of institutional stakeholders in the SoHoLab planning process. It includes several meaningful aims, such as the development of long-term strategies rather than time-limited, project-specific partnerships and networks; relation-building between stakeholders, based on institutional reform; and a coordination between spatial and a-spatial policy domains. However, we believe that power imbalances on the site obstruct the potential of developing such aims through Habermans' model of 'rational' and 'inclusionary argumentation'. One of the major problem is that policymakers often lack a critically reflective understanding of their own cultural practices (Maginn, 2007) and power over unorganized inhabitants. In this sense, we think an ethnographic research of both inhabitants' and institutions' cultures can play a major role. The presentation of such ethnographic research to policy makers and institutions, can be used to make these stakeholders aware and critically reflective of their own cultural relations, practices and processes (Maginn, 2007). Although the aims of such presentation might fail, clashing with institutional stakeholders' identities, ideas and intentions, it might provide an indispensable base for enabling long-term strategies, relation-building, institutional reform and a coordination between a-spatial and spatial domains.

### ***Participation of inhabitants***

In relationship to the participation of inhabitants, the overview of planning paradigms show that collaborative planning and antagonistic planning might fall short in engendering participation at a local level. Distrust and little confidence in institutional stakeholders and in the fact that their neighbourhood will actually improve obstruct their willingness to participate in collaborative planning, while daily problems and different forms of deprivation create a major obstacle to collectively organize themselves and develop a counterhegemony, as proposed in antagonistic planning. In this sense, 'subjectification' planning might provide valuable, and more realist, clues for (re)thinking local participation in large-scale estates. Through ethnography, we can learn about daily acts of resistance, minor engagements, short-lived moments, precarious acts, cautious attempts and here-and-now reworkings of space, as expressed above. This learning process might enable us to reveal struggles and issues, which are of major importance in the context of large-scale social estates. In addition, and building on Rancière's notion of 'aesthetic politics', by using and valorising this energy, we might think of certain 'egalitarian' interventions and actions, that reconfigure, although in a short-lived and precarious way, the way inhabitants are heard and seen.

### ***Bridging worlds***

As mentioned above, building on a study of both stakeholders and the collaborative planning paradigm, the Brussels SoHoLab might serve as an important intermediary between 'different worlds'. It can communicate and increase understanding of each others' world, in order to enhance mutual knowledge building, while undertaking steps to bring them together, enhancing communication.

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# Endnotes

1 The main reference for this case study is the article of Edith Hallauer (see Hallauer, 2015)

2 Instead of continuing the constructive dialogue set up with inhabitants, the HLM installed a guardian on the site. For the architect, this strongly decreased her credibility, while the HLM and inhabitant's situation of distrust was reinforced once again.

3 In contrast to many similar large-scale estates, in Droixhe the modernist project was fully completed and equipped with qualitative and varied amenities such as a park with a pond (for several decades used as a scenery for wedding pictures), a school, a crèche, party hall, indoor public space, commerce, playgrounds...

4 90% of the inhabitants of Droixhe doesn't have a job.

5 The main references of this case study are based on an interview with Pierre Frankignoulle (Liège, 11-09-2018) and the report of the sociologist (Barbara Stevens) and historian (Pierre Frankignoulle) who were involved in the follow-up experience. (see Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005)

6 Interview P. Frankignoulle, researcher part of the Droixhe team, Liège, 11 September 2018

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

9 For instance, for the second zone Croix Rouge, different architecture offices developed diverse project proposals. They ended up being too expensive compared to the estimation developed by Projénor and due to financial and administrative troubles. During this period, which coincided with the beginning of the financial crisis, many scenarios were envisaged, amongst others the demolition of the blocks. At the end, 3 of the 5 buildings were emptied without any agreement on the renovation. The discussion lasted 10 years to conclude, in 2014, with the decision to partly demolish the estate in order to develop a 'human size' social and typological mix in public-private partnership. The third zone was subject to renovation works, but in a more punctual way (Frankignoulle & Stevens, 2005).

10 Villechaise-Dupont (2000) has argued this is especially difficult for social tenants, who often have been emotionally 'over-investing' in their dwelling.

11 Originally, the three towers were to follow this orientation. But before their construction, – strangely- it was decided to rotate one tower 90 degrees, in order to follow the course of the canal.

12 The main reference for this case study is de Decker et al., 2015

13 The incomes of Belgian municipalities are strongly dependent on tax revenues from inhabitants and city users.

14 Interview S. Allemeersch, artist, Anderlecht, 17 January 2019

15 Ibid

16 Allemeersch, extract from website <https://simonallemeersch.wordpress.com/category/atelier-rabot/page/3/> and translated by the authors

17 Interview S. Allemeersch, artist, Anderlecht, 17 January 2019

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 Ibid

21 Interview with Simon Allemeersch, 3 June 2014 by De Decker et al., 2015, p.

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ISBN 9789464007190

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**S<sup>o</sup>H<sub>o</sub>L<sup>a</sup>b**