Narrating the ‘city problem’ and ‘city policy’ in post war France: The case of Montpellier

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Summary

This article examines the characteristics of the narrative framing discussions of the so-called ‘city problem’ and city policy in post war France and identify the ideal narrative for discussing and analysing them, based on a case study of two collective housing complexes located in Montpellier city: namely, Le Petit Bard and La Pergola. We draw two conclusions. First, the common narrative of the city problem, which emphasises ‘identity politics’ as its origin, is intentionally and artificially constructed. Second, the development of effective city policy requires the consideration of not only the cultural but also the socio-economic and spatial aspects of the city problem.

Keywords

Post-war France, political narrative, policy intellectuals, identity politics, city problem, city policy

Introduction

This article clarifies the characteristics and analyses the structure of the narrative used to frame and discuss the so-called ‘city problem’ (*question de la ville*) and city policy (*politique de la ville*) in France after the Second World War (1939–1945). In doing so, this study identifies an ideal mode of narrative for contemporary discussions by widening and enriching the narrative commonly used today. The latter by itself could well explain the history of city problem and city policy, but it has certain problems, shortcomings and possible danger.

Here the ‘city problem’ refers to a complex of issues pertaining to the growth of cities, particularly in terms of population. These include lower living conditions, as well as security issues like petty crime, vandalism, drug use, and social conflict. These social issues are often concentrated in collective housing areas, which are often described as ‘sensitive areas.’ The term ‘city policy’ refers the general system of politics, including urban development policy, as well as the immigration, socio-cultural, economic, security policies implemented in cities.

A subject of major public debate since the 1990s, the city problem and city policy gained significant attention in the fields of urban research and contemporary urban history. This prompts several questions. First, how has the city problem and city policy in post war France been understood by the public and scholars? Second, what realities and intentions shaped the common narrative used to discuss the city problem and city policy in such debates? Third, what merits and problems does this narrative reveal when applied to attempts to improve living conditions in France’s so-called ‘sensitive areas’? Finally, what perspective is most effective in examining city problems and policies?

In addressing these questions, this study focuses on the historical experience of Les Cévennes, a district (*quartier*) located in the city of Montpellier (department of Hérault, Occitan region), between the 1960s and 2010s. Having suffered the typical city problem, this

district contains several large collective housing estates with different characteristics, the comparison of which provides useful insights.

The rest of this study is structured as follows. The next section provides an overview of the type of narrative used to talk about the city problem and city policy since the 1960s. The third section discusses the problems resulting from this narrative, particularly in regard to the use of identity politics. The fourth section traces the process through which the city problem emerges, elucidating the operational mechanism of the city policy applied to Les Cévennes district. The final section highlights the important findings of this study, focusing on points that need to be considered when discussing the city problem and city policy.

France's City Problem and City Policy: The Common Narrative

This section discusses the content and character of the common narrative on the city problem and city policy in France, evaluating the validity of this narrative in the political and academic world.¹ Between 1945 and 1975, France enjoyed a period of intense economic and social reconstruction and development—a period referred to as the ‘the Glorious Thirties’. Following this post war economic growth, the government implemented large collective housing schemes in the neighbourhoods of big cities, such as Paris and regional centres like Montpellier. Commonly called ‘social housing,’ these areas soon became synonymous with

¹ See, as examples of the common narrative in the fields of urban research and contemporary urban history, J.-C. Chambordon and M. Lemaire, ‘Proximité spatiale et distance sociale,’ *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 11-1 (1970), 3-33; Ph. Estève, *L'usage des quartiers* (Paris, 2004); A. Fourcaut, ‘Trois discours, une politique?’ *Urbanisme*, 322 (2002), 39-45; H. Marchal et al., *La ville au risque du ghetto* (Paris, 2010); Roncayolo, M. (ed.), *La ville aujourd'hui* (Paris, 2001, first edition, 1985); T. Tellier, *Le temps des HLM* (Paris, 2007); P. de Almeida Vasconcelos, ‘Processus et formes socio-spatiales des villes,’ in M. Carrel et al. (eds.), *Ségrégation et fragmentation dans les métropoles* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2013), 37-62; B. Vayssière, *Reconstruction, Déconstruction* (Paris, 1988); S. Zegnani, *Dans le monde des cité* (Rennes, 2013).

social disadvantage and other attributes of the city problem, thus becoming the targets of city policy. The common narrative comprises two characteristics: namely, the attribution of the city problem to the increase of poor immigrants, and the emphasis on the assimilation of immigrants into French society as the objective of city policy.

First, it tends to attribute the emergence and the deterioration of the city problem to the gathering of poor immigrants—particularly Muslim immigrants from the former French colonies—in sensitive areas. Collective housing areas, and social housing in particular, were initially constructed for urban labourers, the bulk of whom came from surrounding rural areas. This labour force contributed significantly to economic growth. However, the character of the collective housing areas and their inhabitants has gradually changed, with increasing number of foreign immigrants arriving in these areas. Rapid growth during the Glorious Thirties attracted many Muslim immigrant workers, predominantly those of Arab ethnicity from North African (Maghreb) countries once colonised by France, including Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Meanwhile, Turkish people forced to leave the Federal Republic of Germany after the modification of its immigration policy in the early 1970s also flocked to France in search of work.²

As such, foreign immigrants came to occupy the collective or social housing estates. When the French government clarified the conditions for the family reunification of immigrants in 1976 and 1978, many temporary immigrants chose to become settled immigrants with their families, thus cementing collective housing areas as zones in which immigrant families lived collectively and continuously. This phenomenon led to greater

² In 1961, the West German government concluded a 'migration accord between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Turkey' in order to attract migrant workers from Turkey who would return to their home country after completing their work, and other short-term workers (*Gastarbeiter*: Ger.). However, in 1973, West Germany stopped receiving *Gastarbeiter* due to the economic recession resulting from the first oil crisis.

visibility of immigrants, whose lifestyles and culture practices differed from those of native French people, and to which the latter were unaccustomed.

The second characteristic of the common narrative of the city problem and city policy is its emphasis on the assimilation of immigrants into French society as a solution to the city problem and thus the goal of the city policy. Advocating assimilation, this narrative claims that the ultimate goal of immigration policy is the integration of immigrants, with assimilated immigrants treated as equal to French people.

The first generation of post war immigrants generally accepted this doctrine, agreeing to their integration and assimilation into the French society. However, in reality, achieving upward mobility through assimilation and integration remained difficult for immigrants, whose cultural backgrounds differed from that of most French citizens. Indeed, the majority of immigrants remained relatively poor. Accordingly, the districts in which they lived—that is, social housing estates—reflected the socio-economic difficulties of France’s vulnerable populations. In other words, social housing estates became synonymous with the city problem and central to city policy.

In contrast, second generation immigrants—that is, those born in France and possessing French nationality—were highly dissatisfied with the French model of immigration policy of ‘assimilation, integration and equality’. Their dissatisfaction was exacerbated by the fact that, as French citizens, they were no longer considered immigrants. Consequently, many second generation immigrants, including Muslims, began turning to their parents’ culture or religion and rejecting mainstream French culture. In some cases, this led to staunch opposition to the normalised values practised and protected in France. Regarded as evidence of the failure of the assimilationist immigration policy, this phenomenon resulted in intense political and social debate from the 1980s.

As such, the zones in which poor and now settled immigrants gathered were considered sensitive areas because of the degree to which attributes associated with the 'city problem' emerged, thereby justifying the need for and legitimacy of city policy. As collective housing estates became a bastion of foreign culture—and typically Muslim culture—the main cause of the city problem was attributed to the spatial segregation of immigrants. Accordingly, city policy aimed to reduce this segregation; that is, city policy was directed towards achieving social mixture (*mixité sociale*: Fr.) and integration. Therefore, the city problem was defined as 'spatial segregation based on ethnic and cultural difference' while city policy sought 'social mixture and integration.'

In short, the common narrative asserts that the gathering of immigrants in collective housing areas combined with their spatial segregation, economic impoverishment, increased crime and delinquency, deteriorating living condition, and failure to assimilate into French society resulted in the emergence and generalisation of the city problem. Then the social mixture is presented as the main goal of city policy.

The Trap of the 'Identity Politics' Approach

The common narrative summarised in the previous section has several problems. Significantly, this narrative is not self-reflexive and thus fails to recognise that it may be artificially constructed and that it has political outcomes, the latter of which are often negative. Lacking sufficient evidence and analytical rigour, the common narrative may have dangerous consequences.³ This section examines the extant research on the city problem and city policy in order to answer the following two questions. First, in what sense is the common narrative

³ As the criticism of the common narrative, see, for example, N. Houard, *Droit au logement et mixité* (Paris, 2009); S. Magri, 'Le pavillon stigmatisé,' *L'Année Sociologique*, 58 (2008), 171-212

on the city problem, and sensitive areas in particular, artificial and constructed? Second, how might this narrative be dangerous?

Regarding the question of the artificiality and constructiveness of the narrative, some studies have shown that artificial intention has intervened in its construction and creation.⁴ This argument needs to be considered when reviewing extant urban and contemporary urban history research. For example, S. Tissot points out that the terms and concepts of the ‘city problem’ and ‘social mixture,’ emerging in the 1990s, did not become widespread naturally but their use were intentionally accelerated by several policy intellectuals starting with the sociologist Alain Touraine.⁵ This interest is not widely shared across the disciplines but it seems very important for evaluating the usefulness of the two concepts.

Touraine, developing the concept of ‘new social movement’ to modify the frame of analysis for social research, advocated a horizontal—rather than vertical—understanding of society. In other words, he contended that contemporary society must be observed, approached, and analysed on the basis of the relationship between heterogeneous identities rather than class structure. According to Touraine, society is and must be regarded as the field in which the game of ‘identity politics’ is played; the stake is no longer ‘if she/he is on the dominant or obedient position in the vertical structure of society,’ but ‘if she/he is included or excluded in the horizontal structure of society.’ The new social movement is pro-inclusion in some cases, and pro-exclusion in others.

Touraine’s theory was widely adopted in academia, with scholars understanding it as a frame of analysis and thus applicable to interpreting and explaining the characteristics of social change observed in developed countries since the 1970s. In the 1990s, Touraine’s social

⁴ See, for example, S. Tissot’s argument. Id., ‘Les sociologues et la banlieue,’ *Genèse*, 60-3 (2005), 57-75 ; Id., *L’État et les quartiers* (Paris, 2007); Id., et al., ‘La spatialisation des problèmes sociaux,’ *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 159 (2005), 4-9.

⁵ Regarding Touraine’s theory and arguments, see A. Touraine, *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble?* (Paris, 1997).

movement theory became influential in the fields of urban research and contemporary urban history, advancing the emergence and spread of the terminology and concepts of the 'city problem' and 'social mixture'. Accordingly, it can be argued that approaching the city and sensitive areas with these terms and concepts meant that they were understood using the frame of analysis of identity politics.

In regard to sensitive areas, it must be kept in mind that it is both a reality and an artefact. It is true that poor immigrants living together in collective housing areas, and youths in particular, are more prone to social problems. However, it is important to note that a speech act defining a sensitive area as a space in which identity politics occur can constitute our discourse, frame of analysis and reality in certain cases. This act impacts the way in which we speak about the 'city problem', when we attribute its main causes to the spatial segregation produced by cultural and ethnic difference, as well as when we examine social mixture as the main objective of the solution adopted—that is, of city policy.

The second question concerns the possible dangers of the common narrative on the city problem. The answer to this question can be divided into two parts: namely, the characteristic of the concept of 'identity' and the impact of this narrative on city policy.

First, possible danger arises from the fact that the common narrative approaches the city problem by using—either consciously or unconsciously—the concept of identity. Certainly, given its concern with sensitive areas In particular, this approach may seem effective and useful for the analysis of the city problem.⁶ According to the common narrative,

⁶ See, for example, M. Bricocoli et al., 'Urbain spaces as public action "made durable"', in A. Madanipour et al. (eds.), *Public Spaces and the Challenges of Urban Transformation in Europe* (London, 2014), 11-22; J.-Y. Causer, 'La contribution des discriminations socio-spatiales aux logements urbaines de cloisonnement et d'enfermement,' in Ph. Hamman (ed.), *Le tramway dans la ville* (Rennes, 2011), 149-158; A. Clerval, *Paris sans le peuple* (Paris, 2013); J.-C. Driant, *Les politiques du logement en France* (Paris, 2010); M. Lussault, *De la lutte des classes à la lutte des places* (Paris, 2009); S. Musterd and M. de Winter, 'Conditions for spatial

the main cause of the city problem is the gathering of poor immigrants in the collective housing areas of a district. Faced with the discrimination and alienation caused by the dysfunction of assimilationist policy, some (re)discover their original cultural or ethnic identity and try to reorganise their life space into a more favourable form for their identity. Meanwhile, non-immigrant residents of collective housing areas oppose these attempts, often regarding them as a challenge to or assaults on the 'republican values' which they deem important. Indeed, such values constitute—or at least are collectively imagined as—integral to French identity, having been affirmed and consolidated since the French Revolution (1789–1799) and during the Third Republic (1870–1940). As these conflicting identities confront each other, sensitive areas become the field in which identity politics play out and where various city problems emerge. This understanding produces the view that the fundamental purpose of attempts to solve these problems—that is, city policy—is to prevent the crystallisation of different and mutually opposing identities. To achieve the goal, this view emphasises the importance of creating an environment in which people with different identities are mixed in collective housing areas: namely, social mixture policy. This then spurs debate regarding the effectiveness of this approach as city policy.

As such, it seems evident that the city problem is, at least partially, the product of identity politics—validating the use of identity politics as a frame of analysis in examining the problem. However, a weakness of this approach is that it often attributes an incommensurable character to the concept of 'identity'. More specifically, identities such as immigrant or non-immigrant, or Muslim, Christian, Arab, and Latina are exclusive and incomparable with one another. Moreover, these identities may exist at different and separate levels, co-existing

segregation,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 22-4 (1998), 665-73; E. Préteceille, *La production des grands ensembles* (Paris, 1973); P. Tévanian and S. Tissot, 'La mixité contre le choix,' *Les mots sont importants* (2004, <http://www.lmsi.net/La-mixite-contre-le-choix>).

in a partially stratified way that causes fragmentation and an increase of sub-identities, such as Arab Muslim immigrant, Christian Arab immigrant, and non-immigrant Arab Muslim (that is to say, children born in France to Arab immigrant parents). It follows that the number of new and sub-identities are often recognised as incommensurable.

It is important to note that the identity politicking of those with incomparable identities seldom has any margin for compromise. In the game of identity politics, each actor has three possibilities: to win and exclude others, lose and be excluded or draw and coexist without interacting with others. In the case of the city problem, individuals win and make a space—such as a collective housing estate or district—their exclusive cultural territory; lose and leave an area; or draw and coexist with those of other identities, treating them neighbours to whom they are indifferent but uncomfortable. It thus remains unclear whether a city policy centred on social mixture can be effective in such scenarios.

Second, the common narrative on the city problem is potentially dangerous because it exercises significant influence on the city policy implemented in France. If opinions, arguments or debates on the city problem and city policy remained restricted to academia, they would have little impact on the daily lives of the public. This would be true regardless of the fact that the common narrative is not self-reflexive and uncritically based on identity politics. However, in France, urban and contemporary urban history research are marked by their close relationship with and strong links to political practice. Approaching the city problem with the frame of analysis of identity politics thus influences political decision-makers, who adopt this perspective and make city policy decisions based on the identity politics approach. Indeed, policy that focuses on the identities of inhabitants, especially those in sensitive areas, is currently favoured by French policymakers.⁷

⁷ See, for example, Comité d'évaluation et de suivi de l'Agence nationale pour la rénovation urbaine (CES/ANRU), *Changeons le regard sur les quartiers* (Paris, 2013); CES/ANRU, *Des quartiers comme les autres?*

In the fields of urban research and contemporary urban history, academic research and political practice are closely linked to each other via certain political intellectuals, the most important of whom is the sociologist, Jacques Donzelot. Specialising in Foucauldian family sociology, Donzelot's research interest and focus shifted to urban sociology in the 1990s. He soon became influential in the development of France's city policy as scientific adviser to the *Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture* (PUCA), an inter-ministerial government think tank on urban planning created in 1998. Applying Touraine's social movement theory to the city, Donzelot contended that spatial segregation lay at the root of the city problem and could thus be mitigated by encouraging social mixture through public participation in the political decision-making process in respect to city, district, or collective housing area policy.⁸

In sum, the utilisation of identity politics as a frame of analysis in addressing the city problem and framing city policy is potentially dangerous, both theoretically and practically—particularly as the concept is artificially constructed. Therefore, it is necessary to examine its effectiveness, as well as evaluate the applicability of other concepts. Additionally, it is necessary to find the origin or mechanism of production of identity politics in dimensions other than that of identity. This requires greater self-reflexivity.

Two Case Studies From Les Cévennes, Montpellier

Based on the foregoing evaluation of the common narrative, it is clear that proper analysis of the city problem and city policy cannot be achieved through recourse to identity

(Paris, 2013); Conseil Économique, Social et Environnemental, *Les avis du Conseil économique, social et environnemental, avant-projet de la loi relatif à la ville et à la cohésion urbaine* (Paris, 2013); J.-M. Delarue, *Banlieues en difficulté* (Paris, 1991).

⁸ For Donzelot's arguments, see J. Donzelot, *La ville à trois vitesses et autres essais* (Paris, 2009); J. Donzelot, *A quoi sert la rénovation urbaine?* (Paris, 2012).

politics alone, making it necessary to identify other measures of analysis. This section addresses this task through the case study of Les Cévennes, a district in the city of Montpellier.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, Montpellier's population increased rapidly—growing from just under 100 000 to nearly 200 000 between 1954 and 1975. This population growth comprised three sectors: factory labourers, university students, and repatriates from Algeria. First, inhabitants of the surrounding rural areas—namely, the Hérault department and Languedoc-Roussillon region—flocked to the city in search of work, as did immigrants, predominantly from North African countries. The majority came in search of factory work, with the city administration actively courting new labour through a local industrial policy framework. Second, the University of Montpellier was enlarged in the 1960s, resulting in a rapid increase in students. Third, Montpellier welcomed almost 20 000 repatriates after the independence of Algeria in 1962.

Mass housing was rapidly constructed to accommodate this population influx. Often comprising towers and slabs, collective housing estates appeared in the north-western zone of the city, including the district of Les Cévennes, located approximately three kilometres from the city centre. In 1964, for example, construction of a private collective housing estate called Le Petit Bard commenced. Comprising over 800 units, Le Petit Bard was regarded the *de facto* reception centre for repatriates. Located on a nine hectare plot near Le Petit Bard, Les Cévennes—a collective housing estate comprising over 900 units and intended for low income residents—also began construction in 1964. Three years later, the HLM (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*: Fr., rent-controlled public housing) office of the Hérault department built a collective housing estate called La Pergola near Le Petit Bard. Comprising more than 500 units, La Pergola was primarily intended to accommodate repatriates.

Many collective housing estates for poor or lower income classes were built in the district of Les Cévennes following the city administration's adoption of such zoning as a

fundamental urban development policy in the 1960s and 1970s. More specifically, the eastern sector was assigned to agriculture, the northern sector to academic institutions (universities and *grandes écoles*) and hospitals, the southern sector to industry, and the western sector to the housing of workers, new arrivals from rural areas and immigrants.⁹ This section focuses on the histories of Le Petit Bard and La Pergola in order to identify and elucidate the process and mechanism through which the city problem emerges and in order to find a clue to a more effective city policy.¹⁰

Le Petit Bard

In the case of Le Petit Bard, most of the original inhabitants were repatriates who had purchased housing units and lived there as owners. However, these residents gradually began selling or renting out their units in order to leave the collective housing estate for reasons such as ageing or changes in family size. These were mainly bought by real estate agencies and rented out, primarily to immigrants. From the mid-1970s, units were rented almost exclusively by immigrants from Morocco. Indeed, by the 1990s, owners occupied no more than 20 per cent of units in Le Petit Bard. Meanwhile, Moroccan immigrants represented

⁹ Archives Municipales de Montpellier (AMM), 101T, 'Programme de modernisation et d'équipement de Montpellier,' s.d., c. 1962. After winning the municipal elections of 1977, the Left's new city administration abandoned the zoning policy encouraged by the Center-Right administration. In contrast to its predecessor's policies, the new administration adopted two fundamental ideas in its urban development policy. First, it established the 'axis of development' that spanned from the north-west to the south-east, including the development of the south-eastern zone as an industrial-administrative-residential district. Second, the administration implemented 'micro-zoning,' including the multi-functionalisation of each district such as the mixture of housing and office types.

¹⁰ As for the more detailed analysis of the collective housing in Le Petit Bard and La Pergola, see N. Odanaka, 'Cinquante ans d'un quartier montpelliérain: Le Petit Bard, 1960–2010,' *Bulletin Historique de la Ville de Montpellier*, 38 (2016), 98-107; N. Odanaka, 'La Pergola: Un grand ensemble résidentiel à Montpellier (1960-2010). Evolution socio-spatiale et politique de la ville,' *Etudes Héraultaises*, 54 (2020), 185-197.

almost 90 per cent of the estate's inhabitants, with an unemployment rate of approximately 30 per cent among adult men. As such, this collective housing estate was soon regarded as representative of the city problem, home to the following vicious cycle: the gathering of immigrants, rising poverty as a result of unemployment, deteriorating security, the departure of more economically secure residents, and the arrival of new immigrants. Indeed, Le Petit Bard gained monikers like 'the supermarket of drugs' and '*de facto* social housing'.

Many attribute the main cause of the city problem at Le Petit Bard to the identity politics—claiming that the gathering of predominantly poor Moroccan immigrants eventually led to cultural conflict. However, this argument fails to explain the cause of the concentration of immigrants in this area. In order to convincingly explain why the city problem emerged in Le Petit Bard, it is necessary to clarify the mechanism through which low income or poor immigrants gather in one area.

In this case, the phenomenon occurred through the introduction of the logic of commercialisation—that is, through the market mechanism of private collective housing. More specifically, a housing unit placed on the market following the departure of its owner-inhabitant was generally purchased by a real estate agency, which then leased to renters. As the agencies were primarily interested in profit, they were seldom motivated to spend much on the maintenance or renovation of the unit or estate. Agencies were also disinclined to pay extra for the cleaning and repairs, such as the hiring a staff responsible for repairing or cleaning common areas such as the building entrance, lifts, exterior walls, and gardens. Management of private collective housing estates is usually delegated to a trustee. However, chosen by the general assembly of owners now dominated by real estate agencies, he had little interest in knowing who actually lived in, rented, or owned the units. Consequently, the buildings, living conditions, and financial situation of the collective housing estate deteriorated very quickly. The owner-inhabitants or tenants unable to bear these

situations left. New arrivals tended to be those who could not afford to live anywhere else, or those who wished to live near their friends or parents and were willing to pay the rent regardless of whether it was more expensive than reasonable, as is the case with Maghreb immigrants. Then the prices of housing units fell, the profitability of the rent went up, and the incentive for real estate agencies to buy more units was strengthened. Hence, the vicious cycle continued.

In short, in the case of Le Petit Bard, the issues of the city problem emerged and were exacerbated by economic factors. In this housing estate, three categories of stakeholders coexisted without interest in one another: namely, the housing unit owners, many of whom were real estate agencies; the inhabitants, most of whom became tenants; and the trustee charged with the administration of the estate. This phenomenon means that three functions associated with these stakeholders similarly coexisted without interaction: namely, possession (owners), habitation (inhabitants) and management (trustee). This division caused the dysfunction of the administration which, as Le Petit bard is a private collective housing complex, was based on the principle of the close connection of the three.

La Pergola

La Pergola experienced a similar cycle: many of the initial inhabitants, who primarily comprised repatriates, left and were replaced by immigrant tenants. A rent-controlled estate (HLM) predominantly inhabited by poor or low income families, La Pergola also witnessed the emergence of city problem attributes.

Like Le Petit Bard, many of these attributes can be attributed to identity politics. However, the seriousness of these issues were far less severe than those of Le Petit Bard, as revealed by a maintenance project started in 2005, called the 'Urban Renovation Project, the Cévennes

district'.¹¹ Targeting the two collective housing estates, this five-year project (2005–2009) intended to renovate the estates in order to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants and the image of the district. However, the proposals for doing so were entirely different for each estate. At Le Petit Bard, it was decided to demolish and rebuild almost half of the units. With the heavy expense involved in the demolition and reconstruction of the buildings, as well as the long and careful administrative process necessary to start with the offer to Le Petit Bard residents temporary accommodations during the reconstruction, the work remains ongoing—far exceeding its original deadline. In contrast, the project judged that only minor repairs to the building exterior and interior of housing units was necessary at La Pergola, and work was successfully completed within the planned five-year period.

La Pergola was able to avoid the emergence of serious attributes of the city problem because of the rehabilitation of the area in the early 1990s. In 1992, the HLM office, which was responsible for the construction and administration of the estate, began rehabilitating the buildings and housing units under the framework of the 'Operation Pergola Quality' programme. This programme was funded by a public subsidy known as *PALUROS* (*Prime à l'amélioration des logements à l'utilisation locative et à l'occupation sociale*: Fr.). It is generally accepted that a collective housing estate needs a total repair every 15 years. Accordingly, it appears that the HLM Office decided to intervene in the maintenance of La Pergola fairly quickly in order to resolve the emerging city problem on the estate. To achieve this, they targeted the estate's structural design.

The original inhabitants—the bulk of whom comprised repatriates—had formed close-knit personal relationships with one another, resulting in a certain conviviality on the estate. Indeed, the architects of La Pergola had designed the estate to promote such relationships, choosing a layout that created closure from the outside and an inclination

¹¹ AMM, 837W18, 'PRU Cévennes, concession d'aménagement Petit Bard,' Ville de Montpellier, s.d., c. 2005.

towards spatial self-sufficiency. However, with the arrival of new inhabitants—most of whom were immigrants and low-income people who did not know one another—this spatial structure contributed to the emergence of the city problem. Spatial closure produced a feeling of being cut off from the outside world, leading the new inhabitants to feel isolated and excluded. Consequently, some newer residents, particularly youths, turned to petty delinquency, drugs, and vandalism. Recognising that the spatial structure of La Pergola no longer corresponded to the personal relationship networks among the new inhabitants, the HLM Office targeted the estate's structural design to mitigate emergent city problem. By demolishing some parts of the buildings in order to open the estate to the outside world, the framework of the 'Operation Pergola Quality' proved critical to maintaining the relatively good living conditions on estate. The experience of La Pergola demonstrates the need to examine the social and spatial dimensions of the city problem in constructing appropriate city policy.

Conclusion

This study does not deny the importance of identity politics in the emergence of the city problem, nor does it contest the effectiveness of identity politics as frame of analysis when examining the city problem. Indeed, the perspective is valuable for plotting effective city policy in contemporary France. Moreover, this study does not entirely reject the common narrative on the city problem and city policy. In fact, urbanisation and urban development are political acts, making identity politics an inevitable and integral factor.¹² Rather, this study

¹² P. Bourdieu, 'Identité et la représentation,' *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 35 (1985), 63-72 ; Ph. Hamman et al., 'La négociation dans les projets urbains de tramway,' in Ph. Hamman (ed.), *Le Tramway dans la ville* (Rennes, 2011), 45-72 ; J. Joly, *Formes urbaines et pouvoir local* (Toulouse, 1995); B. Jouve et al., 'De la

seeks to illuminate how this perspective is insufficient on its own, even potentially dangerous if we diagnose the city problem and execute the city policy on the basis of identity politics alone. While the term 'identity' is fashionable in many academic disciplines, we need to look beyond this concept.

The historical experiences of Le Petit Bard and La Pergola indicate that the common narrative on the city problem and city policy—a product of historical analysis dominated by the perspective of identity politics—is insufficient. Two important dynamics have been overshadowed by the influence of identity politics in research on the city problem and city policy: the economic phenomenon of the commercialisation of real estate and the introduction of market logic, as well as the link between human social networks and spatial structure.

This study is based on only two case studies. It will thus be necessary to examine other cases in order to judge the effectiveness of identity politics approach thoroughly and in detail. It will also be necessary to measure the weight of the cultural, the socio-economic and the spatial factors for the emergence of city problem and for the effectiveness of city policy in each case, to reconstruct the mechanism of the city problem by integrating the socio-economic aspects and linking them to identity politics, or to go beyond cultural identity and consider the socio-economic dynamics at play.¹³ There rest many tasks to do.

gouvernance urbaine au gouvernement des villes?' *Revue Française de la Science Politique*, 49-6 (1999), 835-54 ; G. Le Goullon, '*Les grands ensembles en France*', Université de Paris, PhD thesis, 2010.

¹³ D. Pinçon, 'La monumentalisation du logement ou l'architecture des ZUP comme culture,' *Les Cahiers de la Recherche Architecturale*, 38/39 (1996), 51-62; H. Vieillard-Baron, *Banlieues et périphéries* (Paris, 2009).