FORGING LINKS,
FOR CONVIVIAL, SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

#12

Read the document ▼

FORGING LINKS, FOR CONVIVIAL, SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Browse

Credits

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

The city of tomorrow will be relational: there's no choice

Sonia Lavadinho

Urban anthropologist, founder of Bfluid, co-author of La Ville Relationnelle ("The Relational City")

The relational city is the city of Connection and of connections. It offers me the space I need to establish relationships, first and foremost with myself. I can reconnect with my body and my mind. I take the time to be truly present here and now, because I feel good where I am, and I don't need to run off to see if the grass is greener elsewhere. I can take a deep breath of fresh air and reconnect with the Living. I feel I am part of the natural world around me, and this makes me more open to relationships with others. Every day that I spend in the relational city makes me more alive, because it increases my capacity to be in touch with myself, with nature and with others. It greatly increases my sense of being alive.

© Le Moniteur_BrunoLévy

At first sight, the relational city seems obvious: after all, the city - this incredible concentration of so many different people in so few square metres - is still the best thing we've invented to bring us together. Birds of a feather flock together, they say. Nowhere is this less true than in the city, where we don't look the same but where, paradoxically, all our differences enrich us. The recipe for building relationships, however, is not self-evident. Think of it as urban mayonnaise: smooth and delicious when it goes right, a disaster when it goes wrong. And it's very easy to get it wrong, because it requires a subtle blend of all those fragile and evanescent ingredients that weave urban bonds. It's a question of slowly incorporating them into the same space, while ensuring that they coexist at the right temperature… It's quite an art, requiring a great deal of effort in terms of proportioning, assembling and even DIY, as we will see throughout this Trend Book!

The relational city dates back to the dawn of urban history, since it has been the place where we live together since the very first streets and squares were created in the proto-cities of Mesopotamia 10 millennia ago. However important it may have been over the centuries, and however essential it may be in guaranteeing our urban future, the fact remains that today the relational city is in danger of extinction. It needs to be closely protected from the functional city, an invasive species that has been invading our towns and cities for more than a century. It is highly predatory in terms of space and resources. The advent of the car gradually led to the massive predominance of the circulation function over all the other functions performed in the public space. And it's now our smartphones that are relocating our physical bodies into increasingly virtual worlds. We need to reverse this trend if we are to restore the relational city to its rightful place in the fabric of the city and of our lives. This will require massive efforts over the next few years to regenerate relationships, just as important as those that need to be undertaken more generally to promote urban regeneration. It will be necessary to bring players together in new configurations for collective action. Above all, we will need to reinvent our values together so that we can prioritise what really matters to us and harness human and material resources to achieve this goal.

Beyond its collective dimension, the relational city also requires a personal effort from each and every one of us. It involves embracing the world around me on a daily basis: I hold this relational city in my arms as much as it holds me. Without it in my life, there would be isolation, enclaves, a rise of extremism, an inability to relate, a lack of empathy, loneliness and early death. But with it comes benevolence, openness and a growing confidence – in myself and in others, confidence in life, confidence in my own ability to act and our collective ability to act, what the Americans aptly call "agency": yes, I can cope, and together we can cope even better. This Trend Book is living proof of that. Page after page, city after city, one case study after another proves that all we have to do is lend each other a helping hand to recreate street by street, square by square, building by building, a world that is more alive, more vibrant and more hospitable.

The relational city can be very easy to implement: in certain streets, certain neighbourhoods, certain bustling city centres or certain lovely parks, there is already potential that simply needs to be reinforced. Take care, however, that the tree of the relational does not conceal the forest of the functional. The relational city is, at most, 10% to 15% of the square metres that make up our cities – our high streets, our waterfronts, our squares and our parks. The rest of the time, in the suburbs where we live, in the business parks where we work and in all the ordinary streets that punctuate our daily lives, the relational city gives way to the functional city and is nowhere to be found! To get it back, we're going to have to go in with forceps, keep it on a drip for a long time and give it plenty of oxygen. Massive efforts like these may seem disproportionate, but they are just as necessary as those made in hospital A&E departments to save the life of a patient in mortal danger who will only pull through thanks to intensive care.

But here's the good news: we know how to do it. As this Trend Book shows, there are plenty of initiatives underway to bring the relational city into existence, touching on all areas of Living Together. Of course, we need to experiment with all these new ways of interacting, but we also, and above all, need to learn how to ramp up our efforts more quickly so that we can reclaim all the functional square metres that make up the bulk of the city today, and turn them into square metres of happiness.

FORGING LINKS,
for convivial, supportive and inclusive communities

Virginie Alonzi

Director of Strategic Foresight,
Bouygues Construction

The World Health Organization (WHO) claims that around one in 10 people worldwide suffer from social isolation. In November 2023, the WHO announced the creation of a new Commission on Social Connection to address the issue of loneliness as an urgent threat to health, promote social connections and accelerate the scaling up of solutions worldwide.

Human beings are fundamentally social; they need others to live and develop. The Covid-19 pandemic served as a reminder of this essential need. Social interaction contributes to our personal development, our self-fulfilment and our emotional and physical well-being. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim clearly demonstrated the extent to which social relationships are essential for maintaining social cohesion and the functioning of society.

In an increasingly fragmented society under strain, how can we encourage social interaction? What makes it possible to live together, to form a society? From

the point of view of the urban fabric, what levers can be activated? How can real estate and urban development projects help to forge links? What planning strategies can be used to encourage citizen participation and enhance inclusiveness and conviviality to create welcoming towns and cities?

Developing places to live, spaces and systems that encourage social cohesion and living together means re-examining our strategies and ways of doing things, but also taking account of a multiplicity of key variables linked to the local context. More than ever, in an increasingly complex and

" More than ever, in an increasingly complex and uncertain world, regional planning plays a crucial role in building inclusive and supportive societies. "

uncertain world, regional planning plays a crucial role in building inclusive and supportive societies. Faced with the socio-economic and environmental challenges that cities are confronted with, it has become essential to change our outlook and rethink projects so that they integrate these social and human dimensions and help to create more balanced, sustainable and resilient urban environments. Strengthening social ties at regional level brings a number of benefits, such as improving the sense of security thanks to the familiarity and sociability of local players (residents, shopkeepers, tradespeople, caretakers, etc.), economising thanks to the pooling and sharing of spaces, resilience thanks to the mutual aid and responsiveness of the social infrastructure, inclusiveness thanks to the equal attention paid to all inhabitants, but also people's well-being and quality of life.
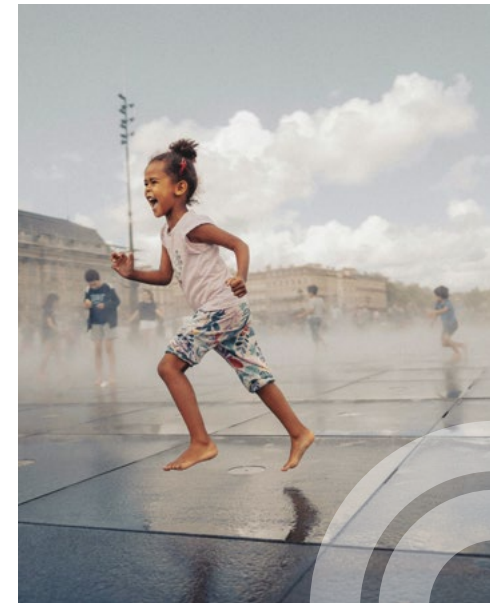
Fostering social cohesion at local level requires a holistic approach, involving the participation and collaboration of a wide range of players. It's about doing things for and with local people. It means encouraging the creation of spaces for meeting and sharing, supporting collective and community-based initiatives, promoting diversity and inclusiveness, improving access to cultural and sporting activities, encouraging a mix of uses and intensity of use, and strengthening local services. It means proposing hybrid developments that are accessible to all, encouraging a diversity of uses and a mix of generations. It also means experimenting with a different way of designing real estate and urban projects, by getting public and private players and civil society to work together towards a common goal of protecting the territory and its residents.

Against this background, we have carried out a multi-partner strategic foresight project involving players from a wide range of complementary backgrounds. The aim

has been to decipher current developments and identify possible future scenarios. The approach is based on a systemic vision of the subject and exploratory foresight via collaborative co-design workshops. The approach we have adopted lies at the crossroads of a number of interacting areas of expertise: architecture, sociology, anthropology, geography, planning, economics, urban planning, psychology, social engineering, etc.

This trend book, Forging links: for convivial, supportive and inclusive communities, takes a close look at the different strategies and approaches that can be implemented to re-forge links in local areas. Drawing on concrete examples, feedback, studies and contributions from experts, it looks at the main levers and best practices for designing projects that meet the needs of local residents while fostering a more inclusive and supportive society. We hope that this new trend book will inspire and encourage action to prepare for tomorrow by sharing ideas through an open and systemic approach. We can build a future where no one is isolated or excluded, but where everyone feels connected, supported and valued. Let's reweave the social fabric and find a better way of living together in our towns and cities.

Enjoy your reading!

1. CONTEXT
and issues

"Human beings are fundamentally social. We need others to live and develop. Our lives are punctuated by our social relationships with other people. Since our birth, life in society has placed us in a relationship of interdependence with others," asserts the sociologist, Serge Paugam (2018), who defines "homo sociologicus" as a human being linked to others and to society, not only to ensure protection against the hazards of life (relying on others), but also to satisfy his "vital need for recognition" (being relied on by others).

What allows society to hold together? This question is all the more relevant in an urban environment, where a restricted space is home to a wide variety of people. Urban centres are characterised by a heterogeneous population of diverse ethnic and social groups. Wirth (1938) defined the fact of living surrounded by individuals with diverse individual characteristics as one of the specific features of the "urban way of life".

Through its diversity and density, the city encourages new contacts and social interaction in a cultural melting pot. Its essence is relational. It's a promise of encounters while enjoying a certain anonymity, because it's a space in which people who, for the most part, don't know each other meet and mingle. But the cohesion of an urban community is a subtle recipe based on a multitude of social ties that enable city dwellers to coexist: "strong" ties (of friendship), "weaker" ties (chatting, exchanging services, sharing activities), but also a dense network of "invisible" ties (recognising a passer-by in the street, knowing the age group of your neighbours). By giving an individual a good overview of their environment, these different links help to foster their sense of belonging to a place. (Felder, 2018)

But it is a fragile equilibrium. Fragile in a world where individualisation is on the increase and the ability to form a collective is weakening; where mistrust of others is growing and can fuel a feeling of insecurity and the temptation for groups to create enclaves; where digital technology is re-examining our way of being in urban space by allowing us to be there and elsewhere at the same time; where attractiveness and efficiency have taken precedence over well-being

as the main guide to the making of the city. There are many challenges, but no lack of initiatives: networks of retailers showing solidarity for the homeless, an operational guide to creating "village squares" as town centres, new ways of living together, travelling festive events, participatory art, and so on. All that remains is for them to converge to create towns and cities that encourage everyone to flourish, whatever their differences.

Social cohesion in the city

Focus: Words have meaning

Social ties, social cohesion, conviviality, sociability: what are the differences?

Words have meanings that are important to grasp. The lexical field of social links is currently pervading the media, advertising and everyday language, so let's take the time to grasp the nuances and significance of a few terms that we have sometimes misappropriated from their real meaning.

Social ties refer to all memberships, affiliations and relationships that bind individuals or social groups together. They are one of the building blocks of **social cohesion:** individuals need to maintain links with each other to be able to live in society. **Cooperation** between individuals is essential in many social situations. For this to occur, members of a society need to be able to trust each other or feel bound to each other by a moral obligation.

Social links in the city need to be strengthened if we are to **live together** harmoniously. This is where **conviviality** comes in. The term derives from the Latin *con vivere* (to live with), and literally means the art of living together. In everyday speech, it is often associated with a party spirit and having a good time, but conviviality actually has a broader meaning, as suggested by the philosopher and theologian Ivan Illich, who influenced many researchers in the human and social sciences.

For the urban philosopher Thierry Paquot, a specialist in Illich's work, conviviality "is first and foremost a state of mind, a way of being with others that erases socio-economic differences and amiably brings together individuals with a distinct and individual character in the same quasi-egalitarian community. Conviviality does not homogenise, but rather pacifies and socialises; it welcomes everyone around the table irrespective of status or social hierarchy." (Paquot, 2022)

American anthropologist Lisa Peattie pointed out that conviviality "is not just singing in pubs, street dancing or tailgate parties, but also small-group rituals and social bonding in serious collective action, from barn raisings and neighborhood cleanups to civil disobedience […]." (Peattie, 2019)

For Peattie, urban planning can foster the conditions for conviviality: a corner sheltered from the wind where friends can share a coffee, a piece of wasteland that becomes a garden. But the conditions must be right – the ideal corner, a piece of wasteland and a few rakes – and the rules must authorise it. Conviviality cannot be forced, but it is encouraged by the right regulations, the right accessories, and the right spaces and places.

The social relationships that we form and experience daily define **sociability.** For the French sociologist Georges Gurvitch, sociability refers more precisely to the principle of relationships between individuals and the ability to form social bonds, which are the basis for the formation of groups. It is said to be underpinned by a natural human desire to be in the company of fellow human beings. Common parlance has evolved its meaning by equating sociability with the ability to live in society and with the quality of a person or group that has easy social relations.

Growing demand for social ties and neighbourliness

71% of French people consider it important to have links with local residents (L'ObSoCo, 2022). Social ties are even a factor in a region's appeal. A survey called *Ancrages et arbitrages des Français sur leurs lieux de vie* ("How French people choose where to live") is very clear on this point. Beyond making people feel at home and able to develop in a stimulating environment, appreciating the presence of other residents is also a major factor in French people's attachment to where they live.

Another indicator of the impact of social ties on people's attachment to the place they live is that the opportunity to make friends and acquaintances is the top factor contributing to attachment to the area, ahead of the opportunity to grow old in good conditions, raise your children or go out for walks. (L'ObSoCo, 2022)

Having a network of social contacts and friends to rely on and with whom to share day-to-day life therefore remains an important expectation. The absence of a social network can be an obstacle for plans to move house, and can delay or even prevent people from moving to a new area. There may be a fear of not being able to recreate networks of solidarity or circles of mutual support. This is particularly true of plans to move from an urban area to a more rural one where the social fabric is different.

In the Dordogne department, this observation has led to the creation of a scheme called "My New Neighbours" to help people living in rural areas to meet people planning to move to the countryside. The aim is to counter the fears of city-dwellers by organising community visits to welcoming villages and enabling them to meet their future neighbours. The local authority was right in its analysis when it set up this scheme: the French generally consider that their place of residence offers them too few opportunities to make friends. (L'ObSoCo, 2022)

Mes Nouveaux Voisins

Beyond the issue of welcoming newcomers, many regions have a wealth of ideas to help people forge links. Some are based on local folklore or on events that have been "traditional" for generations, and have developed into real cultural markers. One example is the *galoubet* festival, where the *galoubet-tambourin* (a combination of a three-hole recorder and a solid wood tambourine) gets people dancing in the streets in parts of the South of France. At the other end of the country, *"faire chapelle"* is one of the highlights of the Dunkirk carnival. Participants gather in their homes for a drink or a bite to eat before going on to the dance or the parade. The festive and event-based dimension plays an important role in creating social links.

We listen to them!

INTERVIEW

👁

Emmanuelle Lallement

Professor of Anthropology at the Institute of European Studies at the University of Paris 8, member of LAVUE, the Laboratoire Architecture Ville Urbanisme Environnement ("Architecture, Town Planning, Environment Laboratory")

Paris, France

> "
> It's impossible for a city to be anything other than relational, obviously! It has resulted from the way in which the various players involved interact with each other.
> "

E.L. An anthropologist will always say that it's impossible for a city to be anything other than relational, obviously! It has resulted from the way in which the various players involved interact with each other. And of course it's not just spatial, it's fundamentally relational. The space itself isn't just a backdrop, it's an element we interact with in a highly orchestrated form of communication.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is often said that social ties have weakened. What are the implications in terms of people "living together", and how is this being expressed in the public space and in our relationships with others?

E.L. Researchers seem to agree that the Covid-19 pandemic may have highlighted and hastened various processes that were already under way: specifically, closer, more family-oriented and even community-based ties, and emphasized socio-spatial, gender and class inequalities. The pandemic was particularly "urban", as it was associated with the processes of metropolisation and globalisation, but it also affected all aspects of the social system.

The pandemic also highlighted how public space – one of the key issues in contemporary society – is the subject of tensions, conflicts, sometimes competing appropriations, differentiated "rights to the city", and periods of occupation followed by evacuation. So what is public space? What makes an area public? Who has the right to public space? Clearly, Covid-19 and its subsequent lockdowns have shown just how much our societies are about public space, and about gathering in public spaces, if only because they were banned during this

unprecedented period. These restrictions on the access and use of public space revealed the nature of our society.

In other words, greater socio-spatial inequalities…

E.L. I'm thinking first and foremost of the striking inequalities between large and medium-sized cities; between city centres, such as Paris, and the suburbs; between neighbourhoods, depending on their social structures and lives; between city dwellers, some of whom had the opportunity to remain mobile, while others were stuck in a sort of "house arrest". The city served as a unique observatory of inequality. As it always does.

But don't forget that the relationship with public space wasn't the only factor to be affected. It was a period marked by what I called at the time the repatriation of home-based activities, a sort of domiciliation of our social lives.

And what is entailed by our sociability being domiciled?

E.L. I was particularly struck, as were all those who experienced this "remoteness", by the way it placed previously distinct activities on an equal footing: it was in the context of this repatriation of all activities to the home that we had to educate our children, work, spend time with our families, maintain friendships and wider family ties, and even "party". These previously relatively fairly compartmentalised activities were carried out with the same tools – Zoom, Teams and so on – which certainly reflected a technological need, but also a technological standardisation: the same tools enabling "closeness at a distance" were becoming

characteristic of these lives at home. This formed a "continuum" in our lives that had not previously existed. Obviously, bringing activities back into the home was one of the major consequences of Covid-19.

In fact, after Covid-19, we noticed in certain professional environments that people were finding it difficult to return to their workplace: the home was the "home base" and remained so.

How did you find the impact of the public health crisis on events and festivities?

E.L. Something that absolutely fascinated me during the Covid-19 era was the absence of celebration, which in turn led to the presence of celebration. Its prohibition brought out its necessity. I observed how, around the festive phenomenon, a sort of double polarisation, or even paradox, occurred.

On the one hand, there was an almost moral polarisation. People who continued to party and socialise were seen as dangerous, irresponsible and selfish, at a time when the entire population was being asked to be responsible. So this was a very strong form of moralisation. On the other hand, Covid-19 revealed how essential it was to our social lives: by making it impossible or difficult, it once again became essential!

For an anthropologist who studies festivities, it was interesting to see the extent to which people were heavily criticising parties, but also showing how Covid-19 was a way of seeing festivities as something that is essential to humanity, essential to social ties, essential for human beings, essential for mental and psychological well-being… Essential for all generations, especially young people, even though some of them were often criticised as being "revellers".

What's the significance of partying?

E.L. The subject of celebration has long been studied by anthropologists. It is at once a conceptual framework and a highly varied empirical phenomenon. Parties are meant to be out of the ordinary and transgressive, but at the same time they recreate the norms of society. Parties are supposed to interrupt the ordinary, but as they multiply, they actually become part of everyday life, part of normality. Every town in France has its festival. The events calendar of cities is getting increasingly packed, so much so that parties have become part of everyday life.

Are we seeing an increase in the number of parties?

E.L. An increasing number of festivals are being held, including a revival of more traditional ones, helping to strengthen village identities, attract residents and visitors, and make places more appealing. These events are an opportunity to make local areas more active and attractive, and encourage local residents to get involved. In a context of transitional and cultural urban planning, festive events are very much in demand.

Can festivities be a lever for urban transformation?

E.L. In France, we used to talk about village halls. These were the places where you could hold events for young people and events for seniors, as well as being where the mayor could meet with the councillors. Maybe they are a driver of change: festivities invariably alter something in time and space. Party venues are always very adaptable or modular. Dedicated spaces are very rare, except in private spaces like cafés and nightclubs.

There is the question of modularity and inclusivity. Modularity is something the city can offer, so that public spaces can be used by different groups. This can effectively act as a lever to address the question of shared public space. There is also this idea of a "process at work" surrounding a party. As an example, the city of Dunkirk takes on a festive character through a series of very specific concrete and symbolic operations. That's a lever for urban transformation.

By definition, festivities are transient, but they can produce more permanent, regular forms of celebration, forging a kind of "rendez-vous" between city dwellers and their city, its spaces and its neighbourhoods.

FIGURE IT OUT

What are the principal means identified by the French to encourage regular contact with the residents of their neighbourhood, village or town?

The most popular levers
(from a list of suggestions)

49% Neighbourhood parties

35% Shared spaces
for activities and leisure

33% Meeting places
reserved for local residents

31% Mutual aid services
between residents

28% Proximity to parks and
public sports facilities

19% Reduced working hours,
4-day week

15% Applications for service
swaps between residents

Source: ObSoCo, Observatory of uses and representations of territories, 2023.

Neighbourhood parties as a way of forging links: a powerful lever in the urban imagination

From the individual's point of view, neighbourhood festivals, shared spaces for activities and leisure, and social spaces reserved for the residents of a neighbourhood are the best ways of encouraging regular exchanges with the residents of their neighbourhood, village or town. (ObSoCo, 2023)

Neighbourhood festivities have a special place in the urban imagination as a way of forging links between people. Neighbours' Day, for example, is a popular event, attracting large numbers of city-dwellers every year on the last Friday in May. In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the twentieth annual Neighbours' Day is estimated to have brought together 30 million people in 50 countries. "How can we understand this once-a-year enthusiasm, when for the rest of the year, neighbourly relations are generally characterised by a cordial distance?" asks sociologist Maxime Felder. "Should we see this as a resurgence of conviviality and local solidarity, or just a simple interlude that has no impact on everyday life?" (Felder 2020) Drawing on research carried out in Geneva, Switzerland, he proposes considering Neighbours' Day as a contemporary ritual that helps to ward off anxiety about the future of social relations in the city and to establish values and norms of 'good neighbourliness'. It also helps to create a sense of familiarity that makes the city less anonymous.

Our local social relations are becoming virtualised

Declining social relations and virtualisation

All forms of relations seem to be under threat these days, or at any rate are being shaken up. Family relationships and friendships are no exception to this trend. Increasingly, our close social relationships are becoming virtual, relying less on physical encounters and more on long-distance exchanges. Younger generations are not spared. Worse still, the overall sociability of young people aged 16 to 24 is said to be falling, reflecting a decline in both physical encounters and long-distance communications.

FIGURE IT OUT

The level of social interaction with family and friends remains stable overall, but there has been a shift between physical meetings and remote exchanges between 2015 and 2022

Fewer physical meetings		More remote contact	
-7 points	**-5 points**	**+4 points**	**+2 points**
with family	with friends	with family	with friends

The overall sociability of young people aged 16-24 is declining

Weekly physical meetings with friends		Weekly physical meetings with family	
92%	**88%**	**67%**	**64%**
2015	2022	2015	2022

This decline in the 16-24 age group concerns both physical meetings and remote communications

Fewer physical meetings		Less remote contact	
-8 points	**-3 points**	**-3 points**	**-4 points**
with family	with friends	with family	with friends

Source: Statistics on resources and living conditions, INSEE, November 2023

A weakening of social ties

The idea that social ties are eroding is shared by many people today. It is becoming part of the public debate, with talk of a decline in social cohesion and the need to "rebuild" links. The aim is to maintain people's desire to live together and to connect isolated individuals.

> "The process of individuation, of existing as an individual, is no longer based on identifying with a single group to which we belong, but on identifying with the other individuals in several groups."

The public health crisis, disrupting and revealing the need for social cohesion

Where does the blame lie? Social relations were severely tested by a series of crises. In this respect, the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated public health restrictions disrupted social ties to unprecedented levels. Is this why so many countries affected by the pandemic literally referred to the first preventive measure, which consisted of keeping a certain distance between two people to limit transmission of the virus, as "social distancing"?

Health constraints affected the most tangible aspects of social cohesion, as well as the most symbolic ones: wearing face masks, bans on social gatherings, etc. What can we say about the city in the post-Covid era? Has it seen, or will it see, the emergence of other forms of public space and interaction? Historians of cities and urban planning have shown that the discovery of the major pathogenic viruses of the nineteenth century, such as tuberculosis by Koch, played a huge part in the emergence of hygienism and shaped the places of urban sociability in the following century: squares, public gardens, boulevards, avenues lined with terraces, and so on.

Public space suffered from lockdown. In French, this was called "confinement," (which the geographer Bernard Debarbieux likes to call "confinement/partitioning," since it was based on the walls and partitions of the home). In his opinion, this method of confinement and partitioning contributed, along with regulated distancing, to the idea that "public space was a dangerous space, because we were likely to come across ill people, asymptomatic carriers and all those whose distance-difference made us see them as a threat in their own right. As a result, the public space, meant to be a space of courtesy, would become a space of distrust and a space also meant to be a space of debate and exchange of ideas would

become a space of silent anxiety. Public space in the strict sense of the term – the street and its adjoining shops, the village square and its meeting points, the local public garden with its children's play area – are among the victims of Covid-19 in times of domestic confinement and social distancing. […] Whole strands of sociability have suddenly been shifted into the (confined?) atmosphere of the home, between the partitions that until now tended to mark the limits of privacy." (Debarbieux, 2020)

But by exacerbating certain social vulnerabilities, the public health crisis also revealed our need for social cohesion and the urban infrastructure that supports it: public spaces and places for social interaction. The public health crisis also triggered an awakening of large-scale solidarity. Citizens, associations and local authorities got involved in making gowns and face masks, distributing food and helping the most vulnerable. Everyone rallied around a common goal, working together with social agility. The period of lockdown may not have been very conducive to "living together" (despite moments of conviviality from windows or balconies), but it was the perfect time to "do things together."

Three years later, however, this enthusiasm is losing momentum: in 2022, 18% of French people said they do not feel any particular responsibility towards people in difficulty and think it is above all important to look after themselves, while this figure fell to 12% at the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020. (Labo de la Fraternité, 2022)

👁

Benjamin Pradel
Sociologist and urban planner at Intermède

Villeurbanne, France

Throughout history, the city has been developed as a relational space. In part, it was established as a marketplace, a place for commercial and therefore also social exchange, and a focal point for surrounding rural areas. It also became a place for power and politics, a public space for debate and exchanging ideas. It also emerged as a place of social interaction, maximised by the density and concentration of people. This is what makes the city a sociological object. It embodies the organic solidarity so dear to Emile Durkheim, the solidarity based on the division of social labour, that bond with other people that stems from the complementarity of people's differences. It is the setting for urban sociability, a mixture of closeness and distance, the result of the impossibility of establishing a relationship with each and every person you come across, given the sheer number of interactions. For economic, social, political, family and historical reasons, the city is a relational space and has always been so.

Are social relations becoming more fragile?

B.P. For some people, the Covid-19 crisis might have been indicative of a social crisis, with people withdrawing and distancing themselves. But in my opinion, the crisis revealed a greater desire for social interaction: there was talk of solidarity in buildings, a surge in long-distance relationships, a return to family life and, with lockdown coming to an end, a greater emphasis on partying. On the other hand, with lockdown, we witnessed the damage caused by a lack of social interaction, both for the youngest and the oldest members of society, with a rise in depression and a fear of isolation. Faced with the idea of a weakening of the social bond, I think there are two things to look at:

the feeling of being part of society on the one hand and the transformation of the social bond on a day-to-day basis on the other.

Our society is made up of individuals who belong to a number of different social groups at different levels of intensity. As a result, the process of individuation, of existing as an individual, is no longer based on identifying with a single group to which we belong, but on identifying with the other individuals in several groups. Existence as an individual is achieved through differentiation rather than identification. This individuation is nevertheless linked to a need for privileged relationships, peer groups, the family, tenuous ties that count for more than others in an increasingly fluid, interconnected and evanescent world, where social relations seem to be diluted in shifting and changing relationships. It is all the more possible to juggle numerous social relationships, fleeting interactions and multiple allegiances when we also have collective affiliations, resource solidarity and relationships to which we attach greater value. When the latter are missing, the strong individuation enabled by the former is incomplete, lacking in quality and perceived as a weakening of the social bond and a loss of identity. Hence the proliferation and success of offers of social withdrawal by groups with outlines that differentiate them from others, with aspirations of identity or community, which are reassuring because they keep people in.

What is the difference between individualisation and individuation?

B.P. Individualisation is more of a process of autonomy in relation to the moral or social prescriptions of a reference group, whereby individuals take more control over their own choices. This is partly responsible for the growing differences in lifestyles and ways of being.

Individuation is the act of existing as an individual, which involves strengthening one's own identity through the enrichment that can come from a more or less peaceful relationship with others who are different. They are not quite the same thing.

You address the issue of inclusion in your work. What are the strategies to encourage people to live together and acknowledge otherness in the public space?

B.P. I believe that education and equality are key to a thriving society and therefore to a peaceful urban environment. Discussing cohabitation and living together in the public space goes beyond urban issues, even if the city acts as a matrix that can influence the social relations and "civility" that develop there. And yet, living together in an urban environment is only one form of civility, based, in my view, on education and equality. On an individual level, this means giving everyone access to the social, economic and cultural resources they need to build a personal and social life that matches their desires and ambitions. This requires education in the form of guidance, support and compassion, within the family and at all ages, which is all the more difficult in situations of insecurity, exclusion and instability. This requires a public education system that is supportive, accessible and equal. From my point of view, the most important thing is that if we are to exist as individuals, above all we must have a sense of recognition and self-esteem, so that we can feel good about ourselves in the company of others, which calls for equal opportunities in an unequal world.

What levers can help everyone to live together more harmoniously?

B.P I would say that we need to overturn the rule of the survival of the fittest in urban planning by focusing on the idea of vulnerability: to protect the weakest in some way, the most fragile, to give them the space they need to feel that they belong, that they are recognised, respected and esteemed, in the knowledge that this vulnerability can affect any one of us at any given time.

And how can we address the issue of vulnerability

B.P. Actions speak louder than words when it comes to overturning the physical and symbolic dominations at play in society, and therefore in the urban public spaces that embody them. We need to counter the domination of increasingly large cars, which are physically conquering the vital battle with pedestrians, cyclists, pushchairs, crowds and so on. We need to counteract the domination of the masculine over the feminine in designing public space. We need to reassess our domination of nature: make the city greener, make its rhythms more seasonal, de-artificialise its soils, boost animal biodiversity. We need to question the domination of money over free or egalitarian services: free toilets, free water fountains, benches, etc. We need to minimise the dominance of adults over infants in pushchairs, children on foot and teenagers on bicycles. And we could go on to talk about the domination of the able-bodied over the disabled – whether cognitive, physical, etc. – who receive very little attention. To sum up, if we take all the levers of domination that exist in our society and that are embodied in the way the city is built and we overturn them, we will have spaces that are more inclusive and more relational, that will improve our ability to live together.

This vision of a vulnerable city goes hand in hand with the idea of caring, and turns it into a kind of way of thinking about public space which, as a public space, must be able to rebalance dominance!

> **"**
> We need to overturn the rule of the survival of the fittest in urban planning by focusing on the idea of vulnerability: to protect the weakest in some way, the most fragile, to give them the space they need to feel that they belong, that they are recognised, respected and esteemed.
> **"**

The decline of the collective and democracy in danger: fragmentation and populism

DMany voices are calling attention to the weakening of the democratic ideal. The historian and sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon believes that institutional or representative democracy is on the decline, while other democratic practices such as participatory democracy are emerging, but struggling to create common ground and to forge a system.

Another sociologist, Alain Caillé, goes further, noting our inability to relate to each other and act together. In his view, we have entered a "fragmented society" in which everything tends to be reduced to fragments. Everything that is communal or collective is sacrificed in favour of the freeing of the individual. The strategy of fragmentary power is to let everyone live according to their own truth and their own choice. We would then have to rebuild the democratic human, striking a balance between the autonomy of individuals and the interests of the collective. Populism is another threat to democracy. It purports to embody the will and the interests of "the people" and presents itself as an alternative to liberal democracy. In the name of a supposedly homogenous people, it relies on popular resentment against "elites" and/or real or supposed foreigners to promote a policy of exclusion by authoritarian means.[1] It is gaining ground throughout the world (a billion people now live in states governed by populist powers[2]) and, in a new development in recent years, is returning to the Western world (Europe, United States). While ideologies and political practices differ from one context to another, populist regimes are based on common themes: defence of sovereignty against globalisation, the "people" against the elites and rejection of multiculturalism and universalism.

These threats to the democratic ideal reflect the difficulties of social integration, the break with governance that struggles to be representative and a weakening image of the collective. They reflect the growing difficulty of societies to "connect".

Focus

Fragmented society as seen by sociologist Alain Caillé

"We're all trying to bring people together through associations for common causes, and we can see that it's not working. There are any number of initiatives, but they aren't taking, just as mayonnaise sometimes doesn't take. The binder just doesn't work. This is because under this regime of fragmentation, in other words an inverted totalitarianism, we have seen the emergence of a human type that is no longer the democratic man with his virtues but a fragmented type of human being who no longer has the symbolic genes that allow him to associate with others. This is the main impediment to political or symbolic recomposition."

Source: Panel discussion "New forms of citizenship", Alain Caillé and Henry Noguès, Fonda la Maison de l'Europe de Paris, 2009

• FIGURE IT OUT

Lacklustre engagement from the French

Do these trends have an impact on the level of engagement within society? A recent joint report by the Red Cross and Crédoc analyses the resilience of French society in the face of crises and its ability to deal with them, based on roughly forty indicators.[3] According to the report, the level of engagement is less than wholehearted:

• **Stagnation in the share of the social economy** in the total workforce

• **A slowdown in the dynamism of the voluntary sector** (largely linked to changes in how the voluntary sector is funded: cutbacks in subsidies, more competitive bidding for projects)

• **Stable level of volunteering among the population:** fewer people are involved through charities, and more are involved outside an organisation

• **But young people have greater involvement** in voluntary work

1. https://www.vie-publique.fr/parole-dexpert/271075-les-origines-du-populisme-par-philippe-raynaud

2. https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/le-tour-du-monde-des-idees/les-vraies-causes-du-populisme-ne-sont-pas-celles-qu-on-croit-4564119

3. Crises : sommes-nous en capacité de les affronter ? Rapport sur la résilience de la société française – 2023, Croix-Rouge française, Credoc

A more structural expression of our changing lifestyles?

Individualisation: when society dissolves into the individual

Some sociologists see the historical process of individualisation as part of the crisis in social cohesion, which is to some extent "the price of the growth in individual freedoms." (Cusset, 2006)

This process, which has picked up speed since the 1960s, gives individuals greater autonomy in relation to the groups to which they are linked. This is due to the decline of traditional forms of membership (social classes) and the questioning of certain social norms and practices (e.g. the growth of previously condemned practices such as divorce). The individual's identity is based less on a single group than on the juxtaposition of different groups, which are intertwined, each in a unique way.

Individualisation does not necessarily lead to individualism, which refers to self-interest (every man for himself) and is the opposite of solidarity. Nevertheless, greater autonomy for individuals gives society less control over individuals, who are also less (under)controlled by society. (Cusset, 2006)

> "
> Individualisation is rather a process of autonomy in relation to the moral or social prescriptions of a reference group, whereby individuals take more control over their own choices. This is partly responsible for the growing differences in lifestyles and ways of being. Individuation is the act of existing as an individual, which involves strengthening one's own identity through the enrichment that can come from a more or less peaceful relationship with others who are different. They are not quite the same thing.
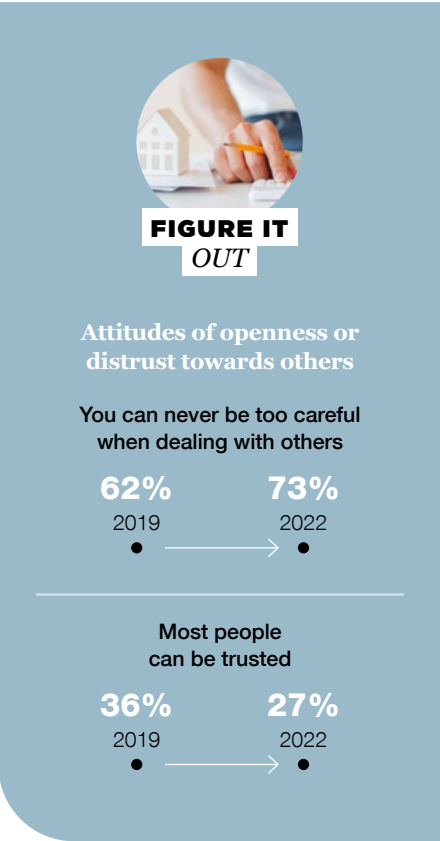> "

Benjamin Pradel
Sociologist

Cohabitation and otherness: between desire and mistrust

A relational city is above all our relationship with others in urban space. Yet we have a complex and ambivalent relationship with otherness, diversity and fraternity.

The Fraternity Barometer, which has been carried out every year since 2016, reveals a "Covid effect" on the way we see the world and perceive diversity, which is reflected in a growing mistrust of others, deeper divisions and growing unease over diversity:

• **Only 27% of French people** think that most people can be trusted, a figure that is falling steadily.

• **Only 54% of the French** consider France to be a country of fraternity (65% in 2021).

• **69% of French people** believe that diversity (ethnic, cultural, religious) can create problems and conflicts, and 58% say that it generates policies that favour minorities over the majority.

FIGURE IT OUT

Attitudes of openness or distrust towards others

You can never be too careful when dealing with others

62%	73%
2019	2022

Most people can be trusted

36%	27%
2019	2022

Source: Fraternity Barometer, 2022

These figures may be growing worse, but there are other signs to show that there is still a real desire to reach out to others. 79% of people surveyed would be willing to talk and interact more with people who are different from them (social background, religious beliefs, ethnic origin). Fear and mistrust do not prevent the French from aspiring to more social ties and fraternal encounters with people who are different from them. The obstacles to doing things with "others" different from oneself that are identified are not primarily fear (only 7%), but mainly concern the lack of opportunities, time and places (75%).

Source: francetvinfo.fr

Compassionate shopkeepers offer help to the homeless

La cloche, Montpellier

Local businesses (such as shopkeepers in a neighbourhood) can have a role to play in creating links with marginalised groups. A whole range of services – including recharging your phone, having a free coffee, filling a bottle of water, using the toilet – are offered to homeless people by the owners of many shops and bars in Montpellier as part of an initiative sponsored by a local not-for-profit association called La Cloche.

Source: business.ladn.eu

A social innovation laboratory that focuses on integrating refugees and migrants

Singa

Singa operates as a social innovation laboratory that seeks to provide opportunities for new arrivals (refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants) and local citizens in the host society. With an emphasis on entrepreneurship, it incubates and accelerates migration-related projects run by newcomers or local people. New arrivals can use their skills and qualities to set up a business or association. The network therefore refuses to see migration only as a humanitarian or security issue, and highlights the opportunities it brings for people to meet, the meaning it gives to our lives as citizens, and the value and talents that those newly arrived bring to their host society. According to the UN, it is possible that 300 million people will be living in exile by 2050 as a result of the accelerating pace of climate change and the political and economic instability of certain countries.

Examples of projects incubated by Singa

• **Kabubu** aims to promote the social and professional inclusion of exiled people through sports.

• **Causons** ("Let's Talk!") is an organisation that encourages linguistic and cultural exchanges with migrants and refugees who are undertaking social and professional integration, through language courses.

• **Meet My Mama** demonstrates the culinary talents of women from over 90 countries, of different ages and backgrounds. The aim is to help them make a living from their passion for cooking and share their know-how.

#1

Cohabitation between city dwellers is a popular theme in sociological research. Described as a "shared sense of belonging" to a space, cohabitation has long been explored through two associated themes: neighbourhood and hospitality. More recently, a number of studies have chosen to approach it from the point of view of disorders caused by the presence of others, by examining the resistance, cooperation or forms of rejection that can arise depending on the context.[1]

Resistance, cooperation or rejection: coping with the presence of others

Buenos Aires

In Buenos Aires, the population living in wealthy neighbourhoods, uncomfortable with the daily cohabitation with the cartoneros, a poor population that lives from recovering waste, which it sees as an invasion, displays forms of rejection.

Paris

In contrast, an ethnographic study of middle-class Parisian neighbourhoods shows how the ties forged by affluent parishioners with the homeless people they coexist with on a daily basis contribute to their attachment to the neighbourhood. The social bond is thus characterised by its spatial anchorage and is given an emotional dimension.

Geneva

Another ethnographic study examines the long-term disorganisation of a well-established squat movement in Geneva over a period of some twenty years, analysing how the tenuous boundaries between private and collective spaces gradually made certain forms of cohabitation unbearable and destroyed the desire to live together.

From the rise of enclaves to the limits of social diversity policies

While links with the most underprivileged or marginalised groups may be forged in the middle-class neighbourhoods of large cities, the general trend is towards an increase in "enclaves", i.e. choosing to live with people who are similar to ourselves and avoiding contact with others. According to an INSEE study published in January 2023, spatial segregation between the richest and poorest has increased in most of France's major cities over the last fifteen years.[2] The cities of Limoges, Rouen, Avignon and Lille report the most marked spatial disparities in income.

In some regions, the "enclave" phenomenon is taken to extremes and materialises in specific urban forms known as gated communities: the most affluent sections of the population lock themselves away in highly protected houses or secure neighbourhoods that can be closed housing estates surrounded by high walls. Urban segregation then follows on from enclaves. Large cities in Latin America are particularly affected by this, and some experts fear a similar pattern in large African cities. This phenomenon has existed for a long time in Nigeria and South Africa, but is now developing in cities where there is very little violence, such as Madagascar and Togo.[3] In Lomé, Togo, for example, security at the Résidence du Benin complex is secured by the presence of military personnel at the entrance. It is home to a large number of shops, including two supermarkets and a prestigious school, the British School of Lomé. In some contexts, social homogenisation is taken to extremes, as in Sun City, Arizona, a private city reserved exclusively for retirees and governed by very strict rules to preserve the peace and quiet of its occupants. Residents, for example, are required to restrict visits from their grandchildren to certain time slots.
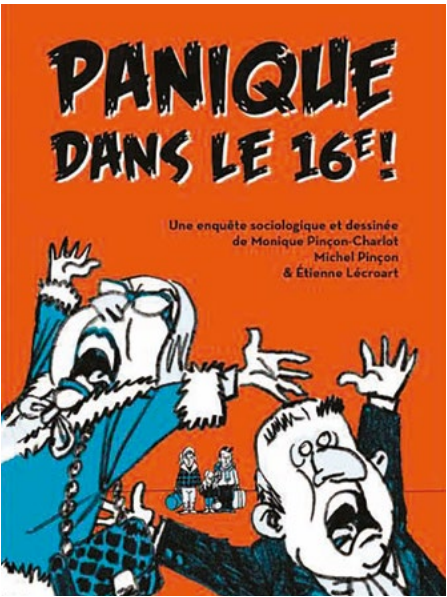
Source: lavillebrule.com

Peer groups can act as a stepping stone to social integration

In middle-class neighbourhoods, without going to these extremes, the "enclave" attitude is nonetheless combined with the privatisation of space and discriminatory segregation of the most deprived. Sociologists Monique Pinçon-Charlot and Michel Pinçon, specialists in the very wealthy, authored the edifying comic book-style investigation *Panic in the 16th*, based on a protest movement that accompanied the installation of an emergency accommodation centre in the well-heeled 16th arrondissement of Paris in 2016.

Social diversity, which refers to the coexistence of social groups with different characteristics in the same space, is a concept that is regularly put forward as a means of combating inequality, segregation and the effects of discrimination. It has been in use for decades in urban public policy in the United States, Switzerland, France, the United Kingdom and other European countries. Social diversity is promoted by politicians because it reflects a social ideal based on values of equality and solidarity.

As an invitation to live together and in the fight against exclusion and stigmatisation, it seeks to create socially balanced neighbourhoods. Public action is primarily aimed at working-class neighbourhoods, with the underlying idea of reducing the effects of neighbourhoods that are considered negative (bad reputation of the neighbourhood, lack of diversified social models, withdrawal into the family and community sphere, etc.), which could limit access to employment or impede the social integration of their residents.

But reservations about the objectives and effectiveness of these policies abound. Social diversity is not necessarily synonymous with social cohesion or rich social interaction. Bringing socially differentiated populations together to live side by side can sometimes generate reactions of indifference, avoidance, even conflict. On the other hand, coming together with one's peers can be a stepping stone to social integration for newly arrived migrants who lack reference points and can benefit from mutual aid structures.

1. https://www.cairn.info/revue-espaces-et-societes-2022-3-page-9.html
2. https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6680439
3. https://www.senat.fr/rap/r10-594-3/r10-594-32.html

Being there but also elsewhere: how digital technology is changing the way we are in the public space

Another aspect of our changing lifestyles is the increasing daily use of smartphones, which has changed the way we live together. This is particularly visible in public spaces. Sociologists Jocelyn Lachance and Yann Bruna studied the effects in urban spaces (2019). They observed a twofold separation of the individuals who roam the city generated by the use of smartphones: a separation of bodies and a separation between digital technology users and the unconverted.

In the first case, smartphone users are distracted from their immediate environment: "[...] The connected individual, absorbed in a mediatised elsewhere, finds themselves plunged daily into an experience of present disappearance when they are here but not really." It is now common to see passers-by who appear to be sealed off in their information bubble, seemingly impervious to any physical interaction, their eyes glued to the screen of their smartphone."

Anyone who is moving around in public spaces with a smartphone in their pocket has the feeling of being linked to others who are potentially reachable. In so doing, the digital tool paradoxically strengthens the link with those who are physically distant, while at the same time distancing them from those who are spatially close. The case of selfies – photos of oneself sent to third parties – is symbolic of this: the individual taking the selfie seeks to share a moment with a loved one who is absent, while at the same time taking care to ensure that no passer-by or intruder

appears in the frame. "In the spaces of the city, a tension has been created between the abandonment of individuals to a remote conviviality, invisible and partly controlled, and an openness to a conviviality of proximity, under the sign of chance and uncertainty."

The use of digital technology in public spaces can also be a source of nuisance. Overhearing a stranger's conversation, being jostled by a passer-by glued to their phone screen or being bothered by your neighbour's music on public transport are all situations that can be experienced as intrusions.

Digital technology can also become a pretext for social interaction in the city through the use of geocaching applications, the organisation of events in physical spaces or the use of dating apps, for example. However, these applications have a strong influence on the way people meet (e.g. predefined locations in the case of geocaching) and leave less room for meeting spontaneously in the public space.

Source: lesechos.fr

Pokémon GO: a game based on geocaching in public spaces

Pokémon GO is an augmented reality video game experience (juxtaposition of a layer of digital information with a physical representation of reality) in which the aim is to capture Pokémon dotted around the urban space. The idea is to search for virtual objects in physical spaces. The game has attracted tens of millions of players worldwide. Players walk or sit in popular locations around the city, watching for them to appear.

🔍 **Some opinions on the Pokémon GO phenomenon**

• **Those not taking part in the game see thousands of people** concentrating in city spaces to catch creatures they can't see.

• **The occupation of physical spaces by players** is strongly driven by private companies which invest in the game (shopping malls, fast-food chains, etc.): it's a form of commercialisation of urban conviviality.

• **More generally, the most popular geocaching games rarely involve venturing into the unknown:** they offer new ways of meeting other players, whose help is invaluable in making progress. But at the same time, they force encounters to take place in predefined locations, and exclude those who are not participating.

Does the city encourage social ties?

According to Dr Emma Vilarem, a specialist in cognitive science, the way we conceptualise cities does not take enough account of the sphere of the emotional, the perceived and the perceptible. And yet, the way people behave in cities is strongly guided by cognitive mechanisms that are not always conscious, and that we ought to decipher. The challenge consists of making the most of the city's enormous potential for social interaction. By taking better account of these mechanisms, we can design a neighbourhood's pathways, lay out the common areas of a residence or create a public space that fosters social interaction: "[...] although our brains are all different, we all share a large number of common mechanisms (attraction to nature, aversion to noise pollution, etc.) that it is crucial to take into account. The danger of not doing so is that our environments may be unsuitable or inappropriate, and that social life may not be able to develop."[1]

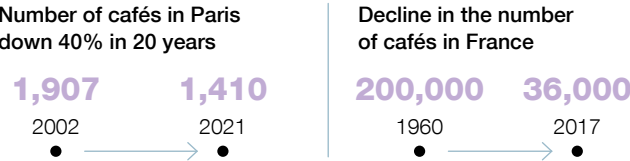## The city has an abundance of places for social cohesion and sociability

Locals feel that they have the most conversations with their fellow residents in neighbourhood shops, cafés and markets (Fraternity Barometer, 2022).

This is an interesting point to re-read against the background of a number of recent and current events: the decline in the number of **cafés**, the reduction of **local shops** and the "dark stores" phenomenon (shops used exclusively for online order preparation and collection, creating few opportunities for social interaction). These figures need to be put into perspective. The social ties traditionally associated with cafés may have shifted to the workplace and the home, in line with changing habits and lifestyles (the coffee machine at work and 'aperitifs' at home, for example).

Social centres are genuine social engineering tools for local communities, playing a key role in social cohesion and local development. This is the message that local councillors from different areas (rural, peri-urban or urban) are seeking to convey in a manifesto outlining the importance of these centres:[2] "The social centre, which welcomes residents, and particularly new ones, contributes to creating social cohesion and diversity, and restores a sense of belonging and purpose to the community. [...] It's also a way of reaching out to residents who do not naturally come to us, and to invest in the places where life is lived: schools, markets, streets, etc., so that we can listen to all the community's concerns."

● FIGURE IT OUT

The number of cafés is shrinking

Number of cafés in Paris down 40% in 20 years

1,907 → **1,410**
2002 → 2021

Decline in the number of cafés in France

200,000 → **36,000**
1960 → 2017

Source: Institut Crocis (Centre Régional d'Observation du Commerce) Ouest France study, 2017

The social centre, a place for everyone

1.9 million people in France

go to the 2,200 existing centres nationwide.

Source: https://www.rtes.fr/system/files/inline-files/Manifeste-Centres-sociaux-et-territoires.pdf

---

1. https://www.recreation-magazine.fr/emma-vilarem-interview/

2. https://www.rtes.fr/system/files/inline-files/Manifeste-Centres-sociaux-et-territoires.pdf

Are cities subject to a growing sense of insecurity?

A survey titled "Victimation & sentiment d'insécurité en Île-de-France" ("Victimisation & feeling of insecurity in the Paris region"), carried out every two years, explores the real or perceived insecurity of the people of the Paris region, and monitors its development.[1] It shows that attacks on people and property are not systematically linked to perceived insecurity, i.e. the feeling of insecurity.

This is a well-known paradox among urban security experts and researchers working on the topic. "When it comes to insecurity, people's attitudes and behaviour are determined more by representation than reality," asserts Michel Fansten, former head of statistical studies at the French Forum for Urban Security (FFSU).[2] An observation highlighted by the social psychologist, Anthony Garoscio, in the course of two field studies in Martigues, a town near Marseille, and the northern suburbs of Marseille itself. In Martigues, subjects living in heavily crime-prone neighbourhoods did not necessarily feel more unsafe than those living in neighbourhoods less affected by criminality. (Garoscio, 2006)

This disconnect between the feeling of insecurity and the level of delinquency or crime can be linked to several factors: [2]

• **Public disorder and anti-social behaviour** (insults, spitting, deliberate deterioration, rudeness, littering) have a stronger impact on people's sense of insecurity than acts of delinquency (violence against individuals, burglaries). This is because these acts are generally more prominent in urban areas: many people have to deal with them, whereas only a minority of the population is subjected to physical violence or burglaries. These disorders and anti-social behaviour are more visible and perceived as disturbing insofar as they symbolise both a deviation from the rules of living together and a sign of the powerlessness of public authorities to address them.

• **Feeling poorly protected** and inadequately equipped to deal with insecurity also strongly contributes to feelings of insecurity. The lack of facilities for victims or public space maintenance (lighting, street cleanliness, upkeep of green spaces) also contributes to feelings of insecurity, as does the lack of police presence.

• **The sense of insecurity is cumulative and self-perpetuating:** it leads to a heightened awareness of problems in public areas and the failure to deal with them.

The sense of insecurity is complex, encompassing both anticipation of the risk we believe we are exposed to and the feeling that the problem is not being adequately dealt with in the urban environment, and that protection is insufficient. **There are many consequences, and these are a real hindrance to the relational dimension of the city: breakdown of social ties, community withdrawal, rejection of others and identity-based reactions.**

As such, dealing with insecurity issues should include both the fight against actual insecurity, but also intervene on a more subjective level by fostering a sense of security:

• **Provide information and communicate on actions and measures** undertaken throughout the city: raise awareness of the measures in place.

• **Involve local players** (local traders, heads of organisations, heads of schools, social players, etc.) in providing information and directing them to the appropriate contacts.

• **Work with local residents,** their use of amenities and their perceptions of their living environment.

• **Create a welcoming urban environment** using all possible levers, not only in terms of urban form and architecture, but also the way the spaces they create operate and are used.

1. https://www.institutparisregion.fr/fileadmin/NewEtudes/000pack3/Etude_2887/RapportFinalEVSI2021_web.pdf

2. https://variances.eu/?p=3328

3. https://variances.eu/?p=3328

Using art to create a sense of place and security

UP/SIDE/DOWN/DOWN/TOWN project, Paris
The Street Society, Daniel van der Noon

According to [S]City, a consulting and research agency specialised in cognitive sciences applied to urban projects, place identity, which is defined as "the emotional and symbolic importance given to a place as the individual becomes psychologically invested in it," helps provide a sense of security. One type of intervention that can foster attachment to place in an urban environment is art. This connection is made visible by the UP/SIDE/DOWN/DOWN/TOWN project, organised in Paris in summer 2019. Winner of the "Embellir Paris" ("Beautify Paris") competition, this project carried out by The Street Society (an urban innovation agency) and artist Daniel van der Noon, was intended to transform a covered gallery on the corner of a Parisian street into a colourful venue. [S]City's assessment of the emotional experience associated with the location showed a shift before and after the operation: emotions of sadness and disgust, mainly linked to the low aesthetic value and the perception of anti-social behaviour, gave way to emotions of joy and surprise, and to behavioural intentions to protect the location.

Source: https://www.scity-lab.com/blog/2019/11/14/le-rle-de-lattachement-dans-le-rapport-la-ville

Urban density: "hell is other people"

In October 2023, the study "Urban density: I love you, but I don't love you either" revealed that in France, people generally have better relations with their neighbours in sparsely populated areas: 33% in rural communes, almost twice as many as in the Paris region (17%).

This raises several questions: is the urban hell other people? Does density have a negative impact on social cohesion? When these same people are asked about their perception of density, particularly its negative aspects, they mention overcrowding (18%) first and foremost, far ahead of anonymity and individualism (6%). So what can be disturbing is overcrowding or the impression of too many people.

Thankfully, there are many ways to make dense areas more pleasant and reduce the feeling of overcrowding that it can create. This can be achieved with buildings, by minimising visual clutter and limiting direct overlooking, or by installing vegetation to provide a calming effect; and with public spaces, by planting vegetation and giving more space to pedestrians, for example. The idea is to maintain a certain intensity in urban spaces, which is synonymous with diversity, while reducing the sense of crowding. The variety of activities, amenities and populations that these areas offer is much sought after and well appreciated. The city offers the chance to meet new people while still being able to enjoy a degree of anonymity, where you can find work and benefit from cultural and entertainment venues that don't exist anywhere else.

Feeling lonely in the city: the paradox of urban solitude

Cities are a prime location for all kinds of interpersonal relationships. They also give people the opportunity to meet new people beyond their family and friends, and to form all kinds of relationships. In spite of this, they can easily be a lonely place. How can we explain this paradox?

In the early 20th century, a German philosopher, Georg Simmel, devoted his essay "Big Cities and the Life of the Mind" to the impact of urban life on people and their moods. He noted how city dwellers were blasé, and attributed this to two contrasting tendencies: on the one hand, the constant sensory stimulation leads to increased nervous tension; on the other, the over-stimulation of the senses results in people keeping their distance and withdrawing as a defence mechanism. Simmel also advocated how the city could have a liberating effect, providing breathing space and alleviating social pressure. The flip side of this freedom, however, is that loneliness is particularly felt amid big-city crowds.

That said, loneliness is by no means a specifically urban feeling. There is no particular geographical configuration that is immune to it, and the feeling is growing everywhere in Western societies. So much so that in 2018, the United Kingdom appointed the first Minister for Loneliness, followed by Japan in 2021. In France, this feeling is widespread and growing. It is estimated that 11 million people are

affected, 9 million of whom suffer from it. (Fondation de France, 2023)

The other paradox is that this feeling is unrelated to having a social life. In other words, being surrounded by people and belonging to various social networks can still lead to feelings of loneliness. In such cases, the relationships or social interactions experienced are not conducive to personal fulfilment. Loneliness should not be confused with social isolation, which is characterised by an objective lack of contacts and relationships. Social isolation is strongly linked to economic factors: people with the lowest incomes are the most affected by it, and unemployed people suffer from social isolation twice as much as those who are employed.

It's also possible to live alone and have regular, supportive family, friends and/or professional relationships. For those who live alone, having plenty of people around them outside the home can even be a way to overcome hardship and loneliness. This is highlighted by sociologist Camille Duthy in her research on "solo living". She interprets this as a way for contemporary individuals to develop themselves by balancing the need for relationships while seeking emancipation and autonomy. (Duthy, 2020)

Loneliness can develop either suddenly or more gradually, at different points in life. It is often linked to a series of painful events that weaken a person's relationships. The factors are more likely to be found in our 'modern biographies', which are more prone to breakdowns and new developments. The challenge, then, is to detect the onset of loneliness and support the individuals concerned to prevent the situation from becoming entrenched over the long term.

The reason this phenomenon is so alarming is that it is harmful to our health. In May 2023, Vivek Murthy, US Surgeon General, identified loneliness as the country's newest public health epidemic. Scientific research demonstrates the deleterious physical and mental effects of social isolation and loneliness: increased risk of heart disease, stroke and premature death, increased anxiety and depression, and disruption of the immune system.

• FIGURE IT OUT

Loneliness in 2022

17%

of people who are "objectively surrounded" (two or more sociability networks) say they feel lonely every day, almost every day or often.

Source: "Solitude 2022. Regards sur les fragilités relationnelles" (Insights into the fragility of relationships), Fondation de France

Focus

Isolation

"Someone is considered isolated when they do not physically meet the members of 5 different social networks: work, family, friendships, professional relations and community groups." Séverine Dessajan Researcher at Cerlis

From a functional city to a relational city

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, a major reference in contemporary urban planning, Jane Jacobs was one of the first to radically oppose the discourse of modernist urbanism of the 1920s and its model of the functional city based on a marked division of human activities (work, housing, leisure and traffic).

When it comes to streets, one of the consequences of modernist ideology and its rationalisation and compartmentalisation of spaces was to turn them into exclusively transport-oriented spaces. "Streets must no longer exist; something must be created to replace them" wrote Le Corbusier in *La Ville Radieuse*. Jacobs, on the contrary, advocates the collective nature of streets and their social character, making them an indicator of atmosphere and safety. She argues in favour of mixed uses of public areas: "Streets in cities serve many purposes besides carrying vehicles, and city sidewalks […] serve many purposes besides carrying pedestrians. These uses are bound up with circulation but are not identical with it and in their own right they are at least as basic as circulation to the proper workings of cities." (Jacobs, 2012)

Although this urban model was subsequently abandoned, it remains functional in other forms. For the philosopher Fabienne Brugère, "the urban models developed over the last thirty years have been largely defined by the myth of an attractive, competitive and above all functional city".[1] In large cities, she writes, the time spent in transport interferes with local relationships, encouraging people to withdraw into their own lives, and the neighbourhoods themselves lack local, lively places.

Sonia Lavadinho, Pascal Le Brun-Cordier and Yves Winkin, the authors of The Relational City, agree: "Even today, cities dedicate most of their financial and human resources to keeping them running as smoothly as possible. Public services are up and running, police forces are on the lookout, fire and emergency services are at the ready, logistics services supply shops with goods every morning, and waste is removed by the tonne every evening. It all works perfectly as long as the machine doesn't break down. This urban machine is – in broad terms – the 'functional city'." They contend that the functional city takes up 80-90% of the surface area of European cities, while the relational city is left to make do with the rest. And this is despite the growing number of initiatives to promote peaceful, lively cities and the questioning of the importance of cars in the city.

Although it goes without saying that the "functional city" is essential to urban life, the challenge today is to give priority to the "relational city", in terms of surface area, funding and human resources. The idea is to shift from urban planning where space is conceived in terms of flows to urban planning that promotes social interaction, encounters and being closer to nature. It is also about empowering people to make decisions about the environment in which they live.

1. https://www.lemonde.fr/le-monde-evenements/article/2022/11/14/il-faut-revenir-a-ce-qu-est-la-ville-par-essence-un-lieu-de-relations_6149822_4333359.html

(!) The challenge now is to prioritise "relational square metres"

Social connections, a driving force with positive effects

Stronger social cohesion and greater conviviality in the urban environment bring a wide range of associated benefits, including improved security, restraint, resilience, participatory democracy and inclusiveness.

Feeling safe in the city

The history of interpersonal violence in urban environments goes back as far as the social history of the modern city. As Michel Porret, a historian from Geneva, explains, cities have never been havens of peace, as they concentrate social antagonisms and exacerbate them when it comes to the distribution of wealth and unequal use of public space. However, he points out that, statistically speaking, we live in a much safer urban environment today than our ancestors did centuries ago.

In contrast to reactionary security rhetoric and the large-scale police response, he believes that insecurity in the city is mainly the result of an "urban de-socialisation" that has partly come from property speculation and profitability. Concierges in blocks of flats, local shops, popular cafés and restaurants, tradespeople's premises and bookshops are all part of a preventive local sociability. Through their presence, they provide social regulation that cannot be replaced by CCTV, entry codes or multinational retail chains. A relational city and its activities strengthen neighbourhoods and mutual acquaintances, encourage people to pay attention to each other and make them feel safe.

A more economical city thanks to sharing

In many cities around the world, the trend towards urban sprawl is still going on, in spite of many premises remaining under-utilised. In France, for example, the occupancy rate for offices varies from 20% to 30%, while schools are used only 20% of the time on average.

This phenomenon consequently leads to new needs for buildings and the consumption of resources, especially land, which could all be prevented if the use of existing spaces were increased. Mixed use, i.e. the simultaneous presence of several types of user, and chronotopia, i.e. an alternating presence of several user profiles or several uses in the same place, are two levers that can be used to optimise use of existing buildings. And there are plenty of examples of how this can be used: an open-plan space that can be transformed into a gym or function room thanks to a system of removable desks, a coworking space on the premises of a university canteen, or a school that doubles as a living space for residents of the neighbourhood.

This increased usage leads to more interaction, which can potentially result in problems of social acceptability. However, if these spaces are designed to bring together heterogeneous groups of people, taking into account comfort of use and interaction, they can give rise to new social dynamics that are full of diversity.

" When video surveillance is designed to replace in-person social regulation by professionals whose activities bring people closer together, then urban insecurity has a bright future ahead of it. "

Michel Porret
Historian

A more resilient city in the face of disruption

The Covid-19 crisis demonstrated just how important it is for a region to have players capable of rallying together and creating a collective dynamic in the event of a major disruption. Initiatives from civil society and the chains and collectives created to cope with the emergency proved their ability to self-organise, show solidarity and create networks of mutual aid (neighbourhood help groups, professionals and advisors available in ground-floor premises, facemask-making, etc.).

According to American sociologist Eric Klinenbourg, when disaster strikes, it is the collapse of social infrastructure that can be the most damaging. These physical places (libraries, third places, community gardens, etc.) or organisations that shape the way people interact contribute to the resilience of an area. In a study of the deadly heatwave that struck Chicago in 1995, Klinenbourg highlighted the fact that the highest mortality rates were recorded in communities where social infrastructure had weakened the most, within similar demographic contexts.

> " When social infrastructure is solid, it promotes interaction, mutual support and collaboration between friends and neighbours; when it is weak, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves. "

[S]City, a cognitive science research company working on urban projects.

Citizens play a part in shaping the city

Taking part in community life is one of the keys to social cohesion. It's a way for people to engage with the place where they live, alongside other residents. It can also foster ties between citizens and the community, as long as it takes forms that empower citizens and allow a wide range of voices to be heard.

Local democracy and community consultation initiatives (public enquiries, neighbourhood councils, etc.) are often poorly representative and involve only certain sections of the population. Various participation tools are being developed to accommodate a broad range of audiences. One example is a customised fleet of cargo bikes allowing a team to reach out to people, by travelling to where they are, stopping, and listening to what they have to say in real time.

Co-construction initiatives encourage citizens to get fully involved in shaping the city, by taking part in the process of developing projects. They provide expertise on local issues and use to public or private project owners and developers.

In some areas, citizen participation is becoming "bottom-up", with public authorities taking on the role of supporting or promoting initiatives. In Loos-en-Gohelle, in northern France, the "fifty-fifty" scheme allows any citizen, group of residents or association with an idea to apply to the local council to have their project implemented, with technical and financial support. The projects are presented on stage by their initiators at the annual "Faites in Loos" citizens' forum.

A lever for a more inclusive city, tackling all forms of discrimination

An inclusive city is one that allows all its residents unrestricted access to all its facilities, infrastructures and services. It strives to reduce social exclusion or discrimination that may be experienced by vulnerable people or groups needing particular attention. These may include people with disabilities, children, the economically disadvantaged, the elderly, women, LGBTQIA+ people, people suffering from illnesses or people from other countries.

Socially speaking, an inclusive city offers everyone the opportunity to thrive and to play a part in the life of the city, whatever their differences. It recognises these differences and embraces them. It calls for other ways of designing urban areas, relying on people-centred and use-centred approaches. In the same way that the relational city encourages people to treat each other with kindness in the urban space, the inclusive city pays equal attention to all its inhabitants, whatever their age, social condition or disability.

An inclusive city offers everyone the opportunity to thrive

Seeing the city at child's level

In the cities of OECD countries, children spend less time playing freely outdoors than their parents did. They travel more by car. In 1980, 85% of 5- to 6-year-olds in OECD countries walked to school, but only 8% do so today. (Paquot, 2022)

The fact that cities are unsuitable is one of the determining factors. During the latter part of the 20th century, the mass use of cars created dangers, less space for pedestrians and pollution. As Emeline Bailly, a researcher specialising in urban planning, explains, "many streets have been reserved for cars and many common spaces, courtyards, squares have been partially confiscated for other uses or privatised through the extension of terraces, etc." (Abbey, 2023)

For the architect and urban planner, Madeleine Masse, cities are unsuitable because children can't get around on their own. She notes several factors that are not conducive to children, including the size of pavements, urban furniture, lack of lighting, absence of nature, and heat. (Abbey, 2023)

Specific areas for children to play have been created to provide outdoor spaces for children. But urban measures such as this are only helping to segregate public space. Designing a city for children actually means designing a city for everyone, where play is reinvested in the public space, where street furniture can be used by both children and the elderly, and where everyone can feel safe.

Trend note #12
Designing child-friendly cities
March 2023

+ To learn more, see our trend note #12 "Designing child-friendly cities".

www.bouygues-construction.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/Trend-note-12_Designing-child-friendly-cities.pdf

Inspirations

Streets for children

Play streets or *Wohnstrassen*

"Play streets" are a phenomenon that originated in the English-speaking world in response to the increase in car traffic and the reduction in urban space for residents.

Nowadays, these initiatives are developing all over the world. It is often non-profit organisations that come up with proposals for new activities to help people (re) appropriate their streets. In France, a national collective called "Rues aux enfants, Rues pour tous" ("Streets for children, Streets for everyone") has helped to create more than 150 play streets. The idea is to reserve a street for children for a whole day, so that local residents, children and adults can enjoy a range of activities on the now free and safe pavement. This initiative, supported by local authorities, encourages residents to come up with new ways of using the street and to rethink its layout. More broadly, it raises awareness among elected representatives, teachers and parents about children's place in the city. In Vienna, Austria, *Wohnstrassen* are public spaces made available to citizens. Citizens are invited to make these "living streets" their own and develop a variety of ways they can be put to use.

Source: mairie7.lyon.fr

Playing secret agent to improve the journey to and from school

Oslo, Norway

A child-friendly city is one that meets children's needs for independence, exploration and socialisation, and enables them to get around safely. To encourage children in Oslo to walk or cycle to school, the city asked them about their feelings of safety when walking in the urban environment, using gamification techniques: via a mobile application, the children play the role of secret agents and share their feelings about their journey from home to school, pointing out difficult spots and sensitive areas. The data from the application is used to prioritise improvements to pedestrian crossings and pavements.

Source: springwise.com

Changing a neighbourhood through a child's eyes

Criança Fala Project, São Paulo, Brasil

In one district of São Paulo, many children rarely go out because public spaces are perceived to be too dangerous. The Criança Fala project has used listening, games and art to transform public spaces in the Glicério neighbourhood, making them cleaner and safer with the help of children. The project was launched in 2013, initiated by the social enterprise Criacidade, which recognised that children had a lot to say about urban space and its development. More than 1,200 children took part in public events and activities, a Maracatu (Brazilian carnival) parade and meetings with their families and professionals from the fields of education, health and social care. Numerous areas in the neighbourhood have been transformed so that children can get together after school.

Source: outracidade.com.br

2. TYPES OF SOCIAL TIES *in the city*

Scale

Neighbourhood

At the end of the twentieth century, a number of urban observers considered that the neighbourhood as a territory and as a framework for social practices was in decline, due to the increased mobility of city dwellers and the weakening of local sociability. (Authier & Cayouette-Remblière, 2021) Since then, a great deal of research has been carried out that challenges this idea and reveals very different ways of living in a neighbourhood.

> " Regular community activities in the neighbourhood create a space of proximity where a sense of familiarity with places is established through daily routines that ensure a feeling of 'ontological security' "
>
> **Anthony Giddens**
> Sociologist

Does a neighbourhood foster trust and safety?

The "My neighbourhood, my neighbours" survey, carried out by a team of researchers in 2018 and 2019 in different types of residential contexts in the Paris and Lyon regions, looked at how neighbourhood relations play a role in people's urban and social integration at several levels, including the neighbourhood.

The survey highlights the importance of regular community activities in the neighbourhood. They create "a space of proximity where a sense of familiarity with places is established through daily routines that ensure a feeling of 'ontological security': shopping, going to parks or public gardens, going to a café or bar, playing sports, going to the library – these are all activities that, through repetition, establish residents in their neighbourhoods and make the world a familiar and safe place." (Giddens, 1987)

The sense of security can be associated with the idea of trust highlighted by sociologist Clément Rivière in his work on parental supervision of children's urban autonomy. On the basis of surveys conducted in Milan and Paris, he suggests defining the neighbourhood in terms of the "limits of the sphere of localised inter-knowledge" (Rivière, 2012), i.e. **a space where individuals recognise each other.** According to Rivière, this localised inter-knowledge is typical of village life, and it is this inter-knowledge that generates trust, and in particular enough trust for parents to leave their children alone in the public space, under the watchful eye of every resident.

Neighbourhood practices and representations shaped by the area's social profile and residents' social position

How neighbourhoods are depicted varies greatly, however, according to the individual's social status, residential context and how central the neighbourhood is to the city. People from working-class backgrounds, from large housing estates undergoing urban renewal, from small towns and from rural and peri-urban areas tend to restrict the notion of neighbourhood to the building, the residential complex or the street.

Social inclusion in the neighbourhood, which is measured in terms of the activities undertaken and relationships formed locally, is also much higher for managers and high-income earners, and for residents of middle-class and central neighbourhoods. The more highly educated people are, the richer they are, and the more likely they are to go to restaurants, enjoy drinks or picnics, go to the cinema or the theatre, or visit exhibitions or museums in their neighbourhood. Sports events are the only area where social variations are limited.

A similar analysis can be made with regard to neighbourhood practices: according to the survey, residents of gentrified neighbourhoods have particularly intense neighbourly relations, ranging from apartment buildings to neighbourhoods. In middle-class neighbourhoods, residents are also involved in many neighbourly relationships, but the practices are more formal and social. For example, it is more common than elsewhere to be invited for a meal, rather than to be invited for coffee, tea or drinks. In socially mixed neighbourhoods, neighbourly relations are more limited, and even weak at neighbourhood level. In apartment buildings, interactions with neighbours are more based on service exchanges (e.g. taking children to school) than on socialising or having a coffee. In neighbourhoods with large housing estates undergoing urban renewal, neighbourhood and social relations are less frequent and less extensive than elsewhere.

Generally speaking, in all residential settings, neighbourly relations are more frequent in close proximity, within a block of flats or neighbouring houses. Exchanges of services take place mainly at this level. Neighbourhood relationships, on the other hand, more often involve in-depth relationships and social visits. These are particularly common among families with children.

Source: carenews.com

Inspirations

Neighbours offer family carers a helping hand and allow them respite time

Solidaires des Aidants

This **initiative to encourage local solidarity** was developed by AG2R La Mondiale's social action wing and its partner associations: Voisins Solidaires, Bleu, Blanc, Zèbre and Familles Solidaires. On the Solidaires des Aidants website, you can download a kit containing an explanatory poster, a guide, a leaflet to drop off at neighbours' homes, a directory of carers and a noticeboard where anyone can sign up to offer a service or ask for help. Some of the ideas put forward include help with mobility, doing the shopping, offering a one-off service, paying a visit, providing day-to-day attention, directing people to help and support schemes. **The aim of this initiative is to encourage neighbours to look after people being cared for and to provide direct support to carers to make their day-to-day lives easier.**

Source: RCF

Restaurants where meeting others is a priority

Les Petites Cantines, France

Les Petites Cantines (Little Canteens) is a not-for-profit network of neighbourhood canteens dedicated to helping people overcome loneliness and fostering social links in the city. Their mission is to create quality relationships and help create a society based on trust. The idea is to cook and/or share a meal with guests from different generations and backgrounds. 14 Petites Cantines have opened since 2016. By 2025, a total of 40 Petites Cantines should be operating across France.

The "neighbourhood-village", a place of intense local social life: fact or fiction?

Sociological research shows that the notion of the "village" is a recurring theme among residents, including those living in towns and cities that can sometimes be very densely populated. The images and depictions associated with the neighbourhood-village have been closely analysed by social scientists. It is described as a place "where there is an overlap of family, professional and friendly ties that support an intense local social life, particularly in public spaces."

Although the neighbourhood-village seems to be more fiction than fact in the context of Antananarivo (see inset), the "My neighbourhood, my neighbours" survey shows that it does correspond to some extent to the experience of the gentrified neighbourhoods of Croix-Rousse in Lyon and Batignolles in Paris. There is a high level of social interaction and ties between neighbours, in the form of invitations, conversations and exchanges of services and information. However, these "villages" are not embraced with the same degree of intensity by all residents (a function of their social status and how long they have been living in these neighbourhoods) and many neighbourhood residents reproduce these social integration practices outside the neighbourhood, without limiting themselves to a local setting.

Neighbourly relations are more frequent in close proximity

Focus

The myth of the neighbourhood-village in Antananarivo, Madagascar

Geographer Catherine Fournet-Guérin studied this phenomenon in the urban context of Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. (Fournet-Guérin, 2006) She found that there was a huge discrepancy between what residents said and what they actually did. Residents see the neighbourhood as a place embodying values of solidarity and social cohesion, where strong social ties are formed, and associate it with an image of an "idealised village". In practice, however, the neighbourhood turns out to be a place where very strong, but subtly hidden, social tensions are expressed. Residents use complex avoidance strategies. For example, people avoid being seen at the water fountain, a place with negative connotations and associated with the descendants of slaves. They also practise famangiana, a customary gesture of solidarity that consists of visiting a family that has experienced a happy or unhappy event and offering them a gift. But on the other hand, they keep visits between neighbours to a minimum, for fear of being the subject of rumours in the neighbourhood or of neighbours abusing their hospitality. The burden of social relations seems to be borne by the residents, and social bonds are often forced relationships. According to the researcher, this discrepancy may be explained by the population's unconscious attempt to feel comfortable in the "big city" by idealising the familiar, reassuring neighbourhood as opposed to the distant, worrying outside world. The neighbourhood's tendency to close itself off from the outside world is fuelled by Antananarivo's original urban landscape, where most of the neighbourhoods are built on hillsides and have a patchwork of paths, alleyways and staircases that are difficult to navigate for outsiders. This discrepancy is also linked to the highly compartmentalised and hierarchical nature of Antananarivan society.

We listen to them!
INTERVIEW

> " Conviviality is not just something to feel good about, but also, and perhaps above all, it's a terrific economic asset. "

Patrick Bernard
Founder of the Hyper Voisins collective

Paris, France

What's the story of the super-neighbours?

P.B. It all began six years ago, with an extremely simple and rather naïve concept, but it was expressed in a very forceful way. Five of us neighbours were sitting around a café table, and we decided to focus on conviviality and think about how we could help bring people together in our local neighbourhood. We then decided on how we would go about it – we'd be cheerful and not take ourselves too seriously – and so we started by sketching out a territory.

Within this territory, which we decided to call the "Republic of Super Neighbours", our only goal would be to convert a neighbour who says "Hello" five times a day into a super-neighbour who says "Hello" 50 times a day. Starting with a "hello", which really is the first stage of conviviality, allowed us to show people that we weren't into something technological, that we were going to challenge everyday reality and that no political party was behind our project. So all we had to do was get everyone to agree on something that everyone already agrees on: we don't say "hello" to each other enough. And the rest is history…

©Hypervoisins

You have come up with some very concrete actions in public spaces…

P.B. Yes, we needed to make our mark. We had to make it clear who we were, what we weren't, what we were doing, what we weren't doing, and so on. We decided on an event-based approach so that we could quickly get the word out and grab the media's attention. This is the story of Aude's table, a huge banquet set up in the middle of the street. At our first meeting in April 2017, there were just five of us. Then in September 2017, at the first Aude's Table, there were 700 people there. The following year, we extended the table to 1,000 people, and for the last one, in September 2023, there were 1,400 people for 1,000 seats.

So what's our message? We get people to eat in the street and we point out that we're also here to share: "Bring some food and share it with your neighbours" It's not an imposition. It's just a cordial invititation, with music playing everywhere and areas reserved for children. Parents can come along and feel safe, there's not a single car around! This event has become something of a trademark for us. The first steps are essential when you want to create momentum: if this event hadn't been a success in its first year, I don't think we would have earned the locals' trust.

What's the reason for investing in conviviality?

P.B. Our view is that conviviality is not just something to feel good about, but also, and perhaps above all, it's a terrific economic asset. If the city were a business, conviviality would be the first item on its balance sheet. A city's core business is no more and no less than its residents' interaction with each other. This should be obvious to everyone, but in fact this potential wealth, this precious resource, is lying dormant in the streets. We were convinced that where we lived, we could awaken this potential wealth. It was just a question of finding out how, of coming up with the means, the day-to-day arrangements likely to energise it all. But this wealth was there, waiting for us.

Based on your experience of "super-neighbours", what are the key ingredients to encourage conviviality?

P.B. Six years on, we can say that the key to our success has been finding the right balance between the story to tell and the place in which to tell it. If you tell a good story in the wrong place, nobody listens. If you're in the right place but can't tell a story, it won't catch on either. Our story was about convincing local people that they had everything to gain from being more closely connected to each other. But if we'd pitched the story at the level of a whole arrondissement, or too big a neighbourhood, it wouldn't have taken. Rooting our story at an ultra-local level was decisive. Today, it reinforces our vision: the right place to bring residents closer to the community, citizens closer to politics, the right place to share responsibility, is where people live: in buildings, blocks of flats, neighbourhoods, etc. More generally, the right network is the area where people live. We ended up calling it the village. And it's possible to create a village within the city.

You mention the importance of a positive narrative, and even more so of having a good sense of humour…

P.B. As I said, the main ingredients are the place and the story to tell. But what's the best way to tell this story? So that we can connect a little more, day by day… The other ingredient of the story is to keep it light. Otherwise, the atmosphere is dampened and the politics of "I'm right and you're wrong" quickly kicks in. So we have to defuse the situation. We have to inject humour into everything. For example, going from five "Hellos" to 50 "Hellos": the first thing

it triggers is a smile. People immediately say: "Who is this idealist? He's dreaming!" and so on. And that's just what we're aiming for. That's why we call ourselves the "Radical Care Bears". It's the humour that convinces people, it disarms them. It removes presuppositions. I'm a great believer in the power of humour and being able to make fun of yourself. And, on a day-to-day basis, it helps to develop positive thinking. Which, at neighbourhood level, is the other real fuel for change.

©Hypervoisins

The city and public spaces

Public spaces are defined as places that are open to the public. They include squares, streets, parks, pavements, "the road network and its surroundings that allow everyone to move around freely, while ensuring that they are both accessible and free of charge." (Paquot, 2009) By definition, these spaces are places that offer opportunities for people to meet and socialise, open to all, with no restriction on access. In reality, these spaces can be the source of urban tensions (conflicts of use, noise and visual pollution, etc.) or social inequalities (relating to gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.).

Sociability and civic-minded behaviour in public spaces

Numerous alarm bells are ringing in defence of the essential role played by public spaces in fostering sociability and civic responsibility. The list of shortcomings in the way public spaces are designed can be as long as their consequences: privatised, exclusion of the most vulnerable, as small as possible, merged with roads and traffic parks, insufficient or poorly designed street furniture, virtually no functional mix, residual space for green areas, etc. Architect and urban planner Albert Levy believes there is a risk of a shift towards public spaces that are anti-social, a breeding ground for political detachment and low levels of participation among residents, when in fact these spaces could become structures for local democracy. (Levy, 2015)

For Joëlle Zask, a philosopher, the town square, as a particular form of public space, "is not by any means a necessarily democratic space." On the contrary, the hierarchical configuration of certain squares can work against the ideal of democracy. In Paris, for example, the Place Vendôme, although public and open to all, is only really frequented by wealthy tourists. Similarly, the original function of the statue that adorns the Place de la République in Paris was "less […] to embody the republican ideal than to stand in the way of popular Paris and its entertainment". Nevertheless, citizens can reclaim public squares through collective action, as in the protest movements of the Indignados in Madrid, Occupy Wall Street in New York and Nuit Debout in Paris. The square then becomes "a place where ideals can be asserted" and "a place where political sociability can be experienced." (Grillo, 2018)

> "
> A society must have public space to live together, to stand together. Public space has a civilising and political function, as a forum for debate, and is a catalyst for civic-mindedness. It is this specificity, this purpose for public space, that has not always been properly appreciated by urban planners and elected representatives, who in new urban developments, have often produced a public space that lacks quality.
> "

Albert Levy
Architect and urban planner

Inspiration

Source: inews.co.uk

Encouraging interaction in the public space
Free conversations

Initiated by Adrià Ballester in 2017, "Free Conversations" is a movement that offers people a free space where complete strangers can come and talk to each other whenever they want. The idea behind the movement, which was launched in Barcelona at the foot of the Arc de Triomf, is to put two chairs around a table allowing two complete strangers to sit and talk freely without fear of being judged.

These "Free Conversations", which are available in three different languages (Catalan, Castilian and English), have since attracted more than 8,000 people to Adrià's chairs. "When there's a story that seems interesting, I write down the person's telephone number. If someone contacts me on Instagram, I put them in touch, and they help each other out," explains Adrià, whose aim is to use his movement to connect people and create opportunities to meet and talk around the city.

The movement has now expanded to other cities in Spain and 12 other countries, including Mexico, Uruguay, South Africa and South Korea.

Exclusion from public spaces: more or conscious restrictions on access

For Chantal Deckmyn, psychoanalyst and architect-urban planner, the treatment of homeless people living on the street in public spaces is a clear indicator of the loss of hospitality for all in public spaces[1]: when benches are removed to prevent them from becoming a stopping place for these people, all users lose out.

Restricting access to public areas affects several categories of the population and is fuelled by processes that are sometimes unconscious. Through a survey carried out in Paris and Milan on parental involvement when their children are out and about, the sociologist Clément Rivière shows that urban perceptions among parents are highly gendered and that there is a tendency to pass on gendered norms regarding the use of public spaces and to impose stricter restrictions on urban practices for girls after puberty (controlling clothing, reliance on others to go out in the evening). By doing so, they help to fuel the idea that urban public spaces are a source of danger for women. (Rivière, 2012)

1. https://www.lagazettedescommunes.com/779082/chantal-deckmyn-%E2%80%89lhospitalite-de-lespace-public-garantit-notre-liberte%E2%80%89/

Focus

Archisuits, absurd garments designed by artist Sarah Ross to reclaim defensive spaces in the city of Los Angeles. Source: static.designboom.com

Hostile architecture: design to exclude in public spaces

Hostile architecture, also known as defensive design, is a phenomenon that consists of deliberately integrating elements into buildings, pavements and other public spaces to discourage certain behaviour, often targeting marginalised groups. Grids, spikes, posts, uncomfortable benches are all examples of features whose sole aim is to keep homeless people away. In France, the Abbé Pierre Foundation launched a campaign called "Soyons humains" (Let's be human) in December 2017 to condemn anti-homelessness measures and raise public awareness. Posters in towns and cities read: "Instead of stopping the homeless from sleeping here, let's offer them decent accommodation elsewhere." According to the latest report on the state of inadequate housing in France, published in January 2023 by the Abbé Pierre Foundation, the number of homeless people has more than doubled in ten years. With one year to go before the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a new awareness-raising campaign was launched by the La Cloche association and the Abbé Pierre Foundation, as urban furniture designed for no other purpose than to discourage the most vulnerable people continues to spread.

Buildings

When it comes to buildings, the term "relational" takes on its full meaning nowadays. There are a number of trends at the moment, all of which have to do with connections, interactions and encounters: the sharing economy, co-living and intensity of use. Although these trends apply to all types of building, they are particularly prevalent in residential buildings for the first two, and in tertiary buildings and establishments open to the public for the third.

Trends note #14
Living Tomorrow,
considerations & prospects
October 2023

Read the document

linkcity

+ To learn more, see our trend note #14 "Living Tomorrow, considerations & prospects".

www.bouygues-construction.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/14-Living-Tomorrow-UK.pdf

The sharing economy

In the 2010s, the sharing economy, also known as the collaborative economy or the economy of functionality, took off. Its purpose was to move away from a consumption rationale based on possession, and focus instead on use. It can, for example, take the form of sharing goods between several individuals, made easier by digital tools.

In buildings, this means sharing certain areas. For example, in apartment blocks where it applies, the surface area of housing units tends to be reduced in favour of additional services and spaces shared by residents, such as laundry rooms, shared guest rooms and multi-purpose common rooms. These elements can encourage exchanges between residents and give rise to new residential uses. However, one of the major challenges is to familiarise residents with the concept of common areas and get them to see the benefits of this change of model. Only then can sharing become a source of encounters and appeal.

Co-living

In the past, house-sharing and flat-sharing were seen as a more or less necessary practice for students, but today they can involve all segments of the population (students, young professionals, senior citizens, families, etc.) with the common theme of living both at home and with others, both together and separately. The reasons for this are varied: a need or desire for solidarity and mutual aid, the fight against isolation, the need to socialise, access to housing, a drop in income, life events (break-up, divorce, bereavement, professional transfer, etc.).

The idea of encouraging people to live together in a residential building is nothing new, and has already been tried out in the past, as in the Isokon building in London or the Narkomfin building in Moscow in the 1930s. But now the movement is gaining momentum and co-living is becoming more widespread, thanks to the emergence of (well) thought-out places and concepts designed to organise co-living. Living with a third party, without a romantic or family connection, is unusual and involves finding a modus vivendi, the "right distance", "non-intrusive familiarity". (Eleb & Bendimérad, 2018) These places offer solutions that both protect privacy and encourage encounters. One of the most popular of these solutions is co-living. The social links that form take on **a strong social dimension.**

Today co-living can involve all segments of the population

Fo'Lo urban residences for students and young professionals: helping people new to communal living while encouraging them to discover the city. (Groupe Lamotte)

Co-living, service-oriented living with a strong social dimension

Well-established in the United States and Great Britain, the concept of co-living is based to varying degrees on the possibility of sharing spacious, lively communal areas in exchange for reduced individual space. The embodiment of serviced housing, and often inspired by hotels or youth hostels, co-living often offers a wide range of amenities: communal kitchens, shared workspaces, gyms, a bar and restaurant, a spa, a games room, outdoor areas and so on. The social aspect can be professionalised in the form of house managers or community managers who make sure that there's a harmonious atmosphere in the building and encourage residents to interact with each other. The residents' profiles are varied – young people entering the working world, professionals on assignment, individuals in transition – but mainly fall into the 18-40 age bracket.

" In each residence, a manager will be tasked with welcoming these young people, reassuring them, guiding them around the city and giving them useful tips for shopping, going out and getting around. "

◉ **Jean-Maurice Lam**
Head of managed residences for Lamotte, in *Les Echos*

Other forms of co-living are more closely **based on solidarity values.** This is the case with intergenerational cohabitation, shared accommodation with joint projects or intergenerational residences. These new ways of living together are one way of containing the growing sense of mistrust in society. The inclusive approach of shared housing is also appealing to a large number of people.

Focus

Different forms of shared accommodation

Intergenerational solidarity-based house sharing: people over 60 let or sublet part of their home to a young person under 30, with the aim of strengthening social ties and making it easier for a young person to find accommodation.

Shared accommodation with community projects: accommodation for young people under 30, students, young professionals or civic service workers involved in community projects in their local area.

Intergenerational housing: an intergenerational building with flats for students, families and the elderly, and communal areas available for everyone to use. The accommodation for each age group is specifically designed to be appropriate in terms of surface area and layout.

• FIGURE IT OUT

Housing and inclusion

55%
of French people say they would be willing to share their home with people of a different generation

50%
would do so with people with disabilities
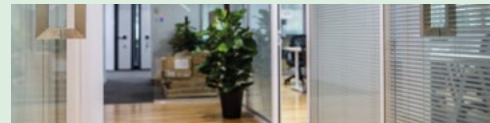
Source: Fraternity Barometer 2022

Intensifying uses

A large proportion of existing buildings are underused or are only seldomly used. Office space is used between 20% and 30% of the time, and schools are used on average 20% of the time. Intensification of use initiatives aim to improve the use of existing buildings and can reduce the need for new construction.

This also addresses environmental needs, such as reducing carbon footprints, reducing land artificialisation caused by urban sprawl and adapting to the growing scarcity of certain natural resources, as well as addressing the new uses and needs of the population. Working to make better use of existing built areas in the short, medium and long term means adopting new economic models.

Assuming that the opportunities for various groups of people to interact with each other are well thought out and that the mix (several user profiles or several uses in the same place at the same time) and/or the chronotopy (several user profiles or several uses taking place alternately in the same place) is managed efficiently, the intensified places can foster social interaction and generate dynamics that promote social cohesion. They can also be a source of social innovation through experimenting with or inventing new practices and bringing together heterogeneous players.

Inspiration

Les Escales Solidaires provides table d'hôte meals for €2: meals as a vehicle of social integration.

Working at every level to develop new forms of inclusive housing

Habitat et Humanisme

Recreating social links by promoting solidarity is at the heart of the work carried out by Habitat et Humanisme, an organisation dedicated to improving housing conditions. The association works at all levels – housing, local housing and neighbourhoods – combining them to overcome the isolation and exclusion of people facing difficulties.
In intergenerational residences for people with low incomes or who are isolated, the presence of communal areas (common room, laundry room, courtyard garden) encourages collective dynamics (joint activities, mutual aid, exchange of experiences). Close to these homes, the organisation is creating community third places to restore ties within the neighbourhoods and help combat social withdrawal. On a city-wide scale, the Escales Solidaires concept is based on meals as a vehicle for social integration: €2 host tables are provided for members of the association, who work alongside volunteers to cook food, mainly supplied by the Food Bank.

Inspiration

Open up your offices after dark!

Les Bureaux du cœur

Les Bureaux du Cœur is a charity that wants to contribute to a society in which no-one is left homeless, thanks to the support of companies and their employees. To achieve this, they are promoting the use of business premises as individual emergency accommodation, in the evenings and at weekends, when they are vacant.

Inspiration

Source: static.actu.fr

A bistro at the heart of a nursing home

Chez Georges, Abbeville

The Georges Dumont Ehpad (nursing home for the elderly) in Abbeville has had a new lease of life since March 2023, when the Chez Georges bistro opened right in the heart of the establishment. The initiative was the brainchild of a psychiatric health manager who saw it as a way of offering the elderly residents the chance to make a regular social connection: paying money for drinks. The prices were affordable and the impact was immediate: residents came out of their rooms more and got together with friends and family for a drink, a chat and to play board games. They all agree that the bistro brings life back into the establishment and breaks the sense of loneliness that some may feel.

Inspiration

A multi-purpose building

La Félicité, Paris

The former administrative headquarters of the Paris prefecture has been refurbished and redesigned as a place where people can meet and enjoy a wide range of activities: accommodation, work, sport, drinks, swimming, sleeping, gardening, eating and so on. Over 40,000 m2 of space includes offices, housing, shops, a 5-star hotel, a restaurant, a nursery, an art gallery, a youth hostel, a fitness centre and swimming pool, green terraces, urban agriculture and an internal street with a food market and shops, linking Boulevard Morland to the Seine.

Regions

In some regions, the relational city faces specific challenges.

Revitalising town centres in small and medium-sized towns to promote social cohesion

Recent years have seen small towns and some medium-sized towns and cities In France facing a devitalisation of their town centres. This trend is linked to a number of factors: loss of population, rising unemployment, greater poverty, rising housing vacancy rates, declining healthcare provision and facilities, and increasing numbers of vacant shops. The dynamics of retailing are particularly characteristic of this phenomenon: local shops in town centres are tending to decline in favour of the growth of retail outlets on the outskirts of towns.

Focus

Transformation and decline of small businesses in small towns, isolated towns and rural areas

The small retail sector in France is undergoing a major restructuring.The number of retail outlets, food and catering outlets, bars and restaurants and services to households rose 4.1% between 2008 and 2013 and then grew more slowly, by 0.7%, between 2013 and 2019.

However, this growth was mainly driven by the catering sector. If restaurants are excluded from the analysis, the small retail sector shrank by 2% between 2013 and 2019.

This growth is not uniform across the country: the number of small shops is stagnating in town centres and declining in rural areas and isolated towns. Vacancy rates are higher in towns with fewer than 40,000 inhabitants.

Source: Note no. 77, Conseil d'analyse économique, May 2023

From a social point of view, this shift has often been analysed as a factor that weakens social ties. However, as the sociologist Vincent Chabault[1] points out, far from being just a place for consumption, hypermarkets and shopping centres are also places for socialising, where relationships are formed and norms are spread. He even sees them as "havens of comfort" which people don't necessarily visit as consumers.

The social function of the shop is playing an increasingly important role in retailers' strategy. They see it as a means of differentiation in the face of competition from e-commerce, which is dramatically expanding. Experiments are being carried out in this area, such as the "chatty checkout" concept in the Netherlands, where customers can take their time to chat with the staff as they go through checkout if they so wish.

....

1. https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/01/12/le-centre-commercial-peut-etre-un-lieu-de-reconfort_1772599/

....

Inspiration

Source: isocial.cat

Shopping and chatting to combat loneliness

Kletskassa, Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the Dutch supermarket chain Jumbo has introduced "kletskassa" or "chatty checkouts". The first of these was set up in 2019 in Vlijmen, a village in the centre of the country, and the concept is set to be rolled out in 200 more stores. Customers can take the time to chat with checkout staff.

A number of schemes have been implemented to make town centres in France that are experiencing difficulties more attractive, not only for shops but also for residents and people who work there. A national programme called Action Cœur de Ville ("Town Centre Action"), which was launched in 2018, has supported 234 medium-sized towns with populations ranging between 20,000 and 100,000 in their overall strategies and projects for their centres. There has been a wide variety of projects, including retail initiatives, new shops, the refurbishment of old buildings, housing renovation, new coworking spaces, support for a group of producers, the regeneration of a town square, and so on. While, generally speaking, all these initiatives contribute to improving the living conditions of the people who live in these towns, some projects have a clear focus on strengthening social links. Similarly, another programme, Petites Villes de Demain ("Small Towns of Tomorrow"), aims to improve the quality of life for people living in small towns and the surrounding rural areas. 1,600 municipalities and groupings of municipalities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants are involved.

● FIGURE IT OUT

Town Centre Action

234

medium-sized towns of 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants supported by the programme in their overall strategy and town centre projects between 2018 and 2022.

Inspiration

Source: caue-observatoire.fr

A multi-service third place and a community bistro to revitalise the town centre

Jouars-Pontchartrain (Paris region)

As part of the Petites Villes de Demain ("Small Towns of Tomorrow") programme, the town of Jouars-Pontchartrain (population 6,000) has refurbished two historic buildings in its town centre, giving them new uses to serve the local population.

A multi-service third place that is accessible to all accommodates the local post office and a coworking space offering workshops and events. There are also plans for a business accelerator targeting projects with an ecological or rural dimension, and a community bistro that offers short supply circuits and local produce on the menu as well as hosting events (exhibitions, concerts, repair café, etc.).

More "traditional" forms of socialising are clashing with new ones created by new arrivals.

Redefining social links in rural areas from an urban perspective

There is no single version of "rural"; the countryside takes on many forms. Once thought of the opposite to "urban", the countryside is now undergoing a major reorganisation and revaluation.

At a time of widespread mobility and multiple affiliations, the terms "urban" and "rural" are becoming intertwined, creating spaces where those who live there, those who spend the weekend there and those who come for leisure activities co-exist; spaces where life trajectories of longstanding residents and those of neo-rurals – people from an urban background who have moved to the country without any family ties and are looking for a living environment that matches their aspirations – intersect (they include professionals at the end of their careers looking for a better quality of life, long-term unemployed people who see it as potential for new opportunities, growing their own produce and being more familiar with people and less anonymous than in the city, young people and graduates looking for new social forms and sociability); and areas where long-term residents are changing their strategies, like farmers: more and more farmers are offering services (bed and breakfast, table d'hôtes) in parallel to their farming activities.

These dynamics are challenging social ties in rural areas. From a social point of view, "traditional" forms of sociability are clashing with new ones created by new arrivals. In the countryside beyond the peri-urban areas, where there are a multitude of small municipalities with populations of between 500 and 3,000, social life and networking are often strong for

long-established residents, but more limited for new arrivals. (Granié, 2003) In these communities, village festivals and Christian rituals such as All Saints' Day are often fundamental social occasions in which the whole village takes part. The contribution of new arrivals to the organisation of these festivities can sometimes be a lever for integration. Young, well-educated newcomers to the area, who are often in search of a social life, sometimes play an active role in strengthening social ties by opening shops, meeting places or not-for-profit organisations.

The different social backgrounds of newcomers or their unfamiliarity with their new living environment can make cohabitation difficult and can cause tensions: conflicts between farmers and newcomers over the nuisances associated with farming, cultural misunderstandings when newcomers are from other countries (British, Dutch, etc.), early signs of rural gentrification when newcomers change the sociological make-up of a municipality and get involved in local politics. (Tommasi, 2018)

Strengthening social ties in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

The Observatoire des Inégalités ("Inequalities Observatory") highlights the concentration of social difficulties in the so-called "priority" urban policy districts, particularly with regard to employment: a quarter of the working population are unemployed, mainly young people and the low-skilled.[1]

This high level of unemployment is explained by a combination of factors: the percentage of people with qualifications is lower than elsewhere, but even with equivalent educational levels, it's harder to find a job. Discrimination against foreigners, a negative image of the area in the eyes of employers, few opportunities to build a social network and a lower level of mobility all account for this discrepancy. However, active participation and belonging to the job market are strong vectors of socialisation and preservation of social ties.

Difficulties in accessing employment are one of the social and economic factors likely to gradually distance individuals from the circuits of social exchange and increase the risk of reaching situations of social exclusion. They don't explain these processes in themselves, but they do contribute to them. The sociologist and philosopher Robert Castel analysed the process of severing social ties through integration in the wealth production network (more or less stable employment) and the distance from a relational network made up of family and friends. (Castel, 1995) In his view, these factors point to several spheres of existence that clearly demonstrate the importance of social support and social integration when people are distanced from stable work (see right). He uses the term "disaffiliation" to describe situations in which individuals find themselves excluded from both wealth-producing networks and those producing social recognition.

1. https://www.inegalites.fr/Chomage-QPV

With equivalent educational levels, it's harder to find a job

Culture, sport and the arts can strengthen social ties and promote inclusion for people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

When combined with other challenges such as unemployment, job insecurity and poverty, the weakening of social ties can thus contribute to social status being downgraded. As a result, a wide range of measures are put in place to maintain social links on a day-to-day basis in these neighbourhoods. Local organisations play an essential role and they are supported by a number of major government programmes. Between 2019 and 2021, for instance, 44 nationwide non-profits working in these neighbourhoods have been identified, 21 of them in the "social links, culture/sport, access to rights and healthcare, civic participation" sector. Among these were Voisin Malin ("Smart Neighbour"), Kolocations à Projets Solidaires ("Solidarity House Shares") and Fête le Mur, a charity founded by French tennis champion Yannick Noah that uses tennis as a means to help underprivileged children.

Inspiration

Source: lelabo-ess.org

Encouraging neighbourhood life through dialogue between residents
Voisin Malin

Voisin Malin ("Smart Neighbour") is an initiative intended to create a network of local residents who can act as "go-betweens" to help recreate a dynamic in working-class neighbourhoods. It offers work contracts of around 15 hours a month to residents who are trained and supervised to conduct door-to-door campaigns in conjunction with local players (social landlords, water companies, institutions, etc.) on subjects of general interest, as part of concrete missions: cleanliness in housing, taking ownership of major building sites, combating energy poverty, reducing water consumption, improving access to healthcare, etc. The aim is to give everyone a place in society and to establish peer-to-peer dialogue that involves residents in the life of the neighbourhood or their building.

Inspiration

Source: afev.org

A place to live while helping residents of working-class neighbourhoods
Kolocations à projets solidaires

Kolocations à Projets Solidaires ("Solidarity House Shares") allows young people to live in shared accommodation and to engage with the residents of working-class neighbourhoods by taking part in community actions, such as organising social events for neighbours, supporting children and young people with educational problems, etc. The housing can be in a single refurbished or newly built building or it can be scattered through the social housing stock. The lease that is offered is at a moderate rent, lasts one year, and is renewable.

Among the many levers that can be activated to strengthen social ties and encourage the inclusion of residents of priority neighbourhoods in the social and urban dynamics of their area, sport, culture and the arts are particularly important. In 2020, the Regional Agency for Cultural Affairs in the Paris Region invited applications for projects focused on culture and social connections in these neighbourhoods. The idea was to support artists and artistic venues in developing initiatives in priority areas, and to provide a presence over a sufficiently long period of time to ensure that the cultural practices of local residents are sustained. Projects included a participatory web series and the creation of a mosaic wall with plants on the facade of an artistic venue.

#2

Tennis at the heart of priority neighbourhoods for youngsters to achieve their potential

Fête le mur

Fête le Mur is a non-profit organisation that enables children and young people to play tennis free of charge in the very heart of their neighbourhood, under the guidance of professionals. The emphasis is on strong values and messages conveyed through sport: respect for opponents, coaches and equipment, and harnessing energy for a project. As well as playing sport, the association also offers support for competition, funding for professional training and an introduction to umpiring.

Source: ville-torcy.fr

Participatory creation of a green mosaic wall

Kaleïdoskopia, Villa Mais d'Ici, Aubervilliers

With a name that puns in French on "Villa Medici", the Villa Mais d'Ici ("Villa But From Here") is a creative space on a wasteland in Aubervilliers, just north of Paris, in the heart of the Quatre Chemins district. It hosts short- and long-term artists in residence from all disciplines: theatre companies, visual artists, puppeteers, photographers, sound designers, street arts groups, etc. Events open to all, in particular local residents, are held here throughout the year. Some of the artists in residence carry out artistic and participatory projects in the district. In September 2022, a collective called Les Allumeur.e.s worked for several months on the creation of a life-size mosaic with vegetation on the Villa's perimeter wall alongside inhabitants of Aubervilliers, elderly people from an old-age home, unaccompanied young foreign minors from an organisation called Les Midis du Mie and groups from an organisation called 4Chem1 Evolution, which was founded in 2006 on the initiative of local residents with the aim of creating social links by implementing educational and civic projects in the Quatre Chemins district and the town of Pantin.

Source: villamaisdici.org

The ABS+R approach

Romainville

"Everyone, local residents in particular, has to be able to take responsibility for social issues and solidarity, as part of the continuity of public policies. In short, we need to put the issue of solidarity back at the heart of the village, and not just in the political arena of the town hall. That's why we devised the ABS+R approach, which consists of analysing the local resources that everyone can appropriate and use in a positive way, mirroring their needs. It's an approach based on outreach, where we go out and find people where they are, whoever they are (young people, the elderly, pharmacists, drug dealers, etc.), to hear their vision of the area in which they live. For example, in Romainville, in the outskirts of Paris, there is a strong social cohesion issue linked to the arrival of new affluent populations, the disadvantaged populations who have historically lived in the area, and new developments that are planned, such as the metro. To address this, we analysed the 'village spirit' as a resource and how it could provide reassurance for people, and also be used to come up with new projects." Sébastien Poulet-Goffard, CEO of La Compagnie Générale des Autres.

Source: La Compagnie Générale des Autres

Source: La Compagnie Générale des Autres

La Compagnie Générale des Autres

Rêve Général Project, Bondy

"We wanted to base this project on the dreams and desires of the residents, rather than on the difficulties they face. We wanted to promote what was working and build on it, or encourage new projects, on the scale of a housing estate in a rather isolated neighbourhood. We worked in three stages. We started off by listening and asking questions. Then we involved shopkeepers, landlords and residents. Unusual links were forged, such as a partnership with a landlord and an artist, and we found innovative methods, including a walk around the city. The third stage was to give impetus to the action by supporting the players involved. With hindsight, the city scenarios we were looking for resembled those of a relational city, favouring conviviality, made up of green spaces, where access to information is simple, etc. Some of the initiatives put in place during this second phase included a solidarity food truck serving 'hanging chickens', a short film about the neighbourhood and the promotion of social work as a profession for young people. Making the relational city a joint project would make it possible to apply this type of approach and method over the long term rather than on an ad hoc basis. Thinking about the relational city also means thinking about issues in a decompartmentalised, cross-disciplinary way." Estelle Bottereau, Co-founder of La Compagnie Générale des Autres.

Working with and for residents

The past decade has seen a strong trend towards greater involvement and a more user-friendly approach to urban projects. Public and private players are tending to go beyond regulatory consultation and engage more closely with users and residents. Whether through collaborative worksites, architectural residencies, co-design workshops or participatory budgets, these growing participatory practices reflect a desire to rethink the city-building process and involve local residents, seen as experts in their day-to-day lives, alongside the traditional players involved in projects (public or private contracting authorities, consulting engineers, etc.).

Citizen participation in real estate and urban projects

The methods and objectives of citizen participation vary according to the different phases of a project. The table below summarises how users are involved in different phases of a project:

©Compagnie Générale des Autres

• CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Programming

Engineering studies

Construction site   Project Timeline

Who is in contact with users?
Contracting authority (possibly with help from contracting authority support)

What is the role of the users?
· They contribute their local expertise
· They take part in the diagnostic process

Should residents be included at this point?

⊕ ⊕ ⊕

Who is in contact with users?
Consulting engineer (possibly with help from user expertise support)

What is the role of the users?
· They provide the project with experience of uses
· They give their opinion of the proposed plans and scenarios

Should residents be included at this point?
If the residents are known (in the case of participative housing)

⊕ ⊕

If the residents are unknown

⊖

Who is in contact with users?
Consulting engineer (possibly with help from user expertise support)

What is the role of the users?
· They test and trial uses
· They create a collective memory of the place

Should residents be included at this point?
In the case of a participative construction site

⊕ ⊕ ⊕

In the case of awareness-raising

⊕ ⊕

Source: Bunel, 2018

3. URBAN PLANNING THAT PROMOTES *Social links*

Programming phase: collaborative diagnostics

In the planning phase, the users' role is to share their local expertise and take part in drawing up a diagnosis. Various tools can be used: mind maps, sensitive maps, walks in the city, etc. Informal meetings can also be organised to gather a variety of opinions, especially from people who are less familiar with traditional consultation processes, such as door-to-door campaigns, discussion sessions outside schools or public facilities, and installation of public booths.

Engineering study phase: co-design

The contracting authority/consultant engineering team can involve future users/residents of the project in the design of certain elements of the project.

Construction phase: co-construction

Participatory approaches can also be employed in the construction phase. Doing this creates new opportunities for social interaction. Co-construction can take several forms:

- **Collective or participative construction sites:** these are sites where people, usually volunteers and non-professionals, work together. The main goals are working together, getting involved in a common project, sharing, etc.

- **Occupational integration construction sites:** projects carried out by an occupational integration structure for unemployed people facing social and professional difficulties. The main priority is to help people integrate into the working world.

- **Training construction sites:** sites where trainees are involved in the work. The objective is for trainees to be able to apply the knowledge they have acquired on a professional site.

©Simon Harvey

©Simon Harvey

Event "Meet the Contractor", Tustin Estate, London, September 2022. ©Simon Harvey

A masterplan designed with and for the community
Tustin Estate, London, UK
Linkcity UK

The project to restructure the Tustin Estate in Southwark, central London, a residential development dating from the 1960s, is an example of an ambitious co-design approach. To engage with the local community, a project group of residents was formed. Their role was to participate in the project design and evaluation process. As a result of the project group's involvement, a vote was held among residents to approve the redesign of the housing estate and the addition of new council housing. In 2021, Linkcity, Bouygues Construction's property development subsidiary, was selected to develop the project. To promote open communication throughout the entire project, Linkcity hosts weekly meetings with residents, in partnership with Southwark Council. Topics that come up for discussion can include general and more specific information about the project, the co-designing of certain elements, and instructive workshops about the construction and site development. Sometimes the meetings just consist of celebrations of seasonal events, bringing the whole community together.

Inspiration

Source: Linkcity

The La Maillerie construction site
Lille, France
Linkcity

On the La Maillerie project, 14,000 hours of work placements were carried out in partnership with the Job Centre, work placement companies and their subcontracting partners.

©Arnaud Février

Focus

A new approach to co-creating public spaces with local residents: placemaking

This approach to designing public spaces was created in 1975 by the American urban planner Fred Kent, founder of the "Project for Public Spaces" organisation. Based on the pioneering ideas of Jane Jacobs and Holly Whyte, it aims to create or improve public spaces by actively involving groups of residents, and involves proposing one-off interventions that can be swiftly tested. There are 4 stages to implementing a "placemaking" approach:

- **Framing the project:** defining the area and identifying the stakeholders

- **Consultation and co-construction workshop** to establish a shared vision of the area

- **Translating the vision into a functional programme** and short-term experimentation

- **Implementing the project over the long term:** ongoing assessment of experiments, adapting and collectively implementing the functional programme.

Emergence of new players to support community participation

More and more public and private players are experimenting with new models to involve users, residents and local players in urban and architectural projects.

Sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, artists, specialists in political science and collaborative initiatives are joining the teams of professionals involved in urban design. Practitioners of new fields, such as specialists in user expertise, are emerging. The idea is to move away from a vertical model of city building towards one that seeks to work with and for local residents, with the aim of proposing projects that are more contextual, more sustainable and more equitable.

Focus

Support in user expertise

"The emergence and proliferation of projects involving end-users reflects the current cultural shift towards putting users back at the heart of property and urban development projects. Support in user expertise is a multi-faceted approach, comprising methods and professional missions. It can be defined as a range of professional activities and tasks aimed at integrating the needs and aspirations of users and involving them in certain choices/decisions about the built environment, from the 'upstream strategy' phase through to operations and even redevelopment." (Récipro-Cité, 2020)

#3

©Alain Smilo

An artistic approach combining social links and on-site creation

Nanterre Cœur Université, France

Bouygues Immobilier

Between 2015 and 2020, an artistic project supported by the City of Nanterre and the Paris La Défense public development agency was installed in the midst of the Nanterre Cœur University development site. Financed by Urbanera Bouygues Immobilier, designed and coordinated by Cultiver la Ville, the initiative involved reaching out to local residents: workshops with school children, social centres and local organisations; on-site production; competition to select permanent works; exchanges with artists between the design and production of the works; on-site shows; urban walks; festive inaugurations of the works, etc. The idea was to involve local residents in the creation of on-site works, with the objective of "ensuring that something happens on the site, that life takes hold in the future district, and that residents take ownership of these surfaces and volumes, this landscape and these places." (Bouygues Immobilier, Urbanera, 2020)

"

Art and culture make it possible to approach the urban fabric as a living entity and to better integrate these major projects into their local area."

"

Claire Laurence
Cultiver la ville ("Cultivating the City")

©Alain Smilo

©Pascal Osten

Promoting experimentation

Temporary projects through "transitional" urban planning, or lighter urban projects through tactical urban planning, make it possible to experiment and adjust proposals based on the feedback of residents.

Temporary use

Temporary use has been developing over the last ten years and is a practice that aims to temporarily revitalise local communities on unoccupied sites or buildings. It consists in making existing sites in transition available to organisations that develop activities or housing there. Several objectives can be pursued depending on the type of space:

- **Adding value to low-quality urban spaces** with no current project

- **Activating a newly urbanised project** through its communal areas and creating a sense of ownership among its users

- **Testing out different uses,** prototyping types of street furniture and layout scenarios ahead of long-term urban projects

- **Promoting and developing derelict areas** or unique sites with high potential

Research on the subject points to the value that temporary urban planning creates: economic gain for owners, a dynamic urban environment for local authorities, low-cost premises and a creative environment for residents, and support for community initiatives for partner associations. (Approche.s!, 2021)

As transitional urban planning is increasingly embraced by the traditional players in the urban fabric, it is evolving into "prefiguration urban planning". Its aim is to present and test future uses for upcoming housing programmes and public spaces. As a result, transitional urbanism gives "a new dimension to temporary uses by enabling it to influence the future of the place it occupies, even after its activity has ended." (Allain, 2021)

Tactical urban planning

Tactical urban planning is an approach to urban planning that makes it possible to implement targeted, small-scale interventions to improve neighbourhood life in a short space of time. These initiatives can also be used to try out new facilities that could be installed over the long term.

©Carole Bertaux

Testing a project's financial viability
The Roof, Rennes (France)
Linkcity

In 2017, Linkcity, Bouygues Construction's property development subsidiary, was chosen by the university hospital, the Brittany Public Land Authority (Etablissement Public Foncier de Bretagne - EPFB) and the city of Rennes to lead a redevelopment of the Hôtel Dieu hospital site in Rennes with its architectural and urban planning partners ANMA and ALL. An astute phasing plan enabled The Roof Rennes and Origines to open a third place from the design stage of the project, and for the duration of the works. This transitional urban planning proposal enabled The Roof Rennes and Origines to test and find the right financial balance in their three activities (microbrewing, catering, climbing) before the final opening of the venue.

©Yes We Camp

Creating places to create connections
Yes We Camp

Yes We Camp is a French non-profit organisation that specialises in transforming derelict urban spaces into creative, convivial places. Working with artists, citizens and other local players, the organisation gives a new lease of life to abandoned, vacant or transitional urban spaces. Their goal is for the residents who use these spaces on a daily basis to become "co-producers" of everyday services.

Focus

Source: vivrelemarais.typepad.fr

Summer terraces: an example of tactical urban planning

During the Covid-19 pandemic, certain regulations relating to restaurant were eased (particularly in cities such as Paris and New York). As it was forbidden to eat indoors, restaurants were able to set up chairs and tables on pavements, but also in parking spaces, substantially extending the functional area of the pavement. Given the success of temporary terraces, Paris City Council amended the regulations governing stalls and terraces in June 2021, with the introduction of summer terraces for businesses operating from April 1 to October 31.

Inspiration

Source: archdaily.cl

Using street art to improve road safety
Rionegro, Colombia

Redesigning streets using art helps to improve safety and revitalise public spaces. This approach maximises results through actions that are limited, participative, educational and inexpensive. (OTT, 2022)

Focus

Temporary, transitional, ephemeral urban planning...

In its *Practical Guide to Transitional Planning,* the French urban planning practice Le Cabanon Vertical explains the differences between these terms:

- **'temporary' development** is a project designed to temporarily accommodate everyday practices and uses within a defined period of the urban development project, without necessarily affecting the rest of the project.

- **'Transitional'** suggests a sense of passing from one state to another. Transitional action has an interim meaning, allowing uses to be tested before definitive development or before the construction of the city that follows.

- **'Ephemeral'** can refer to an initiative that contributes to transforming and questioning the city by organising events and festive activities in public spaces."

Inspiration
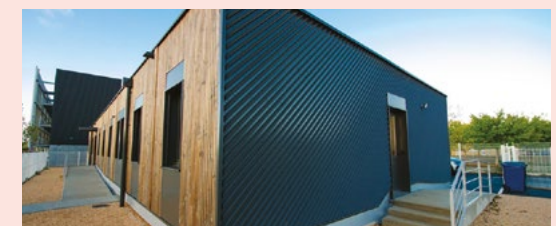
Source: Selvea

The Toits Temporaires Urbains ("Temporary Urban Roofs") project

Developed by the Banque des Territoires, SNCF Immobilier, ICF Habitat and the Seine-Saint-Denis departmental council, has been set up to implement a sustainable construction solution that can be adapted to meet housing, short-term accommodation and professional and community activity needs on land that is available on a temporary basis.

Urban commons, a lever to rethink shared and inclusive cities

For the past few years, the concept of "commons" has been making its mark in the field of urban development, with the aim of providing solutions where certain social needs are not being, or are poorly, met.

Urban commons provide local responses to a number of contemporary urban issues: "facilitating access to land and property, encouraging shared urban production, promoting joint management of resources that need to be preserved (fertile land, areas of biodiversity, open spaces, etc.), suggesting ways of making the ecological transition and strengthening social ties through collective action by local residents." (Diguet, 2019)

The rise of the "urban commons" reflects a growing interest in producing, managing and sharing tangible and intangible resources in a collaborative and open way, and testifies to an evolution towards "more collective, more participative" ways of developing and managing territorial resources, in which stakeholders, and in particular users, are involved. (Kebir & Wallet, 2021) For urban planner Céline Diguet, the creation of commons is part of a general movement to reappropriate space in order to rethink shared and inclusive cities.

Focus

So, what exactly are "commons"?

In line with the ideas of American economist Elinor Ostrom, awarded the Nobel Prize in 2009 for her work on the subject, commons are generally defined as a shared resource belonging to a community of users, who determine the rules for using it and ensuring its long-term preservation. These can be defined as "material or immaterial resources, public or private, which we collectively decide should be accessible and/or managed collectively, for the common good." (Giraud and Renouard, 2012)

There are two underlying rationales behind the management of "commons":

• The rules used to manage a resource considered to be commons are determined by the people who use it;

• The resource itself is managed by its users.

> " Commons are now part of a general movement to reappropriate space in order to rethink shared and inclusive cities.
> ""

Cécile Diguet
Urban planner

Inspiration

A new collaborative governance model

Société coopérative d'intérêt collectif (SCIC), France

The SCIC is a private, public-interest company that brings together individuals and legal entities around a common project combining economic efficiency, local development and social utility. To operate, the SCIC must be composed of employees, beneficiaries or users, and a third stakeholder (a non-profit organisation, investor, public authority, etc.). All members have equal voting rights at SCIC general meetings, regardless of the amount of capital they hold. Together, the partners decide on strategic directions and major investments.

Inspirations

Source: basecommune.com

A socially responsible ground-floor property company

Base Commune, France

Base Commune is a property company that focuses on the development of ground floor premises to counter urban decline and property speculation. It buys premises on the ground floor of buildings in order to develop activities that have a social impact and/or are of local benefit. The purpose of these ground floors is to be truly mixed-use spaces, open to the neighbourhood and accessible to a wide range of activities: social economy businesses, independent shops, services, crafts, small facilities, cultural activities, community work, etc. These are all activities with a strong local impact, but which are excluded from the traditional property market because of the cost of property. That's why Base Commune offers premises that are accessible via a system of graduated and incremental rents to enable these activities to set up permanently in the city. Base Commune's mission is to transform ground floors into real urban commons.

Neighbourhood centres, a public-citizen partnership

Cascina Roccafranca, Turin, Italy

The Cascina Roccafranca is one of 18 neighbourhood centres set up in Turin in the late 2000s. Created as part of a European project, these centres were intended to regenerate neighbourhoods by encouraging citizen participation. Designed as "empty boxes", the spaces were intended to bring together and enable the development of initiatives led by local players and residents. The neighbourhood centres are based on a model of public-citizen co-sponsorship, with the local authority of Turin providing the building, staff and some services, and the partner organisations contributing their ideas, projects and availability. Inaugurated in 2007, the Cascina Roccafranca offers 2,500 m² of space where people can meet, take part in activities, develop projects and enjoy social events. It offers a wide range of activities and services, including a restaurant and café, a children's area, cultural and recreational activities, and a programme of courses and workshops.

Cascina Roccafranca, Turin, Italy - Source: i0.wp.com

Creation of convivial public spaces

Public spaces with a sense of calm

Although public spaces were historically places where people connected, the rise of cars in the city has considerably reduced these urban practices. Between 1950 and 1975, the number of cars in European cities grew at an average rate of 10% per year. (HERAN, 2020)

For several decades now, cities have been trying to achieve a better balance in the way public space is used. Priority has been given to public transport, and more recently to cyclists and pedestrians.

> Over the last few decades, towns and cities have been looking to restore a balance in how public space is used, with the aim of creating a calmer city.

Focus

Peaceful public spaces

Towns that foster conviviality are towns where public spaces are designed to be pleasant places to meet. These are cities that encourage soft mobility, where people can walk, stop and chat, meet new people and feel safe. They reflect the principles of the "peaceful cities" concept, which aims to ensure the harmonious cohabitation of users, particularly through the use of environmentally-friendly modes of transport.

The first efforts to reduce car traffic in cities date back to the early 1970s in Northern Europe and Germany. The desire to restrict access to car traffic can take several forms. In some Northern European cities, it is a comprehensive strategy that discourages all transit through the extended city centre, reversing the hierarchy of modes of transport, lowering speeds and promoting journeys on foot and by bicycle. In other contexts, quiet neighbourhoods revive micro-centres, allowing the emergence or return of high street shops and places to live. Barcelona, for example, has developed a super-block strategy to encourage neighbourhood life in a renovated environment. Within these blocks, public areas are redesigned for residents' enjoyment and motorised vehicles are excluded, with the exception of local residents and deliveries.

©Claire Meunier

©Claire Meunier

Inspiration

Source: geoconfluences.ens-lyon

Car-free neighbourhoods
"Superblocks": Barcelona

In Barcelona, superblocks have been introduced as part of the urban mobility plan. Seen as an innovative way of reconsidering the use of urban space and promoting sustainable mobility in dense urban areas, the aim of these blocks is to encourage a more sustainable city model, with more user-friendly public spaces. The idea is to limit traffic within these superblocks to 10km/h, and to restrict traffic to residents, emergency services and delivery vehicles only. The creation of these blocks has encouraged the development of public squares, cultural spaces, café terraces, children's play areas, gardens, benches and other spaces where people can meet, create social links and enjoy the city. With six superblocks already in Barcelona, the city council is already working on 11 new projects over the next few years.

Focus

Source: www.lhaylesroses.fr

The role of nature in the city

The importance attached to nature in urban environments is not only motivated by ecological imperatives, but also by the fact that these green spaces or cooling areas are ideal places to meet people, take part in recreational activities or practise sport. Green spaces, parks, communal gardens, streets planted with trees and flowers play an essential role in strengthening the social fabric by providing communal areas where residents can go for walks, meet up and take part in various community activities.

Public spaces for all

Theoretically, public spaces are places open to all, whatever their gender, age, sexual orientation, ability or ethnic origin. Everyone should be able to use them safely and comfortably, and enjoy pleasant moments.

Yet many studies show that certain categories of people experience difficulties in accessing the city as a result of discrimination and exclusion. These include – a non-exhaustive list – people with disabilities, the very elderly, children, the economically vulnerable, women, the LGBTQIA+ community, the very ill and, in some cases, people of foreign origin. (Impact Tank, 2023)

Age-related inequalities raise urban planning issues

The World Health Organization's "Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities" is committed to addressing the needs of older residents to improve their daily quality of life. The "Child-Friendly Cities" programme launched worldwide in 1996 by UNICEF has been implemented by more than 3,000 cities in 57 countries. The aim is to make towns and cities more pleasant and safer for everyone, whatever their age. This has led to numerous initiatives:

• Reducing traffic speed

• Closing certain streets to traffic

• Involving children in designing the new area

• Allowing more outdoor play by having more grassy areas in the street

• Increasing the width of pavements

• Installing street furniture that encourages play

Inspiration
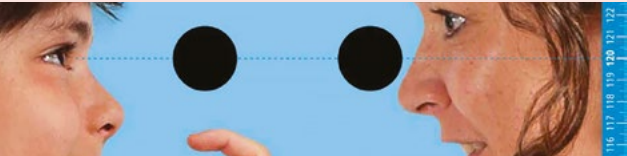
At child's eye-level

"Les yeux à 1,20m", Basel, Switzerland

The Development Department of the Canton and City of Basel, Switzerland, has developed a tool called "Eye-height: 1.20m" in collaboration with various other departments. This tool is designed to promote child-friendly urban development.

Inspiration

Shared play areas
Mont-Saint-Aignan, France
Linkcity

The aim of the project is to create a lively, bustling family neighbourhood. The housing estate is surrounded by 8,300m² of landscaped green spaces open to all, with play areas, shared gardens and pathways. Two renovated disused barns also house a Montessori-inspired micro-crèche and an eco-responsible third-party centre, the SCIC "Le Producteur Local", a short-distance producers' shop and laboratory for intergenerational cookery classes.

©Claire Meunier

Focus

"Play strips", an urban development tool for an intergenerational city

The concept of "play strips" is an urban planning tool designed to bring play as close as possible to the pathways, moving away from the logic of isolating in order to protect. "The play strip is not a separate space reserved for play, as traditional play areas can be. It can grow anywhere in the city, because it's made up of a succession of very simple play elements that can be shared with furniture or equipment that could very well also have other uses." (Lavadhino, 2022)

Gender and urban planning

The question of gender inequality raises urban planning issues, with the observation that until recently, cities have been designed and developed "by and for men." (Raibaud, 2017) As a result, cities "tend to reflect traditional gender roles and function better for heterosexual, able-bodied and cisgender men than for women, girls, gender minorities and people with disabilities." (Terraza, 2020).

"Gender policies concern all the thematic policies implemented by local and regional authorities: urban planning, mobility management, access to cultural and sports services, the use made of public spaces, pedestrian traffic in particular, in a quest for a feeling of safety and of 'living together well'. This quest for equality applies as much to solidarity and social cohesion policies as it does to urban and regional planning policies". (City of Paris, 2023)

The City of Paris published a Guide on Gender and Public Space in 2023, setting out 45 key points organised along the following five themes: move freely; occupy the space; be present and visible; feel safe; participate.

Focus

What is inclusive urban planning?

"The notion of inclusion gradually emerged in the 2000s as a way of rethinking the city, recognising the categories of individuals who make up society and those who have difficulty accessing the city because of discrimination and exclusion, such as people with disabilities or the very elderly, children or highly disadvantaged people." (Impact Tank, 2023)

Various levers can be used to create public spaces where everyone feels safe and comfortable. As indicated in the City of Paris's Guide on Gender and Public Space published in 2023, making public space more welcoming to all means addressing two distinct aspects:

• **the design and planning of urban space,** with the installation of street furniture and amenities (e.g. seating, toilets, children's games, apparatus, appropriate night-time lighting, etc.)

• **how public space is used** (games, sports, meeting people, etc.) and regulated (e.g. dealing with street harassment) or how women are represented in the public space (art, advertising, etc.) and the naming of streets, squares, etc.

Inspiration

The Gehl Institute
New York, USA

The Gehl Institute, a New York-based NGO, has devised and published a reference framework to create and monitor inclusive spaces. This tool is based on four guiding principles:

• **knowledge of the health and social context** of the public space

• **implementing inclusive planning processes**

• **inclusive design and planning** to promote good health for all

• **maintenance of the space,** encouraging local communities to make it their own and to develop it further

Pleasure, amenities, safety

To provide inspiration and encourage a cross-disciplinary approach, the Institut Paris Région has drawn up a list of ten "universes of conviviality" with associated "objects of conviviality" that help to create more pleasant spaces by "[bringing] entertainment and culture, beauty and colour" and "[encouraging] meetings and gatherings of friends, family and lovers."

The universes of conviviality impact on the living environment and the well-being of the public: these include art, trade, events, functionality, active mobility, nature, digital technology, appeal to the senses, sport and games, and sharing. In each of the ten areas, there are a number of objects of conviviality. Some of these are concrete objects (tables, toilets, lighting, fountains, mobile shops, bicycle lanes, etc.), while others are services, networks or events (digital applications, festivals, street performances, etc.). Each object relates to a use from the public's point of view and to a mode of intervention from the local authority's point of view.

☺ The universes of conviviality impact on the living environment and the well-being of the public

Source: LEROI, P. (2019)

Healthy Streets indicators by Lucy Saunders

Healthy Streets is a method created in 2018 by Lucy Sanders, a specialist in public health, urban planning and mobility. This approach seeks to improve the existing conditions of public spaces through ten indicators and can be applied anywhere in the world. Focusing primarily on health, they are quality of life indicators for public spaces that foster social cohesion and conviviality.

Source: Brussels Mobility, inspired by Lucy Saunders, 2019

Focus

Active design to stimulate activity and local life in public spaces

Active design involves designing public spaces to bring physical activity and sport closer to those who are the most distant from it. This approach enables people to reclaim public space, promoting accessibility and a mix of uses. It is also an opportunity to celebrate existing heritage, encourage frugal design, propose playful projects, etc.

©Claire Meunier

Pedestrian crossing · Exhibition · Wi-fi · Picnic · Foraging · Feedback · Smart street furniture · Feedback · Street furniture · Digital signage · Skate park · Street · Sports hall · Site · Bike lanes · Bins · Pedalos · Street art · Toilets · Musical instruments · Ice rink · Chairs · Signage · Equipment · Cash machine · Wildlife · Fun furniture · Recycling · Skate park · Displays · Beach · Construction site · Pedestrian zones · Container · Fountain · Table · Box · Niche · Lighting · Plantation · Water · Hut · Bike repair · Wasteland · Boat · **OBJECTS** · Water sprinkler · Tree · Open doors · Temporary shop · Circus · Games · Party · Water mist · Carpooling · Route · Car sharing · Fares · Playground · Massage · Games table · Canoe · Works · Event · Bench · Bike parking · Dance · Business · Garden · Festival · Market · Application · Short circuit · Café · Garden · Cinema · Getting warm · Library · Fair · Garden shed · Street furniture · Roads · Cooling down · Getting around · Toy library · Network · Digital application · Authorisation · Reassurance · Creating · Relaxing · Places · Signage · Being clean · Keeping informed · Sharing · Events · **METHODS OF INTERVENTION** · Getting around · Preserving · Looking · Exchanging · **USES** · Eating out · Works of art · Real estate · Citizen initiative · Connecting · Drinking · Discovery · Services · Pop-up venues · Resting · Listening/silence · Playing · Gardening · Portable equipment

Source: LEROI, P. (2019)

Seven models of the relational city

Sonia Lavadinho, Pascal Le Brun-Cordier, Yves Winkin

Sonia Lavadinho, Pascal Le Brun-Cordier and Yves Winkin have identified seven ideal-type figures that constitute the relational city.

1. The City of Encounters "has a historic centre, a high street with shops, markets, terraces, bustling streets where you bump into people you know."

2. The City of the Outdoors "puts a strong emphasis on green and blue spaces. It provides many opportunities to move your body, relax and make direct contact with the living world in the city."

3. The City that is Friendly to All Generations "knows how to allow all generations to live together without ever resorting to zoning, which would isolate children, teenagers or the elderly in places that are exclusively reserved for them."

4. The City of Doing and Third Party Solidarity "gives itself the time and space to evolve: it grows organically, humbly from the bottom up, spontaneously according to the desires expressed by the inhabitants, and manages to recycle the city of yesterday by proposing alternative narratives for the city of tomorrow."

5. The City of Surprise "calls on artists to surprise us at every moment by transforming the banality of everyday life into moments of joy and wonder that we are glad to share with our loved ones."

6. The City of Food and Drink "offers ample opportunities to share a friendly moment of eating and drinking in the public space, freely, independently and spontaneously."

7. The City of Free Time "offers citizens an opportunity to explore new forms of interaction by sharing their diaries and resynchronising their rhythms with those of their immediate environment, their neighbourhood and, more broadly, the life of the city."

The aim is to replace the functional paradigm inherited from the twentieth century with the new relational paradigm to shape the cities of the twenty-first century. (Lavadhino, Le Brun-Cordier, Winkin, 2022)

Focus

Creating the "Village Square" in the city

Bouygues Construction, Linkcity,

Alain Bourdin (sociologist)

The "Village Square" approach explores what makes a town centre, beyond the simple process of concentrating shops and services. The idea is to respond to a strong demand for proximity, which is not always met by traditional or contemporary forms. Based on the analysis of squares or central districts in several European countries (Germany, Belgium, France) selected for their varied typologies (historic centres with a high heritage value, small historic towns, classic central squares or streets built recently, squares or groups of squares in recent developments that take account of the context or the urban problems to be addressed, public space developments around a major retail park, recent squares and central districts in suburban areas, squares with a strong leisure or recreational dimension), the sociologist identified the ingredients for a successful "village square" as a central place in the city. Researchers and Linkcity's operational teams have distilled them into ten recommendations:

- Think about mobility, but not just in terms of flows
- Create urban comfort and master the design of ambiance
- Give purpose
- Find out more about uses. Anticipate their possible diversity
- Know how to use transitional urban planning, a good tool that doesn't work miracles
- Know how to work with artists
- Work with finesse, even in huge spaces: the value of the tiny, almost insignificant detail
- Coordinate expertise (a major challenge)
- Engage stakeholders and favour long-term commitments
- Impose a realistic project mode in design

Working with an ecosystem of local stakeholders

Designing real estate and urban projects that meet the needs of all residents means renewing links with an ecosystem of local players. Workers specialising in gender issues, experts on the place of children in the city, groups helping vulnerable people (the homeless, migrants, etc.) are increasingly involved in the urban design process. With their in-depth knowledge of the local situation, these players are expected to play a leading role in the same way as the more traditional participants (town planners, developers, architects, etc.).

Inspiration

Collaboration among city makers

La Compagnie Générale des Autres (CGA)

This non-profit organisation fosters cooperation between players to promote local solidarity. It helps to strengthen local solidarity ecosystems by linking players and organisations in vulnerable areas. It creates opportunities for professionals to work together to improve their practices and respond more effectively to social needs.

> "
> Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.
> "

Jane Jacobs
The Death and Life of Great American Cities

> "
> We need to encourage dialogue and win-win cooperation if the relational city is to be a reality. The social, facilitation and social engineering sectors must be able to mix and be recognised in the same way as those who build functional cities. Social ties need to be nurtured: building floors and roofs that encourage cooperation, such as cooperative supermarkets or shared rooftop gardens; realistic socio-economic models based on the exchange of values. New professions, such as community organisers (inspired by Quebec) will also need to be developed. Ultimately, viable economic models, sustainable social engineering and a focus on transition are surely the keys to creating the city we all want.
> "

Rudy Pignot-Malapert
Co-founder CGA

Inspiration

©Arnaud Février

Co-constructing with local stakeholders

La Maillerie, Villeneuve d'Ascq and Croix, France

Linkcity

La Maillerie, which straddles the towns of Villeneuve d'Ascq and Croix in northern France, is the setting for a new way of living by creating a 10-hectare city district and placing the uses and needs of future residents at the heart of the construction process. The neighbourhood has been designed as a place to live, create social links and combine cultural, social and community initiatives with commitments to biodiversity, the circular economy and soft mobility. Neighbourhood life is governed by a Collective Interest Cooperative Company (SCIC), which currently has around twenty members. This body was put to good use by the property developers, who have provided it with premises enabling it to run the neighbourhood and provide services for residents and users: a meeting and reception area, a shared Airbnb apartment, a community hall and commercial premises for shops/activities voted for by the residents.

WORKING WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS AND ASSOCIATIONS
SERVING MORE APPROPRIATE, MORE SHARED, MORE COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE

A vibrant network of organisations

- Coin de Terre (Piece of land)
- Zerm, Fibr&Co, Resale shop The Breeze Block, Educational Farm of Lapwings
- Essor Espoir (Rise Hope)
- La Belle Fiole (The Beautiful Vial)
- ABEJ Solidarity
- Association of former employees of 3 Suisses

Objective: to unite and create a community

Dialogue with local residents

- The Maillerie Gazette
- 3D model app on the AppStore or PlayStore
- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Call for project from local residents
- Evening meetings for all audiences "fries and beers"
- Toll-free number
- Open house Wednesdays
- Co-design workshops

Objective: ensure urban and social cohesion

Involvement of key stakeholders

- Dance School students
- Students of the Douai "Ecole des Mines"
- ESMode students
- Schoolchildren from the Jean Jaurès school
- Architecture School students

Objective: anticipate the city of tomorrow

> " I see social innovation as providing new solutions to old problems. "

©Arnaud Février

©Arnaud Février

We listen to them!
INTERVIEW

👁

Tarik Ghezali
Expert in social innovation, joint founder of La Fabrique du Nous, Marseille Solutions, Mouvement des Entrepreneurs Sociaux and Le Labo de l'ESS

Marseille, France

How would you define social innovation and why is it important for our cities and regions?

T.G. I see social innovation as providing new solutions to old problems. For the past 20 years, I've been committed to driving social innovation on the ground and in public policies. Three years ago, Nathalie Gatellier and I set up La Fabrique du Nous, which is an endowment fund intended to re-establish social links: bringing together people who are "not the same", young and old, homeless and the socially integrated, people from working-class neighbourhoods and fashionable town centres, and so on. And doing so through original projects, implemented with a wide range of partners (social economy, public, businesses, etc.).

With La Fabrique du Nous, you're aiming to create social links between people from different backgrounds. What's the reason?

T.G. The sense of mistrust between people has never been so high and it's constantly growing (+17 points over 5 years, see Fraternity Barometer 2024), especially between people who are not alike. Social division leads to violence in the medium term: we have got to start learning to co-exist, or we're doomed to keep getting in each other's way! The name "La Fabrique du Nous" refers to "creating Us" through encounters and initiatives. What's more, a city with more intense human relations is a city that is more confident, more peaceful, more creative and richer in opportunities for everyone too!

You mention "the importance of imagining good stories to tell and share". How does creating a story encourage social interaction?

T.G. In all our projects, we try to find a "good story to tell", i.e. one that is simple, motivating and unique, capable of drawing energies together and releasing them. And to create emotion too: what moves you, motivates you! But a good story is not enough. We also seek to create the conditions for this story to come to fruition, by finding the right operator, the right partners and the necessary resources…

What obstacles might you encounter when working on your projects?

T.G. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is fear, fear of others and fear that things won't work out. When it comes to human beings, there's a lot of complacency and self-censorship: "Come on, don't be naive, man is a wolf to his fellow man!" We say yes, it's true, it can happen, but "Man can also be a fellow to his fellow man"! Under the right conditions. What we're trying to do is create the right framework to allow this to happen and unleash people's fraternal energy. And ultimately, to simply allow them to be human…

Can you give us an example of a successful initiative that has helped build social links?

T.G. One example of a project that is working well is Eau-rizon, which shows our ambition. Many kids in the working-class neighbourhoods of Marseille can't swim, even though they live right by the sea.[1] This leads to frustration and drowning. It also stops these young people from having access to many jobs linked to the sea economy. As there aren't enough public swimming pools in the area to teach young people to swim, we thought: there are people who have swimming pools in their homes, so we offered to open their pools to these young people so that they could learn to swim with lifeguards who are paid as part of the project.[2] The aim is both to teach them to swim and to establish a connection between two worlds that are very far apart. It's a way of getting to know each other and overcoming prejudices about others. In this case, it's not a local social link, it's more of a social link on the scale of a city that is very fragmented, very segregated… and it works! With no issues, but with lots of great encounters.

What are the factors that have made it successful?

T.G. Above all, we had to believe that it was possible! A lot of people told us we were crazy and that it would never work… Then we had to find the right partners, from a wide range of backgrounds, and be meticulous in carrying out the project. We're lucky that the project is being supported by a superb Marseilles-based organisation, Contact Club, which is leading the project brilliantly. It's also a cheap to run using modest resources: the "infrastructure" is already there (i.e. people's private swimming pools), and is being made available free of charge. Fraternal commitment and sharing are at the heart of this project.

What are your medium-term goals? Where so you go from here?

T.G. We plan to keep increasing the number of projects of this type (around ten to date, a hundred or so by 2030). But our dream is to try and create a systemic dynamic in an area, with all these players building links, and to act as a catalyst for a kind of "demonstrator" area for "living well together".

Our aim is to involve in the action 10% of the local population, in all its diversity: students, the elderly, managers, workers, the disabled, refugees… It's at the local level, i.e. in the area where we live, that we can make a difference. That's where the results can be visible and contagious.

And also with a vision of the social link that is recognised as a genuine investment in the future, in the same way as the hydrogen-powered aircraft or metropolitan rapid transit systems, which benefit from substantial public funding… And also with a measurable "return on investment" in the social link: in costs avoided (health, social, safety), in gains in purchasing power, and in enhanced quality of life.

1. In Marseille's priority areas, two out of three school children are unable to swim. (Interview with Tarik Ghezali, 2024)

2. 10 hours of lessons over 5 weeks. (Interview with Ghezali, 2024)

© Eauorizon

© Eau-rizon

> "
> Our dream is to try and create a systemic dynamic in an area, with all these players building links.
> "

How third places catalyse social links

By offering places to meet, create, exchange ideas, forge bonds and encourage the emergence of new projects, third places are catalysts for social links.

What exactly are "third places"?

The expression "third place" was coined by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1989 in his book *The Great Good Place.* Oldenburg devised the notion by opposing it to the home, considered to be the "first place", and the traditional workplace, "the second place".

The concept of "third places" first appeared in the United States in 1989, when it was used by the sociologist Ray Oldenburg in a book titled *The Great Good Place* to define hybrid places in the city. It was gradually adopted from the 2010s onwards to refer to meeting and practice spaces, such as coworking spaces and fab labs, which encourage hybridisation. Third places can be defined as "facilitators" or "accelerators of community initiatives". The very essence of third places is that they bring different people together to carry out different activities.

A third place can take different forms. Examples include:

- Fab lab (manufacturing laboratory)
- Makerspace (digital manufacturing workshop), Social centre
- Coworking space (shared workspace)
- Microfolie (digital museum)
- Cultural brownfield (former industrial brownfield)
- Local factory
- Shared workshop
- Community garage
- Public services centre
- Neighbourhood agency, community grocery shop and snack bar
- Community concierge service, barter shops
- Educational structure

©Sylvain Vesco

©Sylvain Vesco

More social links through multifunctionality?

The Ilot Fertile in Paris

Linkcity

The "Reinventing Paris" call for projects has generated some bold initiatives aimed at revitalising neglected areas. A striking example is the Îlot Fertile project in north-east Paris, won by the Linkcity team, urban architects TVK and landscape architects OLM.

Seeking to create a real sense of life within the development, the project is based on an original mixed-use programme for residents and the local community: a 5,000 m² indoor sports centre run by UCPA, including a youth hostel with over 200 beds and a number of sports facilities; an apartment-office-hotel concept with 125 lofts run by the Dutch company Zoku; an incubator dedicated to environmental innovations run by Impulse Partners; more than 7,300 m² of office space; a space for last-mile logistics, with the Geodis "Distripolis" concept; a "green base" for Jardins de Gally for their green space maintenance business; a café-co-working space, a new concept developed by Anticafé; and 800 m² of local shops. A Living Lab, run by the Dédale agency, is also incorporated into the project, and is responsible for organising activities in the neighbourhood in partnership with WWF and all the players present on the site. All these roles blend together to give life to the neighbourhood over the course of time.

To guarantee its long-term ambitions, the team of partners is committed to bringing the neighbourhood to life over the next ten years in a way that respects the innovations proposed, in both social and environmental terms.

©Sylvain Vesco

Third Places for independent living

Bofill'Good, Noisy-le-Grand, France

Bofill'Good is an intergenerational third place designed to stimulate neighbourhood life by supporting the inclusion of the elderly and people with disabilities. The 75 m² space includes a lounge, social areas, a room dedicated to digital activities and kitchen areas. A wide range of activities are on offer, including cooking, gymnastics, choirs, memory workshops, cultural outings for seniors, a coworking space, training courses for working people, and theatre and film screenings for families.

The creation of Bofill'Good is part of the "Third Places for Independent Living in my Neighbourhood" call for projects launched by the Seine-Saint-Denis Department, in the outskirts of Paris, in 2020 to develop the presence of structures offering activities and support that encourage independent living. The aim is to set up a network of 30 third places by 2025 to combat the isolation of seniors and address an ageing demographic.

Source: escrojcpula.wordpress.com

Strengthening cooperation and the habit of "working together"

Rocj Alliance, Pula, Croatia

In Croatia, Rojc Alliance, a community centre for the city of Pula, consists of 111 not-for-profit organisations housed in a complex offering a wide range of services to its visitors. Its aim is to strengthen cooperation and the habit of "working together" between voluntary bodies, citizens and local authorities. Now a genuine community centre for the town, it also provides access to medical care by giving space to health professionals. With 1,000 daily visitors, Rojc Alliance is an amenity that is essential to the functioning of the city of Pula.

Source: sortiraparis.com

A third place for single-parent families

Me and my children, Paris

Opened at the end of 2022 in the southeast of Paris, Moi et Mes Enfants ("Me and My Children") is a third place open to all, but it specifically targets single-parent families. The modular space includes an open kitchen, a spacious room and play areas. Families can work here, have their children looked after by an on-site childminder, take part in a workshop or just have a coffee.

More than 80% of single-parent families are headed by women, which is why "Me and My Children", a not-for-profit organisation, has set up a programme called Brisons le plafond des mères ("Let's Smash the Ceiling for Mothers"), to help mothers who are members find a new career path, with coaching and workshops in personal grooming and self-confidence. Through this third place, the organisation aims to help single mothers find a balance between economic, professional and social criteria.

The social impact of real estate and urban development projects

In light of the social and ecological challenges they face and society's increasingly high expectations, businesses are becoming ever more concerned about the social value of their projects. Various tools, labels and methods are emerging to better assess their impact on the ecological and social transition.

The "triple bottom line" accounting method aims to broaden the scope for assessing a company's performance, by including social and environmental dimensions in addition to economic performance. It is based on measuring the value created or destroyed by an organisation on society and the environment. While this method offers significant additional leverage in favour of the ecological and solidarity-based transition, it also raises questions. How can we measure the environmental consequences of an activity over the medium and long term? Can all social impacts be expressed in monetary terms? (Avise, 2020)

How can the social impact of real estate and urban development projects be assessed?

The value of social impact is seen as a source of value in its own right by the Approches! urban planning studio, and cannot be reduced to a financial value. While it is possible to calculate the social cost of a project (e.g. payroll for project developers, cost of materials, etc.), the costs that social action has helped to avoid (financial benefits, doctor's visits, etc.) and the costs avoided in a development or construction project (programming study for ground floors, marketing costs for a project, etc.), these quantitative assessments "do not, however, make it possible to exhaust the subject of social impact."

As part of an action study on the social and urban impacts of transitional urban planning, the Approches! urban planning studio has developed tools for project leaders and their public or private partners to collectively qualify the social effects and social value produced by their projects. 15 analysis criteria divided into four levels (individual, collective, territorial and urban project) are available.

"
Impact assessment allows us to focus on social utility and to understand how our actions contribute to change. It can also be a tool to drive continuous improvement, dialogue with stakeholders and social innovation.
"

Jérôme Saddier
Chair of Avise, ESS France and Crédit Coopératif

© Sylvain VESCO

"
Social impact is not the linear result of cause and effect, but rather a chain of relationships, planned or unplanned, between actions, people and their environment. The value of social impact is 'situated' and results from interaction with an environment and a social ecosystem.
"

Approches! urban planning studio
2022

Source: Approches! (2022)
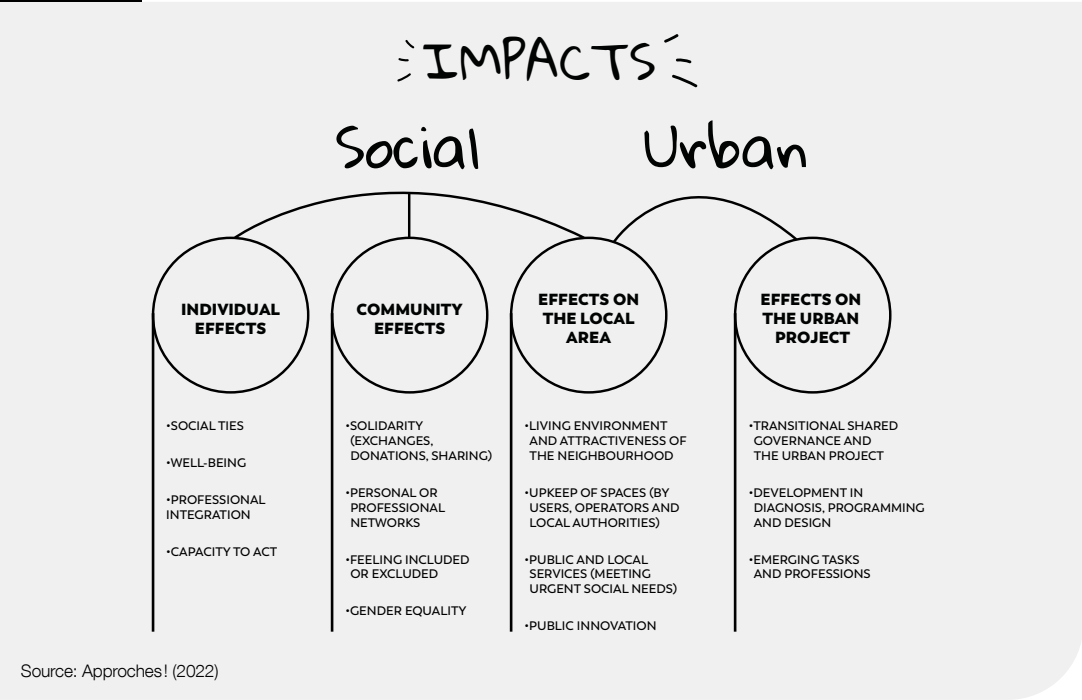
By way of such indicators, the aim is to provide a "steering tool for organisations seeking to enhance their social impact and viability." By extension, these tools can become instruments to "build a territory that is more easily scalable and adapted to the needs of local residents."

A number of studies have also looked at measuring inclusion in the context of urban planning projects. Inclusion refers to a situation where all people can participate fully in the life of the city, whatever their gender, state of health, physical or mental condition, age, financial situation or ethnicity.

The Impact Tank has launched a working group to define common indicators for measuring the contribution of social innovation projects to inclusive urban planning. On the basis of the nine projects that were the subject of a detailed study, and thanks to an analysis of several pre-existing guidelines that address the notion of inclusive urban planning, the working group came up with a set of guidelines in 2023 that set out seven categories of key effects:

• **Accessibility:** the project aims to make the area accessible in a variety of ways (physical, geographical, economic, residential, linguistic and cultural), guaranteeing equal access to the city for all categories, including the most vulnerable.

• **Social cohesion:** the aim is to improve the level, frequency and quality of social interaction, reduce the feeling of isolation and encourage generational and social mixing.

• **Skills development:** the project helps people to acquire personal, academic and professional skills in an inclusive environment that encourages social integration.

• **Independence and employment:** efforts focus on self-confidence, a sense of legitimacy in the public arena, personal and professional empowerment, increased employability and effective access to employment for all.

• **Physical and psychological well-being:** the project seeks to improve overall health, comfort and a sense of safety in public spaces, including people's relationship with nature.

• **Contribution to living together:** the project encourages awareness of harmful behaviour, promotes social harmony, reinforces mutual respect, reduces delinquency and promotes responsible, socially aware practices.

• **Engagement:** the emphasis is on strengthening a sense of belonging, civic participation, the vitality of community organisations and cooperation between social players.

Society has become "liquid", to borrow the striking term used by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman to describe a society in which the structures of reference (work, love, friendship, etc.) can no longer provide reassurance. These are the foundations that provide us with the resources to deal with otherness and the challenges we face. A certain frenzy, a growing uncertainty, gives an impression of floating. In a context where individuation and multiple allegiances are on the rise, we are experiencing shifts and changes in our relationships.

Yet the need and desire for ties remain intact: deep-rooted friendships, family bonds, everyday connections, neighbourhood contacts, or more furtive relationships. Urban spaces are places of intense ties. When harmonious, they are a source of cohesion and individual fulfilment, but when they are not, they can lead to a feeling of insecurity or to mechanisms of withdrawal (identity, community) that may reassure, but ultimately isolate.

Forging new links in the city is an invitation to look at others with kindness. It is also an invitation to pay equal attention to everyone, to offer them the means to express themselves and to act on their living environment. Those involved in creating the urban fabric will need to prove their creativity and commitment in order to rise to the challenge of doing things for and with local residents, in order to create buildings and neighbourhoods where everyone can flourish, whatever their differences.

At the rate at which the city is changing, what can we expect to see in the coming decades? Will we see the emergence of cities of "intertwined roots"? Will *neighbourhoods of sensitivity* replace so-called *sensitive neighbourhoods*? Will new professions emerge, such as community facilitator? Will artificial and collective intelligence tools make it possible to increase citizen participation? Will a "relational revolution" transform the real estate development sector? Will care homes be the new face of nursing homes? Will environmental challenges be drivers of solidarity?

Through three fictional narratives, we are enabling you to project yourself into possible futures. These stories, written by Compagnie Générale des Autres (CGA), are the result of a collaborative workshop organised by Bouygues Construction and CGA with participants from a variety of backgrounds (building and construction, non-profit organisations, urban planning, research, strategic foresight, etc.). They invite us to immerse ourselves in prospective and probable universes to envisage other ways of creating the city and creating links.

PORTRAITS
*Once upon a time
in 2040...*

THE RELATIONAL
SUPER-MAYOR
of a town that is now desirable

Portrait

Adel Bouchaib

The relational super-mayor of a town that is now desirable

While the relational city is not yet a standard applied by all local authorities, the 2030 Act did a lot to encourage its spread. A mayor in Seine-Saint-Denis is applying it forcefully. How does he see it working, and how far does he think things will have changed by 2060?

March 13,
2040

Adel Bouchaib has been mayor of Sevran, close to Paris, since 2032. He calls the town a "forest of intertwined roots." He doesn't think he deserves any credit for the town's exceptionally dynamic ecosystem of solidarity. The town is surprising, attractive and close to full employment. It resembles an organism that is constantly breathing in and out.

This is largely thanks to its events and its shopkeepers, most of whom now operate as "resource centres", a kind of third place where you can find a whole range of community and municipal services. "I took over a colossal project from my predecessor, who supported and maintained the effort to ensure the continuity of the links and facilities created," he says. "It's now up to us to ensure that community organisers have the means to carry out their actions; that neighbourhoods of sensitivity and their sensory and dialogue areas continue to replace the so-called sensitive, troubled neighbourhoods of the past; that digital technology continues to foster social links…" The profession of community organiser was exported from Quebec and is still struggling to find its place in institutions that remain very hierarchical. We are with a mayor who is not lacking in humility. A dynamic man with a twinkle in his eye, he has achieved the feat of transforming a town in the Paris suburbs from being known as a vast "drug dealers' supermarket" into a town now ranked number three in the list of "desirable towns 2040". Since taking part in the government's "City of the Future" programme back in 2024 at the insistence of the then Mayor, Estelle Poulet-Pignot, the town has managed to transform itself from a budget deficit to a "regenerative town 2060 budget" with a flourishing economy. As he walks along the tar-free pavements dotted with digital terminals dedicated to mutual aid, Wi-Fi and access to rights, he states emphatically: "All the costs that are saved through the relational city give you the added bonus of having funds to invest elsewhere."

Massive investment in social links, social engineering and maintaining links between stakeholders has enabled the local authority to make considerable savings on damage, staff turnover and health costs. This budget was immediately reinvested in investment and subsidies. "Jobs have been created, and local residents have been loyal to their community," says the mayor. "They consume locally, live locally and contribute to creating an attraction that has spread well beyond the region… as your visit today proves!" He points to the cargo bikes that criss-cross the town. Wherever they stop, they create a community grocery shop, an information kiosk or a kind of media library where the voices of the neighbourhood's elders can be heard.

This social innovation was developed by the Compagnie Générale des Autres, a social engineering organisation that was behind their introduction during an experimental programme designed to attract initiatives back in 2024. The bikes, which are ridden by employees on "positive job" contracts (formerly an integration scheme), made it possible to speed up the rollout of some of the 7 pillars of the relational city, which may be familiar enough today but were unheard of when they were first introduced. In this case, the "city of surprise", the "city of food and drink" and the "city that is friendly to all generations".

Paola has lived there for more than eight years. According to her, it's as if "a city within a city" was born: "I'm constantly surprised by the fact that the bicycle services make me feel like I'm in the city centre, even though I live in a neighbourhood with very poor transport links." This is the "everyday wow effect" that the mayor has been aiming for since the beginning of his term of office. And all this while promoting social diversity, zero waste, zero non-recourse to rights and zero unemployment. "1, 2, 3 zeros: that's what my late father used to sing at the top of his voice! He often used to talk to me about the 1990s, when France won the World Cup, and the carefree attitude he had back then. We consumed without shame, we certainly created this climate in the last century, but at least we had air." She pauses for a moment. "In the old days, we used to say when you don't have oil, you have ideas; now we say we have no more oil, we have no more air, but at least we have solidarity. Otherwise, believe me, we wouldn't have lasted."

Thanks to civic engagement, 1,200 trees have been planted, roofs greened and Oasis courtyards and lobbies created. As a result, the average temperature in the town has fallen 4°C. Are air and connection the new gold of our century? "In twenty years' time, in 2060, we'll need to further develop the relational city by combining it with the regenerative city," replies Bouchaib. "Self-consumption, short-circuit recycling, water loops – every town and city will be an oasis where life is good."

A DISRUPTOR
AMONG PROMOTERS
of the "city of links"

Portrait

Billie Gegere
Author

The "relational revolution" continues to shake up the business models and professions of real estate developers. One of them, a precocious entrepreneur, is bursting with ideas and inspiring her peers. Here is a chance to meet her.

March 22,
2040

Billie Gegere sips a coffee as she looks from a top-floor window of the 49-storey former Montparnasse Tower, contemplating 20 years of unprecedented urban upheaval that can now be described as a "relational revolution", which is the title of her first bestseller. It traces her journey, that of her solidarity group and the elements that led to this revolution. The Tower of Possibilities is home to many initiatives. This sort of eco-neighbourhood has become the symbol of the regenerated city ever since it was transformed in 2027.

We can't miss out on a visit to the famous "Urban Farm & Kitchen", which occupies the first 10 floors of the tower: the "urban pied-à-terre" of budding chefs, neo-agriculturists who combine agro-ecological practices with sparing use of FoodTech, and also practise regenerative agriculture in the third ring of the Paris metropolis. The building provides Billie

with something to brighten up her lunches every day – "food doesn't get more local than this!" – but above all "proof that you can do yourself good while making connections… and vice-versa", a motto that she uses over and over to prove that you can "combine environmental, social and economic performance."

The woman who has "cracked the business models" of real estate development companies to the point of inspiring and convincing even her most reluctant colleagues to change, shares with us a few of her open secrets, which she has enthusiastically repeated in interview after interview and seminar after seminar. Urban Relate, which she jointly founded and has been running since 2027, is a pioneering "linked city" group that manages a large portfolio of property assets and maintains several hundred hectares of "relational space" in France. The company also employs

dozens of social engineers and community facilitators (a kind of field mediator) who are employed in public-private partnerships by the member municipalities. One of the group's unusual features is that all the commercial leases are managed on a cooperative and participatory basis by the residents. Last but not least, the whole thing is hosted by a semi-profit model inspired by the social economy, which shares not only the value but also the decisions at different levels of governance. "It's quite simple", she says, making her point assertively but with a smile but all the same. "In relation to the space it occupies, the 'city of links' represented barely 10% of the square metres on the ground 20 years ago. We've taken care of the other 90% and turned it into our business model." It's a clever concept, but the reality is more complex: "In reality, it's a real in-depth revolution," she continues. "We've had to rethink our business models and management methods, and move away from innovation exclusively from a technological standpoint to social innovation".

From the outset, the group positioned itself as an economic oddity, drawing on the various standards of the turn of the century (CSR, impact enterprise, b-corps, social economy, etc.) and basing its model on that of the regenerative enterprise. "We are regenerating in three ways. Regenerating the environment, with 100% of our materials bio-sourced, reused or compensated for, habitats restored for biodiversity and increased autonomy in water and energy for our buildings; regenerating social links, with infrastructures that encourage the development of hyperlinks; and regenerating economic vitality using a circular and solidarity-based model." Still, she is at pains to point out: "To be honest, none of this would have been possible without a profound change in paradigm and mindset." Take that as a euphemism for the intensive lobbying by committed promoters and the vast communication operations supported by Ademe and foundations to get across the message of change.

The climate turmoil cannot, however, be dissociated from the relational revolution: it was a lever for awareness and action. Gegere looks back at the events of 2030: "The citizens' initiative was what changed

everything, creating the enthusiasm but also making it possible to open up the market," she says. "When a massive movement came to make the city greener to mitigate the sweltering heat, along with a drive for a vibrant city, a city that is both lively and conducive to walking, the 'city of links' pretty much created itself."

This constraint could have created a disruptive social innovation on a global scale. Greening permits were distributed en masse, and shared rooftop gardens designed for this purpose became the norm, fostering social ties and a taste for initiative. On these roofs, some of which are linked by garden walkways, residents come together to grow food. Encounters are made and mutual aid bonds are formed. The space freed up at ground level has made it possible to develop vast areas for cultural and sporting gatherings, protected by the shade of the footbridges. The new residents are delighted with the "neighbourhood passport" offered to them on their arrival by their "neighbour-buddies": a sample of local currency to treat themselves in the local shops, a talking stick to chair the next neighbourhood assembly and a community map of the neighbourhood's favourite secret spots. Finally, collective intelligence sits side by side with artificial intelligence, facilitating links between initiatives that are as yet unaware of each other. This is Urban Relate's latest masterstroke: developing not only physical bridges between rooftops, but also digital ones. The group is currently in the process of raising funds for a regenerative AI/IC, an Artificial Intelligence controlled by Collective Intelligence to fill the gaps in the "city of links" and "connect and regenerate the world". No doubt about it, the relational revolution is under way!

FROM SABLIÈRE 2040

a neighbourhood transformed into a "radiant city"

👤
Portrait

Claire Toglo
Community facilitator

La Sablière is a small neighbourhood in the south of Bondy in the northern outskirts of Paris. It has undergone major transformations that have set new standards in urban renewal planning. Meet Claire, a resident and community facilitator.

👁

March 28,
2040

Claire is never at a loss for words when she is talking about what she calls "the famous La Sablière", as she likes to describe her neighbourhood. The fact is that nothing predestined this small enclave of Bondy to become a symbol of a friendly and supportive neighbourhood. After all, it is cut off from the rest of the town by a railway line and it shares its territory with another municipality. Boundaries would have been hard to break without a dramatic turn of events.

It was through street theatre that the residents met each other, via a walk and poetic performance created by the Random collective. "Virtually all the residents were there, whether as actors or spectators," recalls Claire. "It was wonderful!" She is getting ready to guide us around the neighbourhood. As we make our way down the four storeys of the shared building, we pass a communal laundry, a community nursery and then a theatre. There we were invited to pick up a "suspended ticket" to see

the next show by the Sablière collective. It's a free ticket pre-paid by someone else, based on the same idea as the community café which has become a tradition in Naples.

The building can be confusing. There has been an emphasis on the principles of hybridisation and intensification of uses. Everything is modular, and you'll never find the same people or activities in the shared rooms twice. At first, everyone was surprised, not to say suspicious. But exemplary management made it possible for people who didn't normally speak to each other to cross paths and meet. Little by little, everyone got to know the other residents. Tongues grew looser and smiles became more frequent! On the way out, the man responsible for this success story, the "caring" caretaker, explains: "The local council had to make some concessions with the land, but in the end, everyone is happy with it. For example, the gym is now fully integrated into the building. In place of the old one, we could make room for a shared garden. But if you come back this afternoon, you'll find a day-care centre in the gym: you just have to check the timetable on the digital wall."

Before going through the front door, we are invited to take a photo and leave a dream on this digital wall. Information of all kinds has been left by residents. Artificial intelligence favours posts that generate links, services or constructive emotions. Complaints are automatically converted into work proposals that the "community facilitator" can organise. Claire recently took on this role for a three-month stint. It involves organising ongoing consultation sessions at neighbourhood tables. All aspects of local life can be dealt with by a wide range of stakeholders and experts directly or indirectly involved (businesses, retailers, pharmacists, residents, etc.). "We need all kinds of players to respond to issues such as health, housing, employment, desire and initiatives," explains Claire. "Humans are not segmented into several parts, they're complex, so we don't segment the answers into parts, either." This process has been used successfully to propose solutions to issues such as high school dropouts, drug trafficking and the health concerns of certain residents.

At La Sablière, the city of links is also expressed through the way people care for each other. The idea for Care came from the conversion of the residential home for the elderly into a third place. "We call it a 'Care place', a third place for care. There's a co-working area, a tea room and a space that regularly hosts repair cafés, solidarity charity shops, public book shared readings and so on. We realised that we had an enormous amount of resources in the stories told by our elders. We were able to use their stories to better understand our future. They've given us a whole new lease of life."

As well as being a friendly, supportive neighbourhood, the focus is on caring for others and the environment, and on economic dynamism. Claire turns around and draws large imaginary shapes in the air. "It didn't happen overnight. Back in 2024, this was a troubled inner-city area. There were tall buildings from which you could see far away, but in hindsight, we were the ones far away from everything." Claire recounts the period before the Urban Renewal Programme, which was a landmark in the way urban consultation projects were conceived. "For us, the Urban Renewal Programme was the turning point. We could organise ourselves to develop our own projects and community groups, and no longer depend solely on external initiatives." Citizen participation took an unprecedented turn, to the point of resembling a kind of full-scale forum on the "city of links", which attracted the involvement among others of Rob Hopkins, the founder of the Transition Town movement. "We had defined scenarios of the kind of future we wanted with the Compagnie Générale des Autres and its Mass Dream project," she continues. "Then, with the help of several transition collectives, we launched a major project to reinvent our neighbourhood. Rob Hopkins' contributions came as a breath of fresh air!"

Catherine Olinza, the French Minister for Urban Affairs and Transition, chose this historic moment to announce the creation of the "Territories and Social Links" government scheme and to allocate the necessary resources to it. Workshops were then organised with French and international experts. "But we always had final say," explains Claire. Some of the ideas put

forward included: community landholding, shared housing, promotion of urban agriculture, a participative cultural agenda, and peaceful spaces and streets for local residents. This last point came as a relief to Claire: "The traffic used to be horrendous. Spaces for pedestrians were almost non-existent and we were losing our natural desire to socialise. But everyone played along, vehicles slowed down, streets came alive, and conviviality flourished. It's happening right here and now! Bruno Latour warned us of the importance of knowing where to land!" The philosopher and sociologist would certainly have admired the "city of links". And that's the dream we're leaving on the digital wall of La Sablière.

References

Academic work

Authier, J.-Y., Cayouette-Remblière, J., Bonneval, L., Charmes, E., Collet, A., et al. *(2021). Les formes contemporaines du voisinage. Espaces résidentiels et intégration sociale.* Rapport de recherche, Centre Max Weber - Ined. (pp. 718).

Bouillon, F., Maurin, M., & Pichon, P. *(2022).* Éditorial. *Espaces et sociétés,* 186-187(3-4), 9-17.

Bourdin, A. *(2023). Créer la place du village en ville.* Archibooks.

Castel, R. *(1995). Les métamorphoses de la question Sociale. Une chronique du salariat.* Paris, Fayard.

Cusset, P. Y. *(2006).* "Les évolutions du lien social, un état des lieux". *Horizons Stratégiques,* 2006(2), 21-36.

Debarbieux, B. *(2020).* "Distance sociale et confinement au temps du Covid-19". In F. Gamba, et al. (Eds.), Covid-19. *Le regard des sciences sociales* (pp. 111-123).

Duthy, C. *(2020). Les solos : entre émancipation et solidarité : Sociologie des épreuves de la solitude résidentielle en milieu urbain.* (Thèse De Doctorat). Université Grenoble Alpes.

Eleb, M., & Bendimerad, S. *(2018). Ensemble et séparément : des lieux pour cohabiter.* Editions Mardaga.

Felder, M. *(2018). Building familiarity: coexistence in an urban context.* (Thèse de Doctorat).

Felder, M. *(2020).* "La fête des voisins : un rituel conjuratoire ?" *Métropolitiques,* 13 février 2020.

Fournet-Guérin, C. *(2006).* "Vivre le quartier à Tananarive. De la remise en cause d'un mythe urbain universel". *Espaces et Sociétés,* 126.

Gamba, F., Nardone, M., Ricciardi, T., & Cattacin, S. (Dir.). *(2020). Covid-19. Le regard des sciences sociales.* Genève : Seismo.

Garoscio, A. *(2006).* "Représentations sociales de l'insécurité en milieu urbain". *Les Cahiers Internationaux De Psychologie Sociale,* 2006(1), 33-46.

Giraud, G., & Renouard, C. *(2012). 20 Propositions pour réformer le capitalisme.*

Champs-Flammarion.

Grillo, S. *(2018).* "Joëlle Zask, Quand la place devient publique". *Lectures,* Les comptes rendus.

Héran, F. *(2020).* "La remise en cause du tout automobile". *Flux,* 2020(1-2), 90-101.

Jacobs, J. *(2012). Déclin et survie des grandes villes Américaines.* Marseille, Parenthèses.

Lachance, J., & Bruna, Y. *(2019).* "De la convivialité dans la ville à l'ère du numérique". *Revue du MAUSS,* 2019(2), 151-164.

Lavadinho, S., Le Brun-Cordier, P., & Winkin, Y. *(2022). La Ville Relationnelle.* Bfluid éditions.

Martin, C. *(2019).* "Penser la vulnérabilité. Les apports de Robert Castel". *Les Cahiers de la Justice,* 2019(4), 667-67.

Paquot, T. *(2009). L'espace public.* La Découverte.

Paquot, T. *(2022). Pays de l'enfance.* Terre urbaine. L'esprit des livres.

Paugam, S. *(2018). Le lien social.* PUF, coll. Que sais-je ? (4e édition).

Peati, L. *(2019).* "Villes conviviales". *Revue du MAUSS,* 2019(2), 27-39.

Raibaud, Y., *(2017) La Ville faite par et pour les hommes,* Belin (2e édition)

Renou, G. *(2020).* "Sociabilité(s)" *Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux* (2e édition mise à jour et augmentée) (pp. 545-553). Paris, Presses de Sciences Po.

Riviere, C. A. *(2004).* "La spécificité française de la construction sociologique du concept de sociabilité". *Réseaux,* 2004(1), 207-231.

Riviere, C. *(2012).* "Les enfants : révélateurs de nos rapports aux espaces publics". *Métropolitiques,* 18 juin 2012.

Granié, A.-M. *(2003).* "Sociabilités dans le monde rural. Entretien avec Anne-Marie Granié". *Revue Projet,* 274(2), 51-58.

Tommasi, G. *(2018).* "La gentrification rurale, un regard critique sur les évolutions des campagnes françaises". *Géoconfluences,* avril 2018.

Simmel, G. *(1950 [1903]).* "The Metropolis and Mental Life". Dans K. H. Wolff (Éd.), *The*

Sociology of Georg Simmel (pp. 409-424). Columbus, Ohio State University Press.

Wirth, L. *(1938).* "Urbanism as a way of life". *American journal of sociology,* 44(1), 1-24.

Zask, J. *(2018). Quand la place devient publique.* Lormont, Le Bord de l'eau, coll. *"Les voies du politique".*

Zito, J. *(1974).* "Anonymity and neighboring in an urban, high-rise complex". *Journal of contemporary ethnography,* 3(3), 243-263.

Institutional reports and studies

ANCT & Label Terre de Jeux *(2021). Guide du design actif.*

ANRU *(2021). L'approche égalitaire de l'urbanisme. Outils et méthodes pour garantir l'accès à la ville pour tout.tes.*

Approches ! *(2021). Pour un urbanisme relationnel : Analyse des impacts sociaux et urbains de l'urbanisme transitoire.*

Approches ! *(2022).* L'évaluation des effets sociaux des lieux hybrides.

Arnodin, C. *(2021).* Enquête : "Résilience, convivialité et solidarités de proximité". *Synthèse des résultats de la phase n°1 - Paris.* Institut Paris Région, l'Atelier Parisien d'urbanisme, la Ville de Paris et la 27e Région.

AVISE *(2020). Évaluer son impact social. Le guide pour construire une démarche d'évaluation adaptée à ses enjeux.*

Bunel, L. *(2018).* "L'intégration des usagers dans la conception du projet urbain", *Cahiers Nantais,* 1-2.

Cabanon vertical *(2018) Les aménagements urbains transitoires, enjeux et guide pratique pour un espace public partagé.*

Conseil d'analyse économique *(2023). Petits commerces : déclin ou mutation,* (Note n°77, mai 2023).

Diguet, C. *(2019).* "Les communs urbains, une notion pour repenser l'aménagement territorial ?" *Note rapide,* n°813 Institut Paris Région.

Fabrique Spinoza, *(2023). Territoires heureux, approches et pratiques pour des territoires et modes de vie heureux,* décembre 2023.

Fondation de France. *(2022).* Solitudes 2022. *Regards sur les fragilités relationnelles.* Récupéré de https://www.fondationdefrance. org/images/pdf/2023/solitudes-2022.pdf

Fondation de France. *(2023).* Solitudes 2023. Récupéré de https://www.fondationdefrance.org/ images/pdf/2024/etudes-solitudes-2024.pdf

Ghel Institute *(2018). Inclusive Healthy Places. A Guide to Inclusion & Health in Public Space: Learning Globally to Transform Locally.*

Impact Tank *(2023). Urbanisme inclusif : projets à impact dans le Grand Paris.*

Institut Paris Région. *(2023). Victimation et sentiment d'insécurité en Ile-de-France.* Récupéré de https://www.institutparisregion.fr/ fileadmin/NewEtudes/000pack3/Etude_2887/ RapportFinalEVSI2021_web.pdf

Kebir L., Wallet F., *(2021). Les communs à l'épreuve du projet urbain et de l'initiative citoyenne.*

Labo de la fraternité. *(2022).* Baromètre 2022 de la fraternité. Récupéré de https://kawaa. s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/kawaa-pdfs/Labofraternite/Barometre-fraternite-vf-2022+webvf.pdf

Lagadec E., Guillemaut C. *(2023). Guide référentiel 3 - Genre & espace public - Un outil de diagnostic au prisme du genre dans le cadre d'un projet d'(ré)aménagement,* Ville de Paris

L'ObSoCo *(2022), Ancrages et arbitrages des Français sur leurs lieux de vie,* mars 2022.

L'ObSoCo *(2023).* L'Observatoire des usages et représentations des territoires *Qualité de vie et transition écologique,* septembre 2023.

Leroi, P. *(2019.) Carnet d'inspiration pour des espaces publics conviviaux,* Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme Ile-de-France.

Pro Juventute. *(2019).* Rapport annuel 2019. Récupéré de https://www.projuventute.ch/sites/ default/files/2020-12/Rapport_annuel_2019.pdf

Récipro-cité. *(2020).* Livre blanc AMU.

Terraza, H., Orlando, M. B., Lakovits, C., Lopes Janik, V., & Kalashyan, A. *(2020) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design,* World Bank Group.

Press articles

Abbey, C. *(2023)* "Les enfants de plus en plus confinés à l'intérieur : la faute aux villes". *Radio France,* 18 octobre 2023.

Blin, S. *(2020)* "Le centre commercial peut être un lieu de réconfort". *Libération,* 12 janvier 2020.

Diguet, C. *(2020)* "L'avènement d'un urbanisme des communs". *Chronique des confins* n° 10, Institut Paris Région, 28 mai 2020.

Duterme, R. *(2020)* "Gated communities : le paradis entre quatre murs". *Libération,* 21 octobre 2020.

Gerbeau, D. *(2021)* "L'hospitalité de l'espace public garantit notre liberté". *La Gazette des communes,* 22 décembre 2021.

Lavadinho, S. *(2022)* "La bande ludique : un outil innovant pour enrayer l'exode". *LinkedIn,* 5 mars 2022.

Ott, C. *(2021)* "Intervención Calle Consciente: Un Jardín de Colores - Taller Arquiurbano + IAA Studio". *ArchDaily,* 5 février 2021.

Porret, M. *(2011)* "Insécurité urbaine, sociabilité, proximité". *Le Temps,* 26 août 2011.

Van Eeckhout, L. *(2022)* « Il faut revenir à ce qu'est la ville par essence : un lieu de relations". *Le Monde,* 14 novembre 2022.

Acknowledgements

Trend books

ELAN **linkcity** BOUYGUES BATIMENT BOUYGUES CONSTRUCTION