

GOLD VI

***Case-Based Contribution
to Chapter 9: Democratizing
GOLD VI Report on Pathways
to urban and territorial equality***

From user knowledges to citizen

expertise: democratizing urban renewal

and new construction of social housing

projects

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From user knowledges to citizen expertise: democratizing urban renewal and new construction of social housing projects

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CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS

Poissy (France), Eindhoven (the Netherlands)

CHAPTER

9: Democratizing

SUMMARY

In France and the Netherlands, an important part of the population lives in rental social housing built and managed by public-private entities (known as “social lenders” or “housing associations”) at under market-rate rents, that are additionally often subsidized by the State to ensure affordable housing solutions to low-income households. However, the concentration of these dwellings in areas that are now impoverished, and where there is a concentration of difficulties in terms of socio-cultural integration and access to higher education and employment, marginalizes their inhabitants. This case study analyses the importance of the integration of the tenants of this housing stock, through their citizen expertise in the processes of urban renewal or new construction that concern them primarily.



Introduction

The last few decades have seen an increase in the participation of residents in urban policies that have an impact on their built environment, such as urban renewal or the improvement of run-down or precarious neighbourhoods. Whether through institutional processes or collective protest actions, the knowledge of inhabitants questions and sometimes imposes itself on the expert and political knowledge on the making of the city.¹

In institutionalized participatory processes, it is generally the “use knowledge”, i.e. individual or collective knowledge linked to the daily practice or living in a place, which is expected by the organizers (surveys, consultations, walking diagnoses, workshops, votes, etc.). Nevertheless, the aim is more rarely to bring out a “citizen’s expertise”, i.e. a more political force of proposal which implies co-constructing a project by giving the time and tools

to groups of inhabitants to increase their skills on regulatory frameworks of urban planning, housing or the environment, on legal issues or public policies.²

Many experiences of participation are initiated bottom-up. However, groups of residents threatened with a demolition and/or relocation project do not always have the means to train themselves, to pay for counter-expertise or the help of professional organisations (NGOs, social movements, militant professionals, academics) to draw up an alternative project to defend themselves from the one proposed (or sometimes imposed) by the competent authorities. The following examples from **Poissy** (France) and **Eindhoven** (the Netherlands) show participatory processes in similar size housing districts (600 and 400) where the municipalities opened to the residents or future residents the board of decision-making about demolition and construction of social rental housing.

A duplex apartment in the social housing complex Space-S, Eindhoven. Source: Mitchell van Eijk

1. Deboulet & Nez, 2013

2. Nez & Sintomer, 2013

I. Co-designed urban renewal and rehousing in La Coudraie, Poissy (France)

The French State initiated in 2003 the first National Urban Renewal Programme (PNRU I 2003-2013) to intervene in neighbourhoods built massively between 1954 and 1973, and then on a smaller scale, in the outskirts of medium and large cities. These social housing neighbourhoods (mainly social rental run by social landlords) have become largely impoverished and concentrate the most alarming social indicators of the national territory.³ In order to meet the criteria required by the National Agency for Urban Renewal (ANRU) – created to implement this policy – and receive subsidies of hundreds of millions of euros, local authorities and social landlords had to design urban projects on priority perimeters that would involve improving public spaces, integrating public facilities, rehabilitating but also demolishing buildings to rebuild more compact housing.⁴ New housing was also seen as an opportunity to integrate subsidized home ownership housing in these neighbourhoods in order to generate a “social mix” through the typologies and tenures of housing.⁵

The participation of the residents only became compulsory after the appearance in many project areas of important conflicts between the residents’ collectives and the authorities, especially in the face of demolitions and rehosings decided in an arbitrary way, without any consultation with the residents. After 10 years of this policy, in 2013, researchers and residents’ movements united in the *Coordination Citoyenne des Quartiers Populaires* (Citizen’s Coordination of Popular Neighbourhoods) questioned the national authorities and wrote an

important report of recommendations for a radical reform of the urban policy for the Minister Delegate in charge of the City, called “It won’t be done without us. Citizenship and power to act in popular neighbourhoods”.⁶ This report emphasizes the need **to promote a democracy of involvement, to provide the means for citizen expertise and the emergence of critical and creative spaces beyond the neighbourhoods** targeted by the PNRU, as a new way of democratizing the design and implementation of public policies. The aim is to apply the observation that “political integration is the condition for social integration and not the other way around”.⁷

As early as 2005, in the western suburbs of Paris, residents of the Coudraie housing district (600 dwellings built in 1968) in Poissy opposed the urban renewal project proposed to the ANRU by the town hall and a social landlord. Together with a group of residents from the town of Gennevilliers, north of Paris, they formed the Anti-Demolition Coordination, which was joined by about twenty organizations from neighbourhoods facing similar problems in France.⁸

Following a six-year open conflict with the town hall, which stopped the project, a change of mayor in the 2008 municipal elections enabled to start a **co-creation process with the inhabitants** of La Coudraie – mainly immigrant workers from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa regions and their descendants.⁹ The new administration contracted an organization to facilitate the participatory process and established regular meetings with the

3. Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013, p. 53-56

4. Lelévrier & Noyé, 2012

5. Houard, 2012

6. Bacqué & Mechmache, 2013

7. Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013 p. 92

8. Bacqué & Mechmache, 2013

9. Deboulet & Mamou, 2013

inhabitants' leaders, the social landlord and the architecture firm to lay the foundations for a consensual project. All the stakeholders had to learn and adapt during the process itself. During the previous years, researchers, doctoral students, architecture students had been observing the mobilizations and the weekly meetings of the residents, helping them to consolidate their citizen knowledge. Thanks to this empowerment and the willingness of the city council to co-construct the urban renewal project, important agreements have been reached between the stakeholders:¹⁰

- The withdrawal of the demolition permits approved by the former municipal majority.
- The signature and application of a participation charter.
- The participation of residents' representatives in the project steering bodies and the rehousing commission.
- The production by the promoting entities of technical support understandable by the population (less technical language, removable 3D models).
- The production at each meeting of reports of the agreements reached.
- The discussion of several important issues for the community besides the project.
- The agreement with each family on the temporary rehousing solutions in accordance with the rehousing charter established before giving the inhabitants' consent to the urban renewal project.

The co-construction process initiated in 2008 was successful and allowed temporary rehousing and work to begin in 2009, and to start rehousing inhabitants in the reconstructed or rehabilitated buildings from 2013 onwards.¹¹ This changed the perspective on how the municipality can implement projects integrating the inhabitants in the decision-making.

The democratization of the urban renewal process in La Coudraie has inspired professionals and inhabitants of other french neighbourhoods to try to create spaces of horizontality with elected officials and civil servants in the decision-making process on urban renewal projects. It gave birth to the association APPUII, a tripartite collective that initially integrated inhabitants, professionals and academics who participated in La Coudraie, and started to accompany inhabitants' collectives in other urban renewal districts. Since its creation, APPUII and similar organizations have been increasingly solicited by residents concerned about the unilaterally planned demolitions of social housing in their neighbourhoods.¹² Although progress has been made in the framework of urban renewal policy at the level of the State to introduce the creation of citizens' councils and to reduce the requirements in terms of demolitions for new projects over the period 2014-2020, the implementation of real co-construction processes is totally dependent on the will of the elected representatives of the municipalities and agglomerations where the projects take place. Unfortunately, only a few municipalities have taken the opportunity to be at the avant-garde in democratizing decision-making in this field in France.

10. Op. cit., 2013

11. APPUII's blog: <https://appuii.wordpress.com/les-terrains/poissy/>

12. APPUII: <https://appuii.wordpress.com/appuii/historique/>. Other similar organisations have emerged locally in other neighbourhoods undergoing renovation. This is the case of the Next Planning association, also created in 2012 in Grenoble, inspired by the principles of "Community Organizing" and "Advocacy Planning" and which has been running the Popular Urban Planning Workshops of the Villeneuve district since then and activities to make the inhabitants' proposals heard in the urban renewal project: <http://assoplanning.org/>



II. Designing a socially and functionally mixed neighbourhood with the residents, the example of Space-S in Eindhoven (the Netherlands)

Between 2012 and 2017, the reconversion of Strijp-S, a large-scale industrial site inside the city of Eindhoven (235,000 inhabitants in 2020) (the Netherlands), has been an opportunity to generate an inspiring community-led process to produce new social housing units in a well-located urban area. In the site where the Philips electronics were once manufactured, the housing association Woonbedrijf (non-profit social landlord) saw the opportunity to create and self-finance 402 housing units for households below the income threshold for accessing public rental housing in this new innovation hub of the city. **The originality of the project is the high involvement in the design and management of the housing complex by the future tenants** - which

include from local and international students and single persons to young couples and families, as well as persons with disabilities - **who created strong community cohesion and appropriation along the process.**¹³

The municipality offered a 30,000m² plot to Woonbedrijf who contracted the local architect firm Inbo and the process manager 12N Urban Matters. The project intentions were publicized through social and local media, as well as by organizations working with marginalized groups (persons with autism, disabilities or learning difficulties). Over a thousand potential tenants participated in the workshops and activities before the project was even designed: the more commitment in the project

Co-design process with the future residents of Space-S, Eindhoven. Source: courtesy of Inbo

13. CoHabitat.io: <https://www.cohabitat.io/en/projects/2eb0abcb-9a38-4ec3-9fd8-cc683d07199e>

is shown, the higher the possibility of integrating the future housing and shared spaces design phases. To facilitate the decision making about the spatial design, Inbo used their Virtual Reality Lab and made a 1:1 scale model with movable walls, windows and furniture so that future residents could fully define their apartment according to their needs, uses and projections. The 402 apartments which now host around 600 persons are tailored for their first residents who decided to mix the different typologies in the seven buildings instead of segregating them (44 assisted studios managed by associations, 143 student residences, 151 apartments with different surfaces, 61 double height lofts adaptable by the inhabitants). Moreover, most of the apartments and communal areas were finished by the residents themselves to adapt them to their criteria and needs.¹⁴

Inbo started with the smallest scale: the urban design of the residence (the minimal things people want in their house), and from there, they continued working on the bigger scales or other types of issues, such as noise within the neighbourhood. As professionals, they led people into the different steps of the process. After asking how people wanted to live, they discussed what was possible according to conditions and budget. Residents now participate in managing collective spaces (communal rooms, outdoor greenspaces and a rooftop garden proposed by a group of tenants), renting empty flats and organizing all kinds of activities for the residents. They also collectively decided to hire a social inclusion firm to do the cleaning of the buildings instead of Woonbedrijf's usual providers although it was more expensive.¹⁵

The concept of "co-creation" materialized in Space-S by the stakeholders has not been applied neither in social housing projects nor in others at that scale in the

Netherlands and demonstrated that involving the residents' user expertise, but also citizen expertise, is not more expensive or time consuming than a standard real estate project. The co-creation led to unexpected changes that considerably improved the project.¹⁶



"The residents were so engaged that they created an alternative plan for the plot, envisioning more buildings than were foreseen by the urban planner responsible for the area (who recommended one or two). They also changed the standardised layout of apartments, to allow for variations to meet differing household needs, and emphasised the use of communal and green spaces".

In this unique case, **the community building and strong participation in the decision making about the planning and the housing has proven to democratize the urban renewal project** and will positively impact the whole neighbourhood. The recognition of the project by the 2017 Dirk Roosenburg architecture award and the 2020 silver World Habitat Award is an invitation to all regional and local governments and public institutions involved in housing to learn from this transformative way of co-creating housing, neighbourhoods and cities.

Co-design process with the future residents of Space-S, Eindhoven. Source: courtesy of Inbo

14. Op. Cit.

15. Woonbedrijf: <https://www.woonbedrijf.com/News/2688/inzet-regionale-huismeesters-bij-spaces>

16. World Habitat: <https://world-habitat.org/world-habitat-awards/winners-and-finalists/space-s/#award-content>

Democratizing urban renewal and housing production

These two examples show the important potential of including the (future) residents and relevant community organizations in the governance and decision making about their future living environment and housing. In democratic systems, conflicts are normal in such challenging projects that will affect the life of many households for many generations. Therefore, as some local and regional governments already experienced, climbing to the highest steps of Sherry Arnstein's "ladder of participation" (Partnership, Delegated power, Citizen control)¹⁷ usually permits to establish the right mechanisms of decision-making that allow citizen-expertise and municipal-expertise to jointly examine the tensions and get to forms of consensus, rather than radicalizing the positions and paralyzing the projects. For this, political will and transparency are essential, and spaces for multi-stakeholder governance are needed, as well as sufficient time and means for citizens to collectively increase their skills on the subjects addressed in order to create a partnership and democratic approach.



A duplex apartment in the social housing complex Space-S, Eindhoven.
Source: Mitchell van Eijk

17. Arnstein, 1969

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This paper has been produced as a Case-Based Contribution to the sixth Global Report on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD VI): the flagship publication of the organized constituency of local and regional governments represented in United Cities and Local Governments. The GOLD VI report has been produced in partnership with the Development Planning Unit (University College London), through the programme Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW). GOLD VI focuses on how local and regional governments can address the local manifestations of growing inequalities and contribute to create “Pathways to urban and territorial equality”. The GOLD VI report has been produced through a large-scale international co-production process, bringing together over a hundred representatives of local and regional governments, academics and civil society organizations. This paper is an outcome of this process and is part of the *Pathways to Equality Cases Repository*, which collects the over 60 Case-Based Contributions produced as part of the GOLD VI report.

In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 9 on “Democratizing”, which focuses on the challenges and opportunities for local and regional governments in implementing meaningful participatory processes, and democratizing decision-making, unpacking asymmetries of power and the underpinning trends affecting processes of democratization. The chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote more egalitarian, participatory and democratic processes, giving voice to marginalized groups of society, minorities and other groups, and thus contribute to urban and territorial equality.

Supported by:



**Funded by
the European Union**

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UCLG and UCL and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



**Diputació
Barcelona**

This document was produced with the financial support of the Barcelona Provincial Council. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UCLG and UCL and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Barcelona Provincial Council.



**Sweden
Sverige**

This document has been financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material. Responsibility for its content rests entirely with the authors.



**UK Research
and Innovation**

This document was produced by UCLG and the “Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality” (KNOW) programme. KNOW is funded by UKRI through the Global Challenges Research Fund GROW Call, and led by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL. Grant Ref: ES/P011225/1