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## **Space, Governmentality, and the Geographies of French Urban Policy**

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URBAN RENAISSANCE

SPACE, GOVERNMENTALITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF  
FRENCH URBAN POLICY

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Abstract

This article seeks to make a contribution to debates around governmentality and urban policy. The main argument is that although there is a governmental dimension to the constitution of spaces through urban policy, there is no inherent politics to such constitutions. Different ways of imagining space have different implications for the constitution of problems and formulation of solutions. This argument is substantiated by an account of French urban policy (*la politique de la Ville*) between 1981 and 2005, organized around three

periods. The first part of the article relates this policy to the contemporary transformations of the French state, and points to the relationship between urban policy and the penal state. The second part presents an account of this policy with a focus on the changing conceptualizations of space, and their varying policy and political implications.

KEY WORDS ★ banlieues ★ French urban policy ★ governmentality ★ penal state

Space in its Hegelian form comes back into its own. This modern state promotes and imposes itself as the stable center – definitively – of (national) societies and spaces . . . In this same space there are, however, other forces on the boil, because the rationality of the state, of its techniques, plans and programs, provokes opposition. (Lefebvre, 1991: 23)

Nothing, it seems, is more un-French than the Lefebvrian city.<sup>1</sup> The latter embodies contestation and resistance, fosters political participation of all city inhabitants in the production of their lived spaces, and conceives space in its multiplicity and relationality as socially produced and decidedly political, while France embodies unity and homogeneity, technocratic and paternalistic state tradition operating on a space divided into discrete pieces and devoid of politics. Yet when it comes to French urban policy, Lefebvrian notions become manifest; social development, self-management (*autogestion*), participation of inhabitants, right to difference, and right to the city have more than occasionally appeared in French urban policy documents in the last two decades or so.<sup>2</sup>

But something happened towards the end of the 1990s. Such notions – though at times little more than merely gestural – have gradually disappeared

from the official urban policy discourses. By the year 2005, references to self-management and participation of inhabitants had completely gone, social development gave way to tax concession areas, and the only right to be defended in the official discourse became the so-called ‘right to security’.

This shift, it seems to me, tells us something important about the concerns in contemporary French urban policy *in relation to* the wider restructuring of the French state. When French urban policy was first conceived in the early 1980s as a response to revolts in *banlieues*, it sought to create a political dynamic with such strong political ideals as ‘democratization of the management of the city’, ‘appropriation of space by inhabitants’, and ‘right to the city’. Two-and-a-half decades later, in the autumn of 2005, banlieue revolts were suppressed by unprecedented repressive measures with the declaration of a state of emergency, making the French state’s authoritarian restructuring more evident. What is striking is that the social housing neighbourhoods that experienced revolts were not just any other neighbourhoods. They were, for the most part, designated ‘priority neighbourhoods’ of French urban policy (*la politique de la Ville*). This policy was initiated by the Socialist Government

following the so-called ‘hot-summer’ of 1981, marked by incidents of unrest in the banlieues of French cities. Under this policy, several social housing neighbourhoods in banlieues were designated as ‘priority neighbourhoods’ with an aim to addressing their problems. Since then, the geographies of urban policy and of revolts have largely coincided. All but two of the areas where large-scale revolts occurred in the 1990s were priority neighbourhoods of urban policy. The revolts of 2005 were no exception; 85 percent of the areas where revolts occurred were neighbourhoods of urban policy (Lagrange, 2006).

The increasingly authoritarian restructuring of the French state has already been observed by many researchers, who pointed to a shift from social to penal forms of state intervention. Wacquant, in particular, has conceptualized this orientation among the European states with his notion of the ‘European penal state’. For Wacquant (2001), the contemporary transformations of Western states are marked by a ‘penalization of poverty’, which serves to contain the negative effects of neo-liberal policies on the lower classes. Thus, the increasing use of the penal system serves to manage social insecurity, and to contain social disorders induced by economic deregulation and social-welfare retrenchment. But not all the Western states follow the same pattern of transformation. Although three interrelated transformations – erasing the economic state, dismantling the social state, and enhancing the penal state – seem to capture, broadly, the contemporary transformations of the state in the US or the UK, not all of them apply to the Western European states. What Wacquant calls the European penal state follows the strong state tradition, and intensifies modes of regulation, *at once* social and penal. The ‘left hand’ of the state, though still active, is increasingly accompanied by its ‘right hand’. There is an intensification at once of social and penal treatments of poverty, with an increased attention on the policing function of the state, and a close surveillance of populations seen to be problematic.

The French state’s contemporary transformations resonate well with Wacquant’s definition of the European penal state, which he refers to as ‘the penalization of poverty *à la française*’ (2001: 407). I have elsewhere (Dikeç, 2006) referred to this as the ‘republican penal state’ in order to highlight the influence of established political

traditions in state restructuring – in this case, the idea of the ‘Republican state’ and its social obligations towards its citizens. Increasingly since the 1990s, both social policy and penal forms of intervention became key issues for governments of the Left and the Right (Levy, 2001; Wacquant, 2001). But the shift towards the penal state was largely legitimized around a discourse which depicted ‘the one and indivisible Republic’ under threat from allegedly incompatible cultural differences and formation of ‘communities’, mainly in the social housing neighbourhoods of the banlieues. Especially from the early 1990s onwards, increasing security measures have been directed towards social housing neighbourhoods in banlieues. These included the engagement of the Ministry of Justice and the French Intelligence Service with the question of banlieues in the early 1990s, the so-called ‘local security contracts’ introduced by the Jospin Government towards the end of the decade, and, more recently, the avalanche of laws and security measures introduced since 2002, which were described by Michel Tubiana, the President of the League of Human Rights, as ‘[t]he worst step back for human rights since Algeria’ (*Libération*, 2004).

One of the principal spatial targets of these new laws and measures has been the social housing neighbourhoods in banlieues (Bonelli, 2003; Wacquant, 2003), most of which were also designated neighbourhoods of urban policy. The ‘geography’ which urban policy has helped to consolidate through its designated neighbourhoods became officially so accepted that when the French Intelligence Service decided to engage with the question of banlieues, it was the list of urban policy neighbourhoods that they took as a starting point. When the Ministry of Justice engaged with the issue in a stated aim to restore the law, its measures aimed mainly at the same neighbourhoods. Similarly, other repressive measures (such as local security contracts, Sarkozy’s flash-ball guns, and so on) and growing anxieties about the ‘values of the republic’ were all guided by the same spatial imaginary, which became the basis for the consolidation of the republican penal state from the 1990s onwards.

This suggests that the state’s spatial practices – in this case, urban policy – have been an integral part in the consolidation of the penal state in France.<sup>3</sup> The spaces of urban policy have become the major sites upon and through which the penal

state has been consolidated. However, the relationship between the constitution of spaces of intervention under urban policy and the consolidation of the penal state is not straightforward. As I will try to show, the French case suggests that the ways in which space is imagined and used in urban policy vary, which is perhaps best exemplified by the differences between this policy's early – militant – years, and its contemporary – statist – orientations.<sup>4</sup> My aim in this article is to chart these changes in French urban policy, and to point to the relationship between changing governmentalities and spatial conceptualizations. More specifically, I would like to argue that although there is a governmental dimension to the constitution of spaces through urban policy, there is no inherent politics to such constitutions.

I start with a brief section which explains my understanding of the implications of the notion of governmentality for looking at urban policy with a focus on space. I then introduce French urban policy, and provide an account organized around the changing spatial conceptualizations of its intervention areas. I conclude with some observations on space, governmentality and urban policy.

## Governmentality, urban policy and space

In the past decade or so, there has been a growing interest in approaching policy from a somewhat 'non-traditional' perspective. A number of scholars inspired mainly, though not exclusively, by Foucauldian social theory have attempted to go beyond studying policy merely in terms of an unproblematic 'tool' to be employed to address 'given' problems. One of the major contributions of this expanding body of work has been its emphasis on the construction of policy problems as part of the policy-making process rather than taking policies as responses to self-evident problems (see, among others, Atkinson, 2000; Cochrane, 2000; Hajer, 1995; Raco and Imrie, 2000).

One of the obvious implications of approaching urban policy – as in other public policies – in this way is to look at the ways in which problems to be addressed are constituted as part of the very policy process. There is, however, a more specific

implication for urban policy that derives from a distinctive aspect of it; that is, space. As Cochrane (2000: 532) notes, urban policy is distinctive compared to other social policies in that it conceives of its object spatially:

Urban policy . . . focuses on places and spatially delimited areas or the groups of people associated with them. Its problem definition starts from area rather than individual or even social group, although, of course, a concern with an area is often used as a coded way of referring to a concern about the particular groups which are believed to be concentrated in it.

This suggests that due attention be given to the ways in which space is conceived in urban policy. The spaces in which urban policy intervenes are not already given spaces; they are constituted as part of the policy process, and urban policy, in this sense, has a governmental dimension. This aspect of urban policy has already been noted in the governmentality literature on urban policy. However, changing conceptualizations of space has received little attention. I would like to argue, therefore, that constitution of spaces through urban policy is not a governmental practice in a univocal sense. Let me elaborate.

One of the issues Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality raises is the mutual constitution of objects of governance and modes of thought – mentality – which then makes specific forms of intervention possible. Thus, the relevance of the concept for studies of (urban) policy derives from its emphasis on the mutual constitution of formation and intervention as part of the activity of governance, of which policy making is one aspect. The emphasis on the mutual constitution of specific forms of representation and intervention is indicated by the semantic linking of 'governing' and 'mentality' (Lemke, 2001). This implies that governmental practices cannot be considered independently of the formation of the objects and subjects of governance. As Thrift (1999: 276) notes, following Rose (1996), one of the issues Foucault intended to signify with the notion of governmentality was the ways in which governmental activities were based on particular forms of political reasoning as conceptions of the objects and subjects to be governed. This implies, among other things, the constitution of 'governable spaces'. As Rose (1999: 36) wrote, in order

'[t]o govern, it is necessary to render visible the space over which government is to be exercised'.

This formulation has useful implications for analysis of urban policy, which depends on and deploys particular spatial imaginaries. Urban policy implies 'a process of actual boundary shaping', and may be seen as an institutionalized spatial arrangement (Shapiro and Neubauer, 1989: 303). This makes it difficult to talk unproblematically about the 'spaces' of urban policy, because, in this view, they are constituted as part of the policy process. It follows that governmental practices, insofar as they involve both formation and intervention, are not merely 'confined' to designated spaces. They constitute those spaces as part of the governing activity. If urban policy has a governmental dimension, as I have suggested, then its spaces of intervention are not merely the sites of this governmental practice, but, first and foremost, its outcomes. However, policy discourses and programmes are guided by particular ways of imagining space, which have different implications for the constitution of problems and formulation of solutions. In other words, how space is conceived matters because urban policy conceives of its object spatially. How do different urban policies imagine their spaces of intervention? What kind of a spatial imaginary do they constitute and act upon? What difference do different ways of conceiving space make for urban policy? Such questions have received little – if any – attention in the geographical literature that focuses on governmentality and urban policy.

The French case, however, suggests that they should. As I will try to show below, although French urban policy has been addressing practically the same areas for years, the ways in which its intervention areas were spatially conceptualized (and discursively articulated) have changed remarkably. This is not to imply that each succeeding programme was a rupture with the preceding one. In each of the periods I use to organize my account, however, there was not only a discernible change in forms of state intervention – with a shift from a social to a penal approach – but also in the spatial conceptualizations of intervention areas – from a relational view of intervention areas to self-contained areas with rigid boundaries. Different ways of imagining space, I will argue, had different implications for the constitution of problems and formulation of solutions. Furthermore, each of the

changing conceptualizations followed different political rationalities, understood as conceptualizations and justifications of goals, ideals, and principles of government (Rose and Miller, 1992; Simons, 1995). This implies that the constitution of spaces through urban policy has a governmental dimension, but there is no inherent politics to such constitutions. It seems to me important, therefore, to give adequate attention to varying conceptualizations of space as they have different policy and political implications, and reflect different political rationalities.

Therefore, my approach to urban policy makes conceptualizations of space central to its analysis. I share the view with the social constructionist approaches that problems and policies associated with spaces of intervention are constituted as part of the policy process, but insist that equal attention be given to the ways in which such spaces are conceptualized in policy. With the governmentality approaches, I concur that the constitution of spaces through urban policy has a governmental dimension, but maintain that there is no inherent politics to such constitutions. Variations in the ways space is conceptualized matter as each policy discourse and programme is based on particular ways of conceptualizing space, as the French experience suggests.

## Geographies of French urban policy

As Estèbe (2001: 25) notes, the basis of French urban policy is its definition of a 'geography of priority neighbourhoods'; that is, a geography constituted by the designated areas (i.e. 'priority neighbourhoods'), which then becomes the basis of policy programmes and interventions. This basis has remained stable over the two decades of this policy; since the early 1980s, French urban policy consolidated and acted upon a geography of priority neighbourhoods. However, the 'geography' of priority neighbourhoods has changed over the years – not simply in terms of the number of areas to be included, but in terms of the way in which the included areas have been spatially conceptualized. In this sense, French urban policy has consolidated and intervened upon three 'geographies' – 'local', 'relative' and 'statist' (*étatique*) – each marked by different ways of conceptualizing space.

My account is aimed at highlighting these transformations in spatial conceptualizations rather than providing a comprehensive account of French urban policy. The early years of French urban policy (the 1980s) were marked by what I refer to, following Estèbe (2001), as a ‘local geography’ that paid attention to local dynamics and specificities, which was a sign of its origins rooted in the self-management and urban movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This was followed by what I refer to, again following Estèbe, as a ‘relative geography’ that implied collaboration between different territorial units, which was a sign of the emphasis put on solidarity and the welfare state in the second term of Mitterrand in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The shift to what I call a ‘statist geography’ – rigid and centrally decided by the state – followed from a change in the government in 1993, which was the start of a period of experimentation with neo-liberal ideas in an attempt to foster economic activity in the neighbourhoods of urban policy. This period, as we will see, was also marked by the consolidation of the penal state in and through the neighbourhoods of urban policy.

### ‘Foot-soldiers of democracy’: the local geography of urban policy

French urban policy (*la politique de la Ville*) was initiated in a specific context marked by the arrival of the Left to power for the first time in the Fifth Republic with a highly contentious political agenda. Only a few months after the arrival of the Left under the presidency of the Socialist Party leader Mitterrand, several incidents of unrest took place in the social housing neighbourhoods at the peripheral areas (banlieues) of large French cities during the ‘hot summer’ of 1981. Furthermore, these incidents occurred against the backdrop of ‘race riots’ on the other side of the Channel, notably in Brixton, which was haunting the ‘one and indivisible’ French republic. In this context, the response of the new government carried immense strategic and symbolic significance. Strategically, the new government could not have afforded the recurrence of such incidents, especially faced with the opposition Right’s severe critique of the new government’s ‘soft’ attitude towards immigration; symbolically

too, because the Socialist Party’s success was based largely on the emergence and activism of a new generation of militants and elites, mostly committed to urban struggles. Indeed, the initial impetus for decentralization reforms, which was on the new government’s agenda, ‘had much to do with the pressure of the social movements that produced the 1981 victory’ (Preteceille, 1988: 415), which means that the Socialist Government was, and had to be in order to maintain its locally based power, very sensitive towards urban social movements (Harburger, 1994; Preteceille, 1988).

Following the incidents of 1981, a National Commission for the Social Development of Neighbourhoods (Commission Nationale pour le Développement Social des Quartiers, CNDSQ) was created and attached directly to the office of the Prime Minister. Hubert Dubedout, the mayor of Grenoble, was appointed as the president of the commission. Dubedout was one of the founders of municipal action groups (*Groupes d’action municipale*, GAM) in the 1970s, which sought to promote the idea of self-management (*autogestion*) at the urban level.

The appointment of Dubedout – a locally elected official – carried immense symbolic value as a sign of the new government’s attempt to alter the overly centralist and technocratic state practices.<sup>5</sup> The commission was characterized by three major orientations and sensibilities. First, there was an orientation towards people working in the field (*acteurs de terrain*) – called the ‘foot-soldiers of democracy’ (*fantassins de la démocratie*) by the members of the commission (Harburger, 1994) – and towards local specificities and experiences, with an attempt to move away from technocratic practices that had characterized earlier periods. Second, there was a great sensibility towards urban social movements, which, probably, was influential in the creation of the CNDSQ with an urban-spatial focus in the first place following the incidents of the summer of 1981. And finally, priority was given to locally elected, rather than centrally appointed, officials.

The Dubedout Report, *Ensemble, refaire la ville* (Together, Remaking the City), was published in 1983, outlining the major features of a new approach to address social housing neighbourhoods: the Social Development of Neighbourhoods, or the DSQ. The report identified three major orientations for the DSQ programme. First, it was necessary to act on the deprived neighbourhoods and the causes of their

degradation in order to tackle problems generated by the concentration of disadvantaged groups in certain neighbourhoods, and by 'social exclusion induced by the economic crisis' (Dubedout, 1983: 12). The deterioration of the social housing stock in the neighbourhoods was only one side of a complex problem, which had to be addressed in ways that went beyond an exclusive focus on physical improvement by taking into consideration issues such as unemployment, poverty and education.

The second orientation concerned the participation of inhabitants. It was necessary, the report insisted, to take into consideration diverse forms of participation, and not merely formal associational forms. 'There is not only one but several levels of intervention of inhabitants in democracy at the scale of the neighbourhood [*la démocratie de quartier*]' (Dubedout, 1983: 38). The quest was for the 'democratization of the management of the city':

In this quest, there are no privileged professions, no monopoly of knowledge, no hierarchical level, no command centres [*base arrière*]. Meeting this challenge requires a mobilization of all those who want to give access to *the right to the city* to all those from whom it is withheld. This dynamism must be part of a new political and technical organization of all authorities who manage these issues. (Dubedout, 1983: 29; emphasis added)

The third orientation defined by the report concerned the role of local collectivities. In this respect, the report recommended that the role of local collectivities be reinforced, giving them more power in larger decision-making processes, while increasing their responsibilities.

The DSQ programme started with these orientations. The first 16 neighbourhoods were selected in 1982, and seven more were added the following year. There was not a standard, 'objective', or formalized selection process; selections were made by the CNDSQ working in consultation with mayors. The members of the commission already knew the social housing neighbourhoods well. The selection was based on their knowledge of these neighbourhoods, taking into consideration their specificities.

Although the DSQ programme was focused on spatially targeted areas, larger dynamics were emphasized in an attempt to avoid what Belbahri (1984) called 'over-localizing the social'; that is, narrowly conceiving the problems of social housing neighbourhoods merely as problems 'confined' to

particular spaces. The incidents of the hot summer of 1981 were seen as manifestations of multifaceted problems, causes of which went beyond the confines of designated neighbourhoods. The creators of French urban policy were very clear on this issue: the banlieues and social housing neighbourhoods were to be seen as part of the production of space, related to larger dynamics, and not as already given well-delimited spaces with problems. All the 'founding texts' of urban policy pointed to the limits of focusing exclusively on selected neighbourhoods, and emphasized the importance of taking larger issues into consideration. The Schwartz Report (1981) on the 'insertion of the youth', for example, argued that the central city and the neighbourhoods at peripheral areas should not be conceived as separate. Similarly, the Bonnemaïson Report on prevention (1982) emphasized the importance of conceiving prevention policies on a scale larger than the neighbourhood. The Dubedout Report (1983) went even further:

The opening up [*désenclavement*] of social housing neighbourhoods implies an ideological breakthrough: their inclusion in debates over the development of cities. (1983: 76)

However, the strong political ideals of the DSQ programme found little realization. Following the so-called 'anti-immigrant vote' of the 1983 municipal elections, the political context in which the banlieues and social housing neighbourhoods was addressed would change significantly. This initially experimental policy programme, conceived to generate new ways of thinking about the city through creating a local political dynamic in the spaces of intervention, started to expand to cover more neighbourhoods. The number of neighbourhoods included in the programme was raised to 148 in 1984. The DSQ programme started to become a means for financing renovation projects and prevention of revolts, and the earlier emphasis on democracy and right to the city started to disappear.

### Restoring the welfare state: the relative geography of urban policy

When François Mitterrand started his second term as President in 1988, he declared that the city would be one of his priorities, and efforts would be made

for 'inventing a real urban civilization' (Banlieues 89, 1989: 3). A few months later, Prime Minister Michel Rocard advanced reforms for the institutionalization of urban policy. The decree of 28 October 1988 established the National Council of Cities, the CNV, created an inter-ministerial committee (CIV),<sup>6</sup> and, more importantly, the Délégation interministérielle à la ville (DIV), an interministerial delegation responsible for coordinating urban policy.

The creation of the DIV not only served to bring an administrative focus to urban policy programmes within other state institutions and policies, but also made clear that 'urban policy was given greater prominence, thereby symbolizing the commitment of the state to tackling the urban crisis and in turn encouraging a greater involvement of the various ministries' (Le Galès and Mawson, 1994: 27–8). These changes occurred in a period referred to as 'the return of the State' (Barthélémy, 1995; Merlin, 1998), and they were in line with the new government's emphasis on solidarity and the welfare state, reflected also in other policy initiatives of the period such as the RMI (Revenu Minimum d'Insertion [Minimum Insertion Income]).<sup>7</sup>

These reforms were accompanied by a significant increase in the number of intervention areas. With the Xth Plan (1989–93), the number of neighbourhoods included in urban policy increased from 148 to 400, including all the previously designated neighbourhoods since 1982. Urban policy was no longer an experimental policy concerned with a few neighbourhoods, but rather, an ambitious programme with 400 neighbourhoods to be tackled.

Institutionalization of urban policy continued with the creation of a City Ministry in 1990, following another series of revolts in the banlieues of French cities. The problem for the new ministry, whose mission was defined as 'fighting exclusion', was to spatially constitute its object of intervention; that is, spatially defining and delimiting 'exclusion'. 'Fighting exclusion' meant to fight it spatially given the way urban policy had operated since its inception. However, this had to be done with an *already* existing geography of priority neighbourhoods – the 'local geography' of the 1980s – which consisted of the 400 areas designated in the Xth Plan. Thus, the City Ministry started to collaborate with the INSEE (French national institute of economic and statistical information) for the statistical profiling and mapping of the priority

neighbourhoods of urban policy. A section called City (Ville) was created at the INSEE for this purpose. This collaboration was aimed at reconstituting the spaces of urban policy as the *objects of a national policy* in a more rational and precise way. As Estèbe (2001: 31) put it:

What is at stake is the transformation of the essentially local geography of the 1980s – based on reputations, empirical and grounded knowledge [*des connaissances sensibles et empiriques*], parallel histories of cities and neighbourhoods – into a set of territories likely to become an acceptable object for a national policy for fighting exclusion.

The neighbourhoods were thus reconstituted as objects of a national policy for spatially fighting exclusion, using long-term unemployment, young people aged under 25, and 'foreigners' (i.e. not French citizens) as criteria. This new geography of the priority neighbourhoods of urban policy was a 'relative geography' in that the defined criteria were used to measure the 'gap' between neighbourhoods of urban policy, national means, and mean values for communes and agglomerations of which they were a part. What was measured, therefore, was the concentration of long-term unemployed, young people aged under 25, and foreigners in relation to mean values at the commune, agglomeration and national levels. The spaces of urban policy were thus conceptualized not as separate from but in relation to wider geographies.

This spatial approach was also manifest in the urban policy initiatives of the early 1990s. One of these was the City Contracts (Contrats de Ville) programme. These contracts defined a programme of action between the state and the localities for a period of five years. The programme was conceived with three major objectives. The first was changing the scale of intervention from individual neighbourhoods to the entire city-region. The second objective was to encourage mayors to take into consideration broader social and economic issues. The third objective was to encourage intercommunal cooperation by bringing communes together in devising projects to address deprived areas. However, the City Contracts programme encountered serious problems in implementation. One of the recurrent critiques directed at it was its 'stereotypical' contracts, prepared with an aim mostly to receive funding from the state with no precise objectives, or with objectives which were

aimed at redeveloping certain parts of the city without addressing the disadvantaged areas. Inter-communal cooperation also fell far behind expectations (Donzelot and Estèbe, 1999; Le Galès and Mawson, 1994; OECD, 1998).

Nevertheless, the City Contracts programme was an attempt to encourage a more comprehensive approach that took into consideration larger dynamics than one that focused merely on delimited neighbourhoods. It was also supported by many laws passed in the early 1990s. The Loi Besson of 1990 defined the right to housing (*droit au logement*) as a 'duty of solidarity for the entire nation', and required the departments to financially contribute to 'solidarity funds' at least as much as the state.<sup>8</sup> The Loi de dotation de solidarité urbaine of 1991 was aimed at establishing intercommunal solidarity (as was suggested in the Dubedout Report of 1983) through a transfer of funds from richer communes with less social problems to poorer communes with more social problems. This was a significant redistributive measure which was aimed at fostering solidarity between communes. Finally, the Loi d'orientation sur la ville (LOV) of 1991 was aimed at a more balanced distribution of social housing among communes by requiring them to meet the norm of 20 percent social housing.

The transformations of the late 1980s and early 1990s shifted the orientation of urban policy from a militant to a technocratic one, with a rationally and more precisely defined geography of priority neighbourhoods. This geography was a relative geography in the sense that the spaces of intervention were defined in relation to their larger city-regions. These attempts to conceive the neighbourhoods of urban policy relationally and to address their problems through redistributive policies, however, were disrupted with the initiation of a new programme, the Pacte de relance pour la ville,<sup>9</sup> introduced by the Right-wing Juppé Government in 1996.

### Consolidating the penal state: the statist geography of urban policy

Before the passing of the Pacte de relance, the new orientation of urban policy was already signalled by Prime Minister Balladur's right-wing Government

which came to office in 1993. The three priorities envisaged by the new Government for urban policy were 'authority, identity, and activity'. 'Authority' implied more repressive measures, and 'identity' a growing concern with the 'integration' of second and third-generation immigrants in the intervention areas of urban policy. 'Activity' referred to tax benefits for firms locating in the neighbourhoods included in urban policy. Thus, the new government associated the neighbourhoods of urban policy with concerns about 'the authority of the State' and 'French identity' (*Le Figaro*, 1993: 6), and gave the first signals of a shift in focus from comprehensive approaches conceived to alleviate inequalities to measures devised with an exclusive focus on delimited neighbourhoods.

The Pacte de relance was the translation of this orientation into law. The main idea behind it was to foster economic activity and to increase employment in the neighbourhoods of urban policy through tax concessions and public subsidies. Trying to foster economic activity and to increase employment through tax concessions and public subsidies was not a novelty brought about by the Pacte de relance. Attempts had already been made in 1987, by the creation of *zones d'entreprises*, inspired by Thatcher's enterprise zones, by the then Minister of Industry Alain Madelin under the Chirac Government. The LOV of 1991 had also envisaged giving local collectivities the possibility of tax concessions for the creation and extension of new business (although this was never widely applied). The Pacte de relance extended tax concessions to already existing firms, and involved public subsidies as well.

The novelty of the Pacte de relance was what it did with the geography of priority neighbourhoods. For the most part, the Pacte de relance retained areas that were already included under the City Contracts programme, but turned the 'relative geography' of this programme into a 'statist geography' – absolute, hierarchical, and defined through centrally decided criteria. What the Pacte de relance did was to redefine the neighbourhoods of urban policy through a scale, which identified hierarchical spatial categories of exclusion. A formula called 'Synthetic Index of Exclusion' (ISE) was devised to assign the neighbourhoods of urban policy to their proper places on a scale of exclusion, which consisted of criteria such as the level of long-term employment, proportion of young people,

and proportion of people without high-school diploma.<sup>10</sup> The attempt in the relative geography of the early 1990s was to measure the gap between the neighbourhoods and their surrounding areas through a calculation of concentration. The designated neighbourhoods were seen as 'neighbourhoods at risk', and the attempt was to discern symptoms of larger programmes and populations at risk (Estèbe, 2001). This time, however, the attempt was to measure how badly these neighbourhoods were 'excluded'. The Pacte de relance transformed the relative geography of difficulties into an absolute geography of exclusion with rigid boundaries.

This was a major departure from earlier, more 'local' and relational conceptualizations. With this particular spatial conceptualization, the neighbourhoods of urban policy were closed upon themselves, becoming 'problems' as such. The inhabitants and local specificities, in the process, turned into internally homogeneous spatial categories, and the earlier ideas about appropriation of lived spaces by inhabitants themselves disappeared, which led Béhar (2001) to argue that urban policy, despite all its spatial focus, was in fact an 'a-territorial' policy in that it became disconnected from local specificities.

The Pacte de relance gave French urban policy a neo-liberal orientation. With this programme, the focus of urban policy shifted from collaboration and solidarity between communes to economic competition among them. It was conceived almost exclusively in economic terms, with an emphasis on economic success within strictly defined spaces of intervention. Whereas earlier urban policy programmes took into consideration local specificities and relations between designated areas and their larger city-regions, the Pacte de relance was exclusively focused on neatly defined, exclusive and calculable spaces of intervention, which could then be classified, categorized and placed on a scale. This spatial conceptualization had no room for redistributive policies aimed at collaboration and solidarity between communes within the larger city-region. In the statist geography of the Pacte de relance, the neighbourhoods of urban policy existed in and of themselves, as neatly delimited areas that supposedly contained both the 'problem' and its solution, provided they were able to attract businesses.

Attempts were made to open up the spatial focus of urban policy under the succeeding Government,

which came to office in 1997 with Jospin as Prime Minister. The Jospin Government's actions in the domain of urban policy included an impressive amount of measures, which were more or less a remake of the measures of the late 1980s and early 1990s. It reintroduced the City Contracts programme, passed two laws which sought to encourage intercommunal cooperation and change the scale of intervention from the neighbourhood to the agglomeration, passed another that was aimed at a more balanced distribution of social housing,<sup>11</sup> and introduced a large-scale physical renovation programme which took after the Grands Projets Urbains (GPU) of the early 1990s.

All three laws had a redistributive aspect; they were all marked by an emphasis on solidarity (Goze, 2002), although they also implied more responsibility and bidding for communes, interpreted as a sign of the relative disengagement of the state (Donzelot, 2006; Le Galès, 2005). Nevertheless, these measures implied an opening-up of the spatial focus of urban policy, which was severely limited by the statist geography of the Pacte de relance. The reintroduction of the contracts meant a process open to negotiations between the state and local collectivities rather than a geography imposed by the technocrats of the central state.

The attempt to open up the spatial focus of urban policy came to a halt with the change of government. The Raffarin Government came to power in 2002 with an agenda dominated by the issue of security, and immediately passed laws that gave more power to the police, extended the scope of criminal offence, and intensified penal responses. 'After measures aimed at restoring the republican order, the fight against injustice has started,' declared Jean-Louis Borloo, the new Minister for the City, soon after the passing of these laws (*Libération*, 2002). Borloo had three priorities for urban policy: 'breaking up the ghettos'; 'jobs and professional insertion'; and 'simplification of procedures' (DIV, 2004: 24). Thus, for the first time in urban policy, a city minister explicitly and without reservations referred to the neighbourhoods of urban policy as ghettos 'at the margins of national territory' (*Le Monde*, 2003).

The priorities defined by Borloo guided a new law on urban policy, known as 'loi Borloo', passed in August 2003. This law translated the first priority, 'breaking up the ghettos', into demolition

programmes; the second, 'jobs and professional insertion', into more areas with tax concessions; and the third, 'simplification of procedures', into the creation of the 'National Agency for Urban Renovation' (Agence nationale pour la rénovation urbaine, known as ANRU).

ANRU would centralize, manage and distribute subventions, thus providing a single stop (*guichet unique*) for the financing of renovation programmes (Depincé, 2003: 28). This indeed was a significant reorganization, but the creation of ANRU meant much more than just simplification of procedures. The creation of ANRU, and the Borloo law in general, recentralized urban policy. This recentralization implied an urban policy which risked becoming purely procedural, reduced to the physical transformation of the built environment or to the designation of more tax concession areas. It also took urban policy back to the statist geography of the Pacte de relance and remarkably limited its spatial focus.

The creation of the ANRU for physical renovation, on the one hand, and the expansion of tax concession areas, on the other hand, implied a major divergence from previous urban policies, which combined physical interventions and measures with social aspects. Urban policy had always had a social dimension. The Borloo law brought about a dissociation in terms both of the nature of urban policy and the relationship it had established between the state and local collectivities (Epstein and Kirszbaum, 2006; Estèbe, 2004; Jaillet, 2003). Regarding the former, it narrowed down the engagement of the state to physical interventions only, leaving the social dimension to the initiative and capabilities of local collectivities. Regarding the latter, it dissociated the contractual relationship between the state and local collectivities, which was also a feature of the Pacte de relance. The previous City Contracts programme was more flexible in terms of objectives and actions, which were negotiated by the state and local collectivities. The new programme, on the contrary, was very rigid; it defined objectives and actions by law. Thus, the objectives of urban policy were given – not negotiated (Epstein and Kirszbaum, 2006). Instead of a process of negotiation, a hierarchical relationship was established between a central agency (ANRU) and local collectivities, which risked reducing the latter's role to a purely administrative one executing the centrally defined actions (Estèbe, 2004).

In spatial terms, the Borloo law took urban policy back to the statist geography of the Pacte de relance. This geography was centrally defined – not negotiated – and absolute, constituted by neatly delimited spaces of intervention as if they existed in and of themselves. The attempts to open up the focus of urban policy by encouraging projects conceived at the level of agglomeration thus came to an end. The Borloo law reduced the spaces of urban policy to an ensemble of housing estates to be demolished. Over the years, urban policy has gradually shifted focus from the inhabitants themselves to spaces of intervention. The Borloo law carried this trend to the extreme, and transformed urban policy to a policy 'addressed not to inhabitants but to space seen as a problem in and of itself' (Estèbe, 2004: 255).

## Conclusions

As we have seen, French urban policy started as an experimental policy with a limited number of neighbourhoods: 16 neighbourhoods in 1982, which went up to 148 in a couple of years, to 400 in the early 1990s and to about 700 in the mid-1990s. In the process, the neighbourhoods of the previous years remained while new ones were added. By focusing on the ways in which space is imagined in urban policy, I have tried to show that although urban policymakers have been addressing practically the same areas for years, the ways in which the intervention areas were spatially conceptualized (and discursively articulated) have changed remarkably.

In the early 1980s, the idea behind urban policy was to create a new territorial dynamic through the 'spatialization of social policies' – as opposed to sectoral policies – and in this sense, it was seen as innovative at the time (Chaline, 1998). Urban policy was aimed at cultivating a local political dynamic through its spatial approach, and was mainly the work of militants working in the selected neighbourhoods (Donzelot and Estèbe, 1999). Its neighbourhoods were selected based on local specificities rather than on centrally defined criteria. Starting with the 1990s, the neighbourhoods of urban policy were constituted as more precisely defined objects of intervention, with clear boundaries and defining statistical information. This emphasis on precision and

statistical manipulation, however, was not premised on a conception of the spaces of urban policy as self-contained. Although their boundaries were now more clearly defined, they were nevertheless conceptualized in relation to wider geographies rather than as separate entities in themselves, thus changing the 'local geography' of the 1980s into a 'relative geography'. From the mid-1990s onwards, however, this relative geography turned into a 'statist geography' with the neighbourhoods conceptualized as self-contained areas with rigid boundaries. This shift in spatial conceptualization corresponded with two other shifts: first, a shift from comprehensive and potentially redistributive policies to initiatives 'confined' to the designated areas (such as tax concessions); and second, a shift towards more repressive and penal forms of state intervention, the effects of which have been more pronounced in the neighbourhoods of urban policy. Whereas the neighbourhoods of urban policy were sites of political experimentation in the early 1980s, starting with the mid-1990s they have become sites where the republican penal state consolidated itself.

By highlighting the changes in spatial conceptualizations of intervention areas, I have tried to show that space matters in urban policy. Saying this sounds a bit like stating the obvious; after all, urban policy is about space, or better yet, about certain spaces. It defines the issues it seeks to address in spatial terms, delineates spaces to intervene upon, and proposes spatially targeted remedies to perceived problems. Yet spatial conceptualizations, as we have seen, change. Urban policy does not operate with an unchanging view of space. Just as the discursive terms with which to talk about its spaces change, the way it conceptualizes its spaces change as well. In other words, urban policy is guided by particular ways of imagining space, and different ways of imagining space have different implications for the constitution of perceived problems and proposed solutions. Depending on whether spaces of intervention are conceived as neatly delimited areas or in relational terms, initiatives range from limited local interventions to regional distributive policies.

Changing spatial conceptualizations has another implication as well. I have suggested that urban policy has a governmental dimension. However, I have insisted that this is far from univocal. Governmental practices are not about

interventions only; they involve both formation *and* intervention. If we hold the view that space is not already given in urban policy, then it follows that urban policy is a governmental practice not merely because it intervenes upon certain spaces, but because it constitutes them as objects of intervention in the first place. In this sense, the spaces of urban policy are not the given sites of this governmental practice, but, first of all, its outcomes. Different policy discourses and programmes imagine space in varying ways, as the different 'geographies' of French urban policy exemplify. This suggests that changing conceptualizations of space and their policy and political implications should be taken into consideration in analysis of urban policy.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This opening is inspired by the opening of a chapter by Connolly (1993: 249) on 'the American state' and 'the Hegelian state'.
- <sup>2</sup> This is not to imply that all these notions were exclusively 'Lefebvrian'. In the early 1980s, particularly, 'self-management' and 'right to difference' were very popular notions in the political agenda, with a variety of interpretations. Lefebvre, however, conceived these notions with a decidedly urban spatial focus.
- <sup>3</sup> As one of the referees suggested, there is a possibility here to consider this argument in relation to Lefebvre's (1991) 'production of space', taking into consideration the state's spatial practices and representations of space. Urban policy, in this sense, may be seen as one of the ways in which space is 'produced' by the state.
- <sup>4</sup> As Donzelot and Estèbe (1999) point out, the early years of urban policy (the early 1980s) were marked by the activity of militants working in the selected neighbourhoods. This approach, however, remarkably changed in the 1990s, and urban policy became more the work of the state's technocrats and bureaucrats than that

- of the local militants. It is this difference that I try to capture with the terms 'militant' and 'statist'.
- <sup>5</sup> As a former member of the commission put it: "We had the feeling we were inventing a new State profession, closer and more respectful of other partners, notably locally elected officials" (Harburger, 1994: 386).
  - <sup>6</sup> Thus, in 1988, the institutional structure of urban policy was consolidated with the creation of the Comité interministériel des villes (CIV), the Conseil national des villes (CNV), and the Délégation interministérielle à la ville (DIV). The CIV, chaired by the Prime Minister, was charged with decision making, the CNV with research and proposals, and the DIV with the coordination of actors and actions concerning urban policy.
  - <sup>7</sup> The RMI offered a minimum income to unemployed people over the age of 25 (provided that they were not students, and were willing to be trained for or placed in work).
  - <sup>8</sup> Departments are one of the three major levels of territorial administration in France, between the regions and the communes.
  - <sup>9</sup> 'Pacte de relance pour la ville' cannot be translated accurately, although it has been referred to as 'urban renewal pact' (see e.g. OECD, 1998). The word *relance* has economic connotations, and means 'boosting' when used with reference to the economy, and 'relaunching' when used with reference to a project or idea.
  - <sup>10</sup> Calculations were made by using data on the included neighbourhoods (the proportions of youth, long-term unemployed people, and people with no high school diploma) and their communes. The formula was as follows:  $ISE = (\% \text{ of people younger than } 25) \times (\% \text{ of long-term unemployed}) \times (\% \text{ of people without high school diploma}) \times (\text{total population of the commune})$  divided by the tax potential of the commune.
  - <sup>11</sup> These were the 'Loi Voynet' of 1999, which sought to encourage contracts conceived at the level of agglomeration; the 'Loi Chevènement' of 1999, which was aimed at encouraging intercommunal cooperation through a redistribution of business tax between communes provided they organized in the form of an Agglomeration Community (Communauté d'agglomération); and the Solidarity and Urban Renewal Law (Loi de solidarité et renouvellement urbains, SRU) of 2000, which sought a more balanced distribution of social housing by requiring communes to attain an objective of 20% social housing.
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