Urban Policy in France and Great Britain:

A Ten-Year Evaluation

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During the first decade of the 2000s, urban policy in France and Great Britain was granted unprecedented budgetary and political support, exceeding, at last, the token sums it had previously received. At present, it is possible to compare the results of the policies pursued in both countries.

Comparing policies aimed at poor neighbourhoods in France and Great Britain, Patrick Le Galès, writing in 1995, noted the disjunction between the alleged voluntarism of their governments and the practical reality of their urban policies. In both countries, urban policies appeared "simultaneously as an important and legitimate realm of government activism, which included some efforts at rationalization, and as improvised, financially modest, indecisive, incoherent, inclined to sporadic initiatives and hype, and overly sensitive to emergencies and the media."[1] Three years later, the governments of Tony Blair and Lionel Jospin seemed to belie this assessment by initiating ambitious programs for regenerating dozens neighbourhoods among the poorest in each country. These programs were subsequently renewed and expanded through vast national plans aimed at reducing territorial inequalities.

During the first decade of the 2000s, urban policy on both sides of the Channel received unprecedented budgetary and political support, finally exceeding the token levels to which it had seemed condemned. As the main policies undertaken during this period have been or will soon be completed, it is now possible to evaluate their success. This is the goal of this article. A comparative examination of these programs will, moreover, allow us to draw some useful lessons for French urban policy, at a time when its future course remains uncertain.

Britain's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and New Deal for Communities

When Tony Blair came to power in 1997, he set the fight against social exclusion at the core of the State's reform agenda. Hundreds of scholars and professionals were mobilized to assess previous urban policies, and diagnose the situation of deprived neighbourhoods. This resulted in the launching of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) in 1998, the pilot

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[1] Patrick Le Galès (1995) "Politique de la ville en France et en Grande-Bretagne: volontarisme et ambiguïtés de l'Etat," *Sociologie du travail*, 37, 2.

program for a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR), which was formally established in 2001. The NSNR aimed to provide a strategic and joined-up approach to the complex problems posed by neighbourhood renewal. It was rooted in an acknowledgement that previous regeneration programmes had failed to reverse the decline of disadvantaged neighbourhoods because they had not fully addressed the complexity of the underpinning causes and their inter-relationships[2].

While the NDC and the NSNR were organized around the common goal of reducing inequalities between poor neighbourhoods and the rest of the country –in terms of employment, education, health, community safety and environment (including housing)– , they differed from each other in scope, resources, and the way they distributed power between stakeholders.

The NDC covered only 39 of the country's poorest neighbourhoods (averaging 10,000 inhabitants each). Each received a ten-year budget of 50 million pounds (60 M€) to finance any number of projects aimed at improving residents' living conditions. In addition to the exceptional resources at its disposal, the NDC differed from previous urban renewal projects in its "holistic" and "bottom-up" approach, as well as in its commitment to "empowering" local communities. New Deal's commitment to put residents in charge of the area's regeneration is reflected in the organization's structure: decision making falls within the remit of partnership boards, consisting of agency and community representatives. Community representatives were given a majority of votes, ensuring their control over the definition of priorities and programming. The NSNR's efforts to reduce social and spatial inequalities occurred on a much wider scale. The program was aimed at the 88 British cities with the largest number of deprived neighbourhoods[3] and it set itself around a hundred national goals for narrowing the gap between these neighbourhoods and the rest of the country, which included indicators and "floor targets." The NSNR was granted exceptional funding to supplement key public services[4] but it placed particular emphasis on mobilizing and changing mainstream policies through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Bringing together local officials and key public services (schools, police, employment agencies, social services, social housing agencies, etc.), each LSP was expected to develop a project which would adapt the national strategy to the local situation and track the evolution of dozens of indicators that were continuously monitored by government agencies. The LSPs' performances were, moreover, regularly reviewed by the Audit Commission. The latter's reports were feared by elected officials and civil servants, who, if their performance was deemed lacking, faced penalties or the requirement to subcontract inadequate services. Contrary to the NDC, one of Europe's most ambitious experiments in delegating power to local communities, the NSNR's structure was technocratic and hierarchical, characterized by central control and the pressuring of local officials and public services. The program was used as leverage to impose the kind of new managerialist approach that was typical of the Blair era, based upon a complex array of

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[2]   AMION (2010), *Evaluation of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, Final report, Communities and Local Government.

[3]   The identification of these neighbourhoods was based on calculating, for all 32,482 LSOA (Lower Layer Super Output Areas, the basic unit of the British statistical system, which are comparable to the French IRIS) a synthetic exclusion index combing 38 indicators covering poverty's seven main characteristics (income, employment, health and disability, training and competencies, access to housing and services, delinquency, and quality of live). The geographical areas that the NSNR prioritized were the neighbourhoods in the first decile of this index found in 88 cities.

[4]   Notably the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, which was allocated de €3.7 billion. Compared to the number of neighbourhoods the NSNR covers, this budget remains limited, as represents €25 per inhabitant per year, compared to € 5,000 per inhabitant per year for the NDC.

instruments including performance goals and indicators, reporting systems, benchmarking, and regular audits.[5]

France's National Program for Urban Renewal

The evolution of French urban policy is broadly comparable to Britain's in terms of chronology, goals, budgets, and tools, but less so in terms of the strategic orientations guiding it over the past fifteen years. Breaking with previous programs, to which the state had never devoted significant resources, the national program for urban renewal and solidarity launched in 1999 by Claude Bartolone called for the mobilization of nearly five billion euros between 2000 and 2006 for 80 of the most afflicted neighbourhood's in France's main urban centers. This unprecedented effort was extended and broadened in 2003 by the Borloo Act which, inspired by the NSNR, assigned urban policy the unprecedented goal of narrowing the gap between the 750 "sensitive urban zones" (zones urbaines sensibles or ZUS) and the rest of the country[6] while also transforming this policy's institutional design by introducing new institutions and neo-managerial tools (agencies, competitive bidding, performance indicators, awards for best practices, etc.) imported from Great Britain.

The goal of reducing inequalities was the organizing principle of the national program for urban renewal (programme national de rénovation urbaine or PNRU). Its administration was assigned to a new national agency, the ANRU, which received a budget of 12 million euros to restore social diversity in the most deprived areas. In addition to this program of tearing down and rebuilding 250,000 housing units, parliament expanded tax exemptions for companies to some 85 enterprise zones (zones franches urbaines). Whereas urban policy had previously employed a comprehensive and bottom-up approach that linked "place-based" development to the "people-based" goal of promoting the residents' social advancement, these costly programs retreated to a vertical, top-down and purely "place-based" approach.

Fadela Amara's "Hope for the Suburbs" plan (Plan Espoir Banlieue) launched in 2009 was no more successful than the urban contracts for social cohesion, introduced after the 2005 riots in challenging the urban renewal policy pursued since 2003. Its success was regularly celebrated by mayors of all political stripes as they engaged in spectacular operations of demolishing and rebuilding housing developments that, in transforming these neighbourhoods' urban design and housing stock, would supposedly restore social mix, which was endowed with every possible virtue.[7]

Common Goals, Opposite Strategies, Different Results

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[5] Florence Faucher-King and Patrick Le Gales (2007), *Tony Blair 1997-2007*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po; Renaud Epstein, Irène Mboumoua (2012) Les indicateurs de la politique de la ville : comparaison entre trois pays, la France, la Grande-Bretagne, les Pays-Bas, Rapport pour le Centre d'Analyse Stratégique et le Secrétariat Général du Comité interministériel des villes.

[6] Until this point these goals and targets had never been specifically declared at the national level. It was up to local actors to define them, on the basis of diagnoses and projects in their own communities. The Borloo Act was a game-changer in the way that it assigned urban policy the goal of "significantly reducing observed inequalities, notably in terms of employment, economic development, education, access to health care, and security, between sensitive urban zones (ZUS) and the entire national territory."

[7] For an analysis of this urban renewal policy, see Renaud Epstein (2013) *La rénovation urbaine: Démolition-reconstruction de l'Etat*, Presses de Sciences Po.

While this comparison makes it possible to identify similarities, it also and most importantly reveals the key differences between French and British urban policy.[8] These policies are in fact embedded in national models that differ considerably in terms of their political traditions, the organization and functioning of their administration, the ways in which they established and reformed their welfare states, and the relationship between public institutions and civil society.[9] The British approach, based on the joint mobilization of government and local communities, the existence and competencies of which are recognized, stands opposed to the anti-empowerment agenda of French urban policy,[10] which is based on the imperative of "bringing the Republic back to the neighbourhoods" and an increasingly defiant attitude towards all forms of community organization. The reforms of the early 2000s exacerbated the Franco-British discrepancy, with NDC embracing community development while the PNRU committed itself to dispelling the "specter of *communautarisme*."[11]

In fact, though both countries shared the same goal —narrowing the gap between disadvantaged areas and the rest of the country—they pursued contrary strategies: the Borloo law reduced urban policy to a sectoral and purely "place-based" strategy of urban normalization, which would supposedly bring back social (and, implicitly, racial) mix through the spatial dispersal of the poor and luring the least poor inhabitants to newly renovated areas. This emphasis on exogenous diversity was, however, completely lacking in the NDC and NSNR,[12] which adopted an endogenous strategy of social development, based on mobilizing all stakeholders in neighbourhood management through horizontal projects in which spatial renovation and the social advancement of residents were combined.

This comparison also lays bare the French policy's evaluation deficit. Consistent with the doctrine of "evidence-based policing," significant resources were devoted to assessing the NSNR and especially the NDC. This was not the case in France, where the emphasis on evaluation used to justify the 2003 reform remained empty rhetoric.

Evaluation of the NDC was based on a vast study combining statistical analyses, functional reviews of the 39 NDCs, and, in particular, four rounds of surveying panels of 500 households in each of the concerned neighbourhoods, focusing on inhabitants' living conditions and outlook from the standpoint of the program's six thematic goals.[13] As the same procedure was repeated in 39 other poor neighbourhoods in the same cities, evaluators were able to determine the NDC's effects and impact at two different levels: that of the targeted neighbourhoods (by calculating their deviation from the test neighbourhoods) and that of the individual trajectories of their residents, thus combining an assessment of the program's effect on places and its impact on people.[14] The results were mostly positive: of the 36 indicators, 32

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[8]   Renaud Epstein et Irène Mboumoua (2011), "France et Grande-Bretagne: Circulations et convergences, Urbanisme, 380.

[9]   Romain Garbaye (2011), *Emeutes vs Intégration. Comparaisons franco-britanniques*, Presses de Sciences Po.

[10]   Thomas Kirszbaum (2011), "Pourquoi la France résiste à l'*empowerment*," Urbanisme, 380.

[11]   Though related to the word "community," the French word "*communautarisme*" refers to the aspiration of a minority group to live independently and in a way that preserves its distinctive identity. In the discourse of some defenders of the French republic, the word has a negative connotation (as it implies a rejection of republican universalism).

[12]   In this respect, the NSNR evolved somewhat in 2006, when the Blair government redefined its priorities by emphasizing social diversity, as an addition to the initial emphasis on improving residents' living conditions.

[13]   Three of these goals were "place-based" (housing and quality of life, delinquency, and communal cohesion) and three "people-based" (employment, education, and health).

[14]   Readers wishing to learn more about the methods and results of NDC evaluation can read their reports

improved in absolute terms and 31 in relative terms (i.e., in relation to the test neighbourhoods). The results were particularly favorable in the case of "place-based" indicators (relating to housing conditions, insecurity, perceptions about one's quality of life, and community cohesion), with the "people-based" indicators suggesting improvements that were less significant compared to the test neighbourhoods.

The evaluation of the NSNR, which was exclusively based on statistical analysis, also suggests the program was successful.[15] Overall, the goal of reducing disparities was achieved, as much between NSNR cities and the national average as between these cities and their environment. In a context of strong economic growth, rising levels of education, and declining delinquency in most British cities, NSNR's priority cities developed between 2001 and 2007 in particularly positive ways, resulting, for example in a 50% decline in theft disparities, while the gaps in educational achievement declined by over a third and unemployment by several percent. Here, too, comparing the targeted neighbourhoods with communities that are socio-economically similar but did not receive NSNR support made it possible for evaluators to identifiy its contribution to the positive outcomes achieved.

In France, the results were completely different. The National Observatory of Sensitive Urban Zones (Observatoire National des Zones Urbaines Sensibles) established, year after year, that gaps had stagnated or increased between the 750 targeted neighbourhoods and their environments. Unlike its British counterpart, French urban policy did not succeed in reducing territorial inequalities. That said, it unquestionably changed these neighbourhoods. This was notably the case of the PNRU, which radically altered the quality of life in hundreds of neighbourhoods, even if it failed to restore social mix. Yet its actual effects and impact remain uncertain, as instruments making it possible to trace individual trajectories and attribute change to the program itself were not implemented when the program was launched.[16] Yet this evaluation deficit did not prevent national and local politicians, as well as many observers, from declaring this urban revolution an "undeniable success," as emphasis on its visible and often spectacular outputs made it possible to overlook the weakness of its outcomes.

What Are the Lessons for French Urban Policy?

Despite the positive evaluations, British urban policy did not survive the change of government in 2010 and subsequent budget cuts. While they had little influence on the Cameron government's decisions, the NSNR and NDC evaluations provide food for thought for French urban policy makers, whose reforms have operated "in the dark" due to a lack of any serious evaluation effort since 2003. In particular, the British evaluations lead one to question the implementation and coherence of the measures that Urban Affairs Minister François Lamy announced in February 2013. These measures defined three priorities: empowerment of citizens and communities in deprived neighbourhoods, mainstreaming ("bringing the state back to the neighbourhoods"), and the spatial concentration of special urban policy initiatives and additional money in the most "troubled" neighbourhoods (i.e., a review of the list of the ZUS and the launching of a new generation of urban renewal

that have been published online: http://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/ndc_reports.htm.

[15]   AMION (2010), op. cit.

[16]   To determine the impact of urban renewal in a rigorous fashion, the procedures for determining the PNRU's geographical priorities required a representative sample, avoiding any selection bias, of neighbourhoods to provide a counterfactual basis, on the one hand, and the selection ex ante of cohorts of neighbourhood residents for follow-up analyses, on the other.

operations, more targeted than their predecessors).[17] In light of these measures, three main lessons can be drawn from the British evaluations.

Concerning the stated desire to pursue and promote social development through empowerment and in anticipation of the results of the Bacqué-Mechmache mission on this topic, the NDC evaluations should encourage only modest expectations in this respect. The joint decision-making powers that were delegated through NDC certainly improved self-perception of the neighbourhoods and their community life, but they had no significant effects on their residents' social trajectories, except for those who became involved in intra or inter-community struggles to seize and exercise power. As a number of French specialists on the topic remind us, participation is not a magic wand that allows one suddenly to solve all of a poor neighbourhood's structural socio-economic problems, modernize public policies, and democratize local power structures that are only barely democratic.[18]

Caution is all the more required as the government's supposed conversion to the philosophy of empowerment has been accompanied by a call for a "return of the state" to poor neighbourhoods and a reassertion of the goal of social mix. Yet these slogans would appear to contradict one another, as one suggests a "bottom-up" approach, drawing on the neighbourhoods' own potentialities, while the other implies a "top-down" approach, seeking to compensate their shortcomings by mobilizing resources (and inhabitants) from the outside. The compatibility of these goals was first tested by French urban policy in the early 1980s.[19] It was tested again in Great Britain over the past decade, when local public services were torn between the demands of the central government (NSNR) and those of local communities (NDC), resulting in disinvestment from the NDC in order to focus on NSNR goals.

Finally and more positively, the NSNR evaluation demonstrate that the emphasis on enhancing and focusing mainstream service delivery within disadvantaged areas was not condemned to failure, as one might be to lead to believe by the French example. Despite successive measures aimed at mobilizing the state bureaucracy and its policies to help poor neighbourhoods[20], these communities still face unequal treatment by mainstream policies. In this respect, the NSNR and its new management approach proved quite efficient. Unfortunately, there are reasons to believe that the covenants negotiated between Lamy and other ministries might result in the same outcome, as these agreements are limited to only a few measures and provide for no control or sanction mechanisms (whether positive or negative). Without such incentive or coercive measures, it is difficult to imagine how urban policy can change other policies that are structurally unfavorable to poor neighbourhoods.

[17]   These announcements represent a curious "mash-up" of the goals urban policies has pursued over previous decades: social development based on participation in the 1980s, the modernization and mobilization of public action in the 1990s, and diversity through urban renewal in the 2000s. These three goals represent different and even opposed conceptions of what is at stake. Their juxtaposition attests to the conceptual fuzziness and strategic vacillation of current urban policy. See Renaud Epstein (2012), « Politique de la ville, rénovation urbaine, égalité territoriale : quelle est la nature du problème ? », in Noémie Houard, ed., *Politique de la ville. Perspectives françaises et ouvertures internationales*, Centre d'Analyse Stratégique – La documentation Française.

[18]   Marion Carrel (2013), *Faire participer les habitants? Citoyenneté et pouvoir d'agir dans les quartiers populaires*, ENS Editions.

[19]   Kirszbaum (2011), op. cit.

[20]   Including the creation of an inter-ministerial committee for cities in 1984, an inter-ministerial delegation for cities 1988, a ministry for urban affairs in 1990, a position of under-prefect for cities in 1991, deputy prefect in 2005, and deputy prefect for neighbourhoods in 2009.