Towards a critical approach to social mix

Should we redistribute populations or resources?

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What if social mix was not always the best way to promote equality and social justice? Éric Charmes argues in favour of a pragmatic approach to diversity, and is not afraid of challenging some of our most deep-seated ideas about education, housing or urban policy. But how can we live together if public spaces are being increasingly restricted? Let the debate begin.

After having for many years been considered as locations for mixing and cross-fertilisation, cities are now viewed as backdrops to the disintegration of social cohesion[1]. The wealthier members of society exhibit a more and more explicit desire to keep themselves separate from poor people, in particular through the development of gated communities. Meanwhile, lower class neighbourhoods, which are growing increasingly poorer, are turning into what some sociologists no longer hesitate to call ghettos[2]. This segregation is creating some serious problems. The inhabitants of the poorest neighbourhoods suffer from the degradation of their access to services and to urban infrastructure. They are also the victims of inequalities in terms of access to education, which is jeopardising one of the central projects of our societies, namely that of guaranteeing equality of opportunity. Over the longer term, segregation is threatening the political virtues of urban life, since cities are losing their ability to expose their inhabitants to difference, and therefore their ability to promote social cohesion.

In order to fight segregation, the immediate reaction tends to be to encourage social mix in residential neighbourhoods. This idea has had a strong influence on recent French policies, particularly when the Socialist party was in power, and culminated in the obligation to provide at least 20% social housing that was imposed on municipalities by the "Solidarity and Urban Regeneration" law of 2000. The success of this idea has been supported by the fact that social diversity is in tune with fundamental republican values. Social mix is supposed to promote social integration and to discourage any communitarian impulses. However, views on this issue have changed in recent years, in particular in the case of Ségolène Royal, who has spoken out against the "hypocrisy" of the current discourse on social mix. Some

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[1] Éric Maurin's work has recently got a lot of attention by highlighting the low diversity of residential districts and the vigour of the forces that encourage segregation. The title of his book is explicit: *Le Ghetto français. Enquête sur le séparatisme social* (*The French Ghetto. An Enquiry into Social Separatism*), Paris, Seuil, 2004. For a critical discussion of Éric Maurin's arguments and methodology, see Philippe Estèbe's reader report, which was published in *Lien social et politique*, no. 52, 2004, p. 162-167.

[2] D. Lapeyronnie, *Ghetto urbain*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2008.

commentators interpreted her arguments as an illustration of the right-wing leanings of her political position. Our object here is not to perform an exegesis of her discourse, but the virtues ascribed to social mix are being increasingly challenged by urban studies experts, including more left-wing ones; more and more academics believe that the real issue is redistributive solidarity, and that this solidarity may not necessarily require social mixing that is more or less imposed from the top. Several arguments support this view. We will limit ourselves here to explaining the main ones.

Our aim in outlining these arguments is not to question the value of diversity as an urban experience. People referred to in the media as "bobos" (or bourgeois-bohemians), who gentrify formerly lower class neighbourhoods in cities, all talk about the pleasure they get from living in lively, mixed neighbourhoods. In addition, for the current guru of "creativity", Richard Florida, this mix is a source of inspiration, of new ideas, of challenges to people's preconceptions… In short, it stimulates "creativity" and makes cities more dynamic[3]. This may well be the case. But our purpose here is to examine the supposed effects of diversity on social integration and on "living together", and more generally to allow for this issue to be openly debated in left-wing circles. Indeed, the positive value of social mix and diversity is so profoundly ingrained in our thinking that it is sometimes difficult to discuss its real effects. Anyone who criticises diversity is soon suspected of wanting to promote individual interests (for example, the possibility of freely choosing which school to go to) over collective interests. The discussion is made all the less open by the fact that the President, Nicolas Sarkozy, was the mayor of one of the least virtuous towns in terms of social housing construction, and that the government, through Christine Boutin, the Housing and Towns Minister, is trying to relax the requirements outlined in the Solidarity and Urban Regeneration Law. At the moment, criticising social mix is viewed as being equivalent to joining the ranks of right-wing parties and of the President. However, while we may not agree with the values promoted by Nicolas Sarkozy (which, incidentally, are fairly unclear anyway), we can discuss those policies that are aimed at promoting diversity, and even discuss social mix itself as a value.

The effects of segregation at school
It is difficult to talk about social mix without talking about school. Without going into all the details of the profuse recent literature on this topic, we will here outline the most important elements of the debate. First, the negative effects of segregation have been proven, at least for pupils from low-income backgrounds. But, although this may appear paradoxical, the positive effects of policies promoting social mix nevertheless remain limited, and are not systematic. For example, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds experience their social situation more negatively the more their high school is privileged[4]. These difficulties in terms of integration counteract the relatively positive effects of social mix, in particular the effect it has of encouraging schoolwork. In addition, studies carried out in the United States have demonstrated that the less the presence of a pupil from a low-income background in a privileged school is due to a deliberate choice (as is often the case with policies aimed at promoting social mix), the less its outcomes are positive[5].

[3] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York, Basic Books, 2002.
[4] M. Duru-Bellat, "Quelle marge de manœuvre pour l'école, dans un environnement d'inégalités ?", in S. Paugam (dir.), *Repenser la solidarité, l'apport des sciences sociales*, Paris, PUF, 2007, p. 678.
[5] M.-H. Bacqué, S. Fol, "Effets de quartier : enjeux scientifiques et politiques de l'importation d'une controverse", in J.-Y. Authier, M.-H. Bacqué, F. Guérin-Pace, *Le Quartier. Enjeux scientifiques, actions politiques et pratiques sociales*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007.

Furthermore, some of the tools that are meant to guarantee social mix in schools have counterproductive effects. Thus, when Nicolas Sarkozy recently called into question the rigidity of the *carte scolaire*[6], numerous left wing voices were raised in protest against this new blow struck against social mix. And yet, aside from the fact that the *carte scolaire* was not initially designed to protect diversity[7], the obligation for children to go to school in their local area hardly promotes social mix – on the contrary, it can often hinder it. Thus, the rigidity of the *carte scolaire* has a tendency to reinforce the very segregation that we are trying to fight against. In fact, the obligation to attend a school that has a bad reputation can put some families off moving into the relevant catchment area. This leads to spatial segregation being added to school segregation[8].

On top of this, the constraints imposed by the *carte scolaire* mainly affect those households that do not have the social capital required to get round them, or who are not able to choose where they live. These households mainly come from lower class or lower middle class backgrounds[9]. It is all very well for the upper middle classes to argue in favour of imposed diversity when they are able to free themselves from it by sending their children to private schools or by using their knowledge of the system to get around the *carte scolaire*[10]. By the time children enter secondary school, a third of families no longer send their child to their local state secondary school, either because they enrol them in a private school (20% of cases), or because they sign them up to a different state school (10% of cases). These are average figures: in the case of secondary schools with bad reputations, avoidance can be very high, at times well above 50 %[11]. And even then, these figures do not take into account avoidance that is achieved by moving into a catchment area that gives people access to a secondary school with a good reputation, or by ensuring that the child is put into a "good class".

In the face of these difficulties, it is worth considering policies other than the promotion of social mix (especially since such policies are not incompatible with a defence of social mix). The first ones we might look at involve compensating for the effects of people's social backgrounds. It is of course impossible to change these backgrounds, but schools can implement specific measures in favour of pupils from lower class backgrounds, by providing them with increased pedagogical support compared to other pupils[12]. Another option is to take action in deprived areas. The policies that were put into place for the *zones d'éducation prioritaires* ("priority education zones" or ZEPs) left people unconvinced, and were challenged for this reason. But their failure to adequately tackle these issues had more to do

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[6] Translator's Note: literally "school map", shorthand for the French system of geographical catchment areas for state schools.

[7] On this issue, see the corrosive criticism of L. Visier, G. Zoïa, *La Carte scolaire et le territoire urbain*, Paris, PUF, 2008.

[8] It is very difficult to estimate the number of families that have declined to move to a particular district because of the *carte scolaire*. However, qualitative surveys clearly show that, for households with children, the quality of the social environment and of local schools is a very important factor when choosing where to live (M. Oberti, *L'École dans la ville. Ségrégation, mixité, carte scolaire*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2007).

[9] L. Visier, G. Zoïa, *op.cit*.

[10] A. Van Zanten, J.-P. Obin, *La Carte scolaire*, Paris, PUF, 2008.

[11] This is particularly the case in Parisian suburbs. See B. Maresca, "Le consumérisme scolaire et la ségrégation sociale dans les espaces résidentiels", *Cahier de recherche du CREDOC*, no. 184, 2003.

[12] On this issue, see the work of Marie Duru-Bellat, art. cit., 2007.

with the way they were implemented than with the principle behind them[13]. First, the measures were scattered over too many zones. Then, if we take into account how young many of the teachers in ZEPs are, and therefore how much less they earn, it appears that the state hardly allocated any extra funds to ZEPs compared to what it provides to other schools. If we were really acting in favour of schools in deprived areas, we would be implementing stronger measures in their favour, in particular by bolstering their pedagogical teams or reducing the number of pupils in a class. According to a survey carried out by Thomas Piketty, the size of school classes has a greater impact on school results than segregation does[14].

Break down the "ghettos", or help poor people improve their lot?
The way in which social mix is implemented is just as problematic in residential neighbourhoods[15]. Here too, the inequalities and exclusions engendered by segregation are obvious and undeniable. At the same time, breaking it down comes at a cost, such as that of needing to move home and leave the environment which one has been living in. And the poorest people are made to bear these costs disproportionately. It is in fact rare for policies in favour of social mix to force wealthy households to move home. Far more often, social mix is implemented through urban renewal, meaning the demolition of council housing towers and low-rises in lower class neighbourhoods. These demolitions destroy neighbourhood bonds and reduce a social capital that is sometimes the only capital that these households have at their disposal to confront the difficulties they are faced with. On top of this, when moving home leads them into a middle class neighbourhood, integration is not easy, in particular because the new arrivals do not know anybody, and must suddenly conform to standards that are not the ones they are used to.

When the displacement is not imposed but encouraged (for example through grants for residential mobility), this criticism loses some of its strength. However, it does not become completely invalid. The experiments that were carried out in this field in the United States have been relatively disappointing[16]. Thus, many families which started out by volunteering to leave their neighbourhood ended up returning to it after a while, or moving back into a similar neighbourhood. Success has only been observed in a limited number of cases, and for families that have been carefully selected and supported, which strongly reduces the potential of policies that support residential mobility. Furthermore, these policies deprive poorer neighbourhoods of their most dynamic families, of those that might be able to be an engine for positive change.

Another source of criticism of policies aimed at dispersing troubled populations are the positive effects of affinity groupings. Even when they connect poor people, it is not always appropriate to analyse these as "ghettos". It may indeed be true that living in a poor, immigrant neighbourhood reduces your chances of making contact with wealthy populations,

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[13] This is acknowledged in particular by Éric Maurin in a recent publication that qualified the arguments he had developed in *Le Ghetto français*. In this text, he had indeed been very critical of positive territorial discrimination. See "La ségrégation urbaine, son intensité et ses causes", in S. Paugam (dir.), *op. cit.*, p. 621-633.
[14] T. Piketty, *L'Impact de la taille des classes et de la ségrégation sociale sur la réussite scolaire dans les écoles françaises : une estimation à partir du panel primaire 1997*, report for the DEP, Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2004. For a discussion of Thomas Piketty's results, see the website of the *Observatoire des zones prioritaires*: www.association-ozp.net/article.php3?id_article=2250.
[15] See I.M. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, chap. 6, p. 196-235, and J. Donzelot, *Quand la ville se défait. Quelle politique face à la crise des banlieues ?*, Paris, Seuil, 2006.
[16] We are here inspired by T. Kirzbaum, *Rénovation urbaine. Les leçons américaines*, Paris, PUF, 2008.

and that these contacts can be useful, for example to help you find a job[17]. But living in a neighbourhood that is mainly inhabited by your peers does not just have disadvantages[18]. It promotes the creation of bonds of solidarity and the production of various resources by the neighbourhood itself. Many sociologists have thus highlighted the way in which immigrant neighbourhoods act as a gateway to, or even as a stage in social integration. Of course, this effect on social integration is not systematic, but it can exist; and promoting it could be an aim, for example by supporting what North Americans call community development[19]. It is a pity that in France such ideas are often viewed as naïve or irresponsible, and that the grouping of peers is viewed solely as the first stage in a withdrawal into segregation and communitarianism.

Gathering with one's peers can ultimately help people become more visible in the public political space and have their differences acknowledged. We sometimes forget how, in the 20th century, the groups of workers that formed in French suburbs supported the existence of a political movement that represented them at the national level. Today, it is these towns that have prevented the Communist party from completely disappearing from the political landscape. Of course, the context has changed, but is the issue here to scatter poverty across metropolitan areas, as if we wanted to make it less visible, and to force municipalities to share the "burden" of caring for the poor? Should the issue not rather be to promote the emergence of a political movement that is native to the "*quartiers*" which we are talking about?

Putting this issue into historical perspective also raises another awkward question: why did the concentration of worker populations in the so-called "red" suburbs not pose a problem in the way that the concentration of working class households in the "*cités*"[20] does today? The explanation for this probably lies in the move from "worker" as a qualifying term to that of "lower class", and in the ever-increasing connection between "lower class" and "poor"[21]. These changes took place over four decades of economic crisis, of the deconstruction of the industrial production system, of increasing insecurity for employees and dismantling of the welfare state. Over the course of these decades, we witnessed in particular the collapse of working class culture, with huge consequences on socialisation and on collective life. While family relationships remain extremely strong in lower class neighbourhoods[22], adults struggle to impose their standards in public spaces: the most visible standards are those defined by juvenile street culture. What is more, the loss by many lower class towns of a large part of their productive apparatus did not just mean that they lost their jobs – they also lost the resources that came from business taxes. And, since the decentralisation laws that were passed in the early 1980s, and which were reinforced through the 2004 laws, local fiscal resources have played a major role in the quality of the infrastructure and services that are placed at a population's disposal. The state does, it is true, compensate for some inequalities, but only within a very limited scope.

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[17] R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[18] P. Genestier, J.-L. Laville, "Au-delà du mythe républicain – Intégration et socialisation", *Le Débat*, no. 82, December 1994, p. 154-172.

[19] For an overview of the scientific debates raised by these issues, see J.-Y. Authier, M.-H. Bacqué, F. Guérin-Pace, *op. cit.*, and T. Kirzbaum, *op. cit.*

[20] TN: colloquial French term used to refer to social housing projects and, by extension, impoverished city districts.

[21] F. Dubet, D. Lapeyronnie, *Les Quartiers d'exil*, Paris, Seuil, 1992.

[22] D. Lapeyronnie, *op. cit.*, 2008.

Faced with this observation, should we be scattering the populations of impoverished towns around better-equipped towns, or should we better equip the impoverished towns themselves? Similarly, is it better to drown any problematic young people in a mass of middle class young people, in the hope that the former will find examples to follow among the latter – or should we support them directly where they are living? In the Bosquets neighbourhood in Montfermeil, is the best policy to destroy the low-rises and to scatter their troublesome populations, as the current mayor is doing, or is it to promote the network of local solidarity in order to support economic development? Should we allow Montfermeil to change its image, or should we improve the infrastructure that services the Bosquets neighbourhood (which is currently extremely isolated and only served by a few bus lines[23])? The answers to these questions are far from simple, and the right strategy for public policy probably lies in combining the redistribution of populations with local development[24]. But we should at least be asking ourselves these questions.

Urban public spaces and political solidarity
Policies that promote social mix thus pose a problem, while the concentration of lower class households in the same neighbourhood is not necessarily a bad thing, especially if said neighbourhood is benefitting from support at the national level. But are these more or less empirical observations enough to call into question the sacredness of the target of social mix? No. Many people acknowledge the pertinence of the criticisms outlined above, while still remaining politically attached to social mix. For them, even though the benefits of diversity may be dubious in the short term, diversity has a long-term impact on the ability of cities to be spaces for "living together". Social specialisation and segregation do indeed threaten social cohesion and political integration[25]: are those who are excluded from the daily environment of wealthy households not at risk of becoming politically invisible, with consequences that are easy to imagine for welfare policies? Anthropological studies thus suggest that children who live in North American gated communities have a tendency to react with increased defiance towards poor people and, more generally, towards anybody who is not like them[26].

We are getting right to the heart of the problem here. If social mix appears to be an aim that it is difficult to disagree with, this is because the very possibility of imagining redistributive policies, let alone of implementing them, seems to be conditioned by the physical experience of society in all its diversity. Maintaining real bonds of political solidarity at the metropolitan level (and probably even at wider levels) supposedly depends on the existence of what urban experts call "public spaces". Ideally, city dwellers should, on a daily basis, be visiting and using spaces that are open to all and where each member of society is visible to all others[27] (this is an ideal which is supposed to have been almost achieved by the 19th century Haussmannian boulevards in particular, where, on a Sunday, factory workers would walk past high society ladies, and where the *flâneur* could enjoy the spectacle of the city as whole).

Using spaces that are diverse and socially open can without doubt be an enriching experience. However, the existence of a causal link between such use and liberal political

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[23] There is however a tramway being planned.
[24] This is what Thomas Kirzbaum suggests based on the example of the United States (*op. cit.*).
[25] For this kind of perspective, see J. Donzelot, *op. cit.*, 2006.
[26] S. Low, *Behind the Gates. Life, Security and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*, New York, Routledge, 2003.
[27] On this view of the city and of public spaces, see I. Joseph, *Le Passant considérable : essai sur la dispersion de l'espace public*, Paris, Librairie des Méridiens, 1984.

attitudes is far from being proven. Even worse, the experience of otherness can encourage attitudes like closed-mindedness and rejection[28]. For example, does the regular confrontation, on a metro platform or in the streets of a town centre, of a white person with black people produce an inclusive political bond? This is not at all a given. The sociological and psychological literature rather indicates that we should be circumspect on this matter. It suggests that any experience an individual goes through is interpreted in terms of this individual's prior disposition. If the person believes that there are "too many immigrants", then he/she will view this daily experience as a confirmation of this claim, and may even feel more justified in believing that they should be "sent home", i.e. precisely that they should be expelled from the political community which the person believes he/she is a part of. If, to take another example, an individual has had a misfortune in a specific place, for example if they have been mugged, they may well associate this place with a feeling of insecurity. In this case, unsettled by fear, the view that this person will have of the other people that use this space is likely to be more negative than positive.

This risk of negative effects connected to the confrontation with otherness is even higher in residential neighbourhoods. Indeed, it is easier to keep your distance from a person whose behaviour or attitude might be bothering you when you are on the street or on a station platform, than when this person lives in the flat over the road. Moving house is an expensive and difficult process. The phenomenon of "white trash", which occurs a lot in lower class neighbourhoods where households of very diverse ethnic origins live side by side, is a good illustration of the potential negative effects of social mix at the neighbourhood scale. For these low-income households who view themselves as locked into a neighbourhood that they would like to leave, the mix is unfortunately more likely to promote racism and segregation than tolerance, openness and civic mindedness[29]. In this case, instead of encouraging the production of a common space and, beyond this, of a feeling of common belonging, the interaction with other people creates a distance and destroys social cohesion. Of course, this is far from being a systematic chain of events, but it does call into question any overly positive discourse about the effects of diversity on social cohesion. This observation is made all the more unsettling by the fact that policies aimed at promoting social mix tend to be focussed at the scale of the neighbourhood.

But we can go even further and take this criticism to a more general level. The ideals of openness and social mixing are commendable, but in real public spaces, openness still remains limited, and the mix always happens to the benefit of a particular group. People's behaviour in public spaces is necessarily governed by specific standards. Thus, at the moment, being a woman does not give you the same amount of freedom as being a man does when you are moving around in public spaces[30]. On a different note, homosexual couples strongly feel the dominant standard of heterosexuality when they consider publicly displaying the bonds that unite them. This is partly why gay people tend to congregate in specific neighbourhoods. It allows them to impose their own standards on the spaces of their daily lives. And the reason why immigrants tend not to stray very far from certain neighbourhoods is not just that their travel options are limited – it is also because these neighbourhoods provide them with an atmosphere that makes them feel comfortable.

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[28] A. Amin, "Collective culture and urban public space", *City*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2008, p. 5-24.

[29] C. Lelévrier, "Les mixités sociales", *Problèmes politiques et sociaux*, La Documentation française, no. 929, 2006; A. Villechaise-Dupont, *Amère Banlieue. Les Gens des grands ensembles*, Paris, Grasset, 2000.

[30] M. Lieber, *Genre, violences et espaces publics. La vulnérabilité des femmes en question*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2008.

In short, the dynamics of power and domination that underlie societies are not neutralised by the fact that different populations might live next to each other in an apparently pacified atmosphere. The experience of public spaces can be one of domination, and it can produce a feeling of exclusion just as much as a feeling of inclusion. For these reasons, it seems difficult to make the existence of public spaces where society makes itself visible to itself a requirement for the construction of political solidarity. Public spaces that are open to all are an essential element of urban life, and their "publicity" must be defended against the numerous threats of privatisation, but we should not expect more from these spaces than they are able to give us.

So, how can we create favourable conditions for political solidarity? The answer to this question is difficult to define, of course, and far exceeds the framework of this essay. It is connected to political philosophy and political science, areas in which our skills are limited. We will simply observe that, among the texts we are aware of, very few examine urban public spaces. In a philosophical text that was regularly quoted in urban studies for a long time, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* by Jürgen Habermas[31], the discussion barely touches on streets or city squares. The places which Jürgen Habermas refers to most are the cafés where the bourgeoisie would meet to talk, places which were hardly open to all, nor very mixed… These days, the functional equivalent of these cafés will more surely be found on the Internet than on a street corner.

Towards a pragmatic approach to social mix

At this stage, the reader may be getting the unpleasant impression that the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater. Can we defend modes of living that come close to segregation and communitarianism just because social mix is not keeping all its promises? We are not making such a radical argument. Let us first reassert the argument that diversity has huge value as an experience, and that it is legitimately sought after by a large section of the population for this very reason. Diversity also contributes to the economic and cultural dynamism of towns and cities. Our criticism is geared towards the other virtues that tend to be ascribed to social mix, in particular that of promoting social and political integration or, in the shorter term, of reducing certain inequalities. Because these virtues are not often challenged, at least not among left-wing commentators, we have had to emphasise the arguments against them and neglect arguments in their defence. Of course, such arguments exist. We do not therefore intend to reject social mix in favour of close-knit communities, but rather to consider social mix as one means among many to promote social cohesion and solidarity. From this perspective, the arguments we have outlined above are geared less towards purely and simply abandoning policies that promote social mix, but rather towards developing a circumspect and pragmatic attitude towards them.

The sacredness of the target of social mix thus prevents us from taking into consideration those policies that might more effectively handle the problems posed by socio-spatial segregation. The constant reference to social mix slows down or perverts redistributive policies. As we have pointed out, in the field of education, France is far from carrying out massive investments into lower class neighbourhoods. The policy of instituting *zones d'éducation prioritaires* barely compensates for the inequalities affecting these neighbourhoods, due to the presence of teachers who are less experienced and too often want to continue their careers elsewhere. But to go any further, for example by bolstering

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[31] Paris, Payot, 1993, first German edition in 1962, under the title *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

pedagogical teams, it would be necessary to start by acknowledging that the problems affecting pupils in lower class neighbourhoods are not just due to a lack of diversity or to people getting round the *carte scolaire*, but rather that they are also, and probably above all, due to the fact that "lower class" is increasingly synonymous with "poor".

In addition, because it is supported by discourse on the necessity to fight against any "communitarianisms", the reference to social mix promotes a picture of lower class neighbourhoods as places that should be cured through demolition rather than as places that have potentialities for social and economic development. The policies that have been implemented around the *Agence nationale pour la rénovation urbaine* (ANRU – "National Agency for Urban Renewal") are a good case in point. These policies intend to be a means of channelling massive investments into "fragile" neighbourhoods. And the amounts that are meant to be spent are indeed substantial. However, the intention here is not so much to help lower class neighbourhoods as to transform them into neighbourhoods that are considered to be normal, meaning to make them more similar to middle class neighbourhoods. The operations that have been carried out thus rely on massive destructions and on major population displacements. And it is not rare to hear elected officials justify their actions by describing the buildings that have been demolished as "warts". This is far from making anything attractive.

Yet local energies and resources do exist[32]. Lower class neighbourhoods are suffering from the economic crisis and from unemployment, but still numerous economic activities are carried out in these neighbourhoods, and it would be worth taking these into consideration. There are also political activities which, if they were relayed at the national level, would allow these neighbourhoods to better make their voices heard. Their real estate itself is a lot more valuable than the conventional criticism of towers and low rises would have you believe. We should not forget that many of the neighbourhoods that are now beloved of the "bobos" were viewed, just fifty years ago, as cesspits that needed to be done away with. The criticism of architecture and urban planning is often a way of displacing conflicts between social groups onto a terrain that is less symbolically contentious[33]. Thus, when a "low rise that is disfiguring the neighbourhood" is razed to the ground, the aim is generally to rebuild housing for purchase in order to "get the middle classes to come back".

Let us conclude by restating what remains the central question: the social and political acknowledgement of lower class neighbourhoods[34]. The discourse around social mix turns lower class neighbourhoods into pathological spaces. In doing this, society conveys to the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods an image of themselves that is extremely violent on a symbolic level. Being referred to constantly as inhabitants of "difficult neighbourhoods" or "lawless areas" does not help people to feel they are recognised: it makes them feel disregarded. The riots of 2005 showed how intense this feeling was, and also to what degree this feeling could be destructive. Likewise, viewing lower class neighbourhoods as ghettos that need to be eradicated is equivalent to refusing to consider them as legitimate political agents. We might wish that these lower class categories had other foundations than their local

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[32] H. and M. Hatzfeld, N. Ringart, *Quand la marge est créatrice. Les interstices urbains initiateurs d'emploi,* La Tour d'Aigues, Éditions de l'Aube, 1998; N. Tafferant, *Le Bizness. Une économie souterraine*, Paris, PUF, 2007.
[33] See É. Charmes, *La Rue, village ou décor ? Parcours dans deux rues de Belleville*, Grâne, Créaphis, 2006, chap. 1. See also S. Zukin, *Landscapes of Power. From Detroit to Disney World*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.
[34] Regarding the importance of this issue, see A. Honneth, *La Société du mépris*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006.

territory on which to mobilise and exist politically, but the deconstruction of the solidarities that used to characterise the working class world has left them with few other options[35].

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[35] On these issues, see the reflections of D. Merklen, "Le quartier et la barricade : le local comme lieu de repli et base du rapport au politique dans la révolte populaire en Argentine", *L'Homme et la société*, 143-144, p. 143-164.