

1 Introduction

The sheer scale of France's innovative local social development projects is very striking to a British observer. These policies have their roots in the 1970s but their real dynamism came with the socialists under President Mitterrand during the 1980s. The election of a right wing government in the early 1990s has not reduced the stress on fighting exclusion – at least in rhetoric. One-nation Gaullism continues to assert the importance of 'society' (*le social*), viewing unemployment as a fracturing of society (Silver 1994). The commitment to the republican values of equality of opportunity, of equal treatment in public services, of national cohesion and urban solidarity are clear in the XIth Plan for 1994–98, and funding for urban social development and the fight against exclusion continues.

As Silver (1993) notes, the French policies reflect not a Marshallian, social democratic notion of social rights but a republican desire to integrate society in the context of anxiety about identity and insecurity about employment. The legacy of the socialists however has been to find ways of operationalising the social policy goal of *insertion* (social integration). As I shall show, there are many imaginative ways in which French social development policies have come to encapsulate a new blueprint for a welfare state, based on both republican ideas of citizenship and social democratic ideals of participation and democratisation. This blueprint moves beyond attempting to address problems of unemployment and need by tinkering with the social insurance and assistance systems. It reconceives public services and the 'mission' of officials, local politicians and professionals, it regenerates community relations with both requirements of active participation in one's own insertion (Silver and Wilkinson 1995) and generous provision of community support services to enable this to happen. Given the search for new directions in western welfare states which combine social justice and opportunity, there is much to be learnt from the French model and experience.

2 Anti-Exclusion: Social Development and Urban Policy

In the 1980s France saw very rapid changes: unemployment rose swiftly, accompanied by

The Struggle Against Social Exclusion

*Urban Social
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fundamental changes in family life with increasing divorce, cohabitation and lone parent families (Hantrais 1996). The speed and scale of these changes meant that they struck the French more forcefully than did similar but slower trends in neighbouring countries, hence the frequent reference to the 'crisis' to describe unemployment and job insecurity. The social security system, which had significantly expanded by the early 1980s, could not however meet new needs where they fell outside specified categories – notably long term unemployed people and the young unemployed. This new poverty was costing a great deal, with much of the burden falling on the locally administered social assistance system. Despite the traditional republican rhetoric of solidarity, the occupational basis of social insurance produced resistance to change among beneficiaries who were alarmed by the threat of reduced benefits if their pool were to be widened to include the less well off. Politicians therefore needed a means outside the social insurance and assistance systems for tackling new problems of need and for containing costs. The mould-breaking benefit *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* (RMI) was introduced (see below), together with an area-based approach which became the new strategy in tackling social problems and disadvantage.

President Mitterrand's socialist party government, elected in 1981, vigorously promoted economic development policies and enterprise values, especially as the crisis deepened and increases in welfare expenditure had to be reined in. His ambition became to ensure that the cities are '...both the motivating force of economic development and the hallmark of social solidarity in tomorrow's Europe' (speech in 1989, cited in *Social Europe*, supplement 1/92). The socialist government therefore developed a culture oriented to both the market and social ideals; a synthesis of individualism, new managerialism and communal solidarity (Biarez 1993; Crawshaw 1993).

New employment patterns and management methods from the private sector were introduced into public administration. Decentralisation began in 1982, intended to reorient professionals, administrators, managers and local politicians to local social and economic conditions, to break the hold of traditional administrative norms, to encourage

strategic thinking, and to find new, locally relevant ways of meeting new needs and of halting marginalisation and dependency. By the early 1990s there was agreement that a new paradigm of social action, a new *espace social*, has emerged with a new attitude and set of social practices (eg Donzelot and Estébe 1993; Levy 1989; Auriol 1993; Jacquier 1991/2).

The new social action incorporated new evidence on poverty which demonstrated that increasing numbers of people live in precarious ways, perhaps with irregular or informal employment, producing spirals and accumulations of deprivation and disadvantage in family life, housing, schooling, and resulting in delinquency, racism, child neglect, violence and drug use (Auriol 1993; Dauge 1988; Delarue 1991). In 1974 Lenoir had published *Les Exclus, un français sur dix* which showed that there were growing numbers who slipped through safety nets and he argued that the combination of changes in family life and employment meant that traditional means of social cohesion and support were weakened. The notions of exclusion, precarity and the accumulation of disadvantage took hold with a growing *prise de conscience* across society. Within official discourse, and among the big charities and associations it became *les exclus* rather than the poor or unemployed who were the objects of social policy.

Poverty, precariousness, exclusion and delinquency are understood then as partly emerging from the failures of social policies to adapt to social and economic changes. The inner city renovation schemes of the 1960s and the associated huge housing developments on city peripheries (*les banlieues, les cités*) for working class and immigrant populations were viewed by the mid 1970s as having destroyed complex patterns of neighbourliness and sociability and as being another significant factor in creating *les exclus*, whose principal problems are now seen as isolation from the life of the city, from civil society. However, instead of Anglo-American anti-welfarism and victim-blaming notions of an underclass, there was a clear assumption that the state had an obligation to turn this situation around, partly by active labour market policies and opportunities in education and training, and by creating the conditions which would enable people to use those opportunities. There was agreement that the welfare state's benefit system needed reform (not cuts) in

order that it could promote participation and active citizenship rather than perversely encouraging passivity and marginalisation.

The creation of a new urban citizenship became a matter of urgency, as a safeguard for democracy (and thus the nation). The matter of delinquency particularly concerned cities after the troubles of 1981's *été chaud*, with riots in some of the larger *banlieues*. The commission of mayors in 1982 (under Bonnemaison) led to the establishment of national and local councils of delinquency prevention – 700 by the late 1980s, covering two thirds of French towns and cities (Donzelot and Estèbe 1993). These are behind the extensive socio-cultural youth centres, community projects, and holiday schemes for young people in general as well as those more at risk of marginalisation such as those of north African origin. The centres and projects all stress involvement of users and the weaving of more active local solidarities (Dauge 1988).

Développement Social des Quartiers (DSQ – Social Development of Neighbourhoods) has been a major initiative with 400 programmes by the early 1990s. It has widened from its origins in a housing renovation scheme (*Habitat et Vie Sociale*) which had been influenced by the US Model Cities programme with its combination of community development with physical renovation. It is based on a partnership of a dozen ministries including social affairs, public works, youth and sport, culture, justice, employment, which all contribute funds to the programme, linked by a national commission and an interministerial delegation. The riots of 1981 had led to the Mayor of Grenoble, Hubert Doubédout, being charged with considering the problems of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. His reports (*Mieux vivre en ville*, 1982, and *Ensemble, refaire la Ville*, 1983) were to lay the foundations for a new urban policy (over which he would preside) which would target areas rather than populations. It understood exclusion in spatial and social terms and promoted the goal of the reintegration (*insertion*) of the disadvantaged neighbourhood in the city to which it belonged.

These principles became the core of the new urban policy which promoted the integration of the disadvantaged by the guaranteed access of all to good quality services, to better quality living spaces in

public and private spheres, encompassing the cultural, educational and commercial facets of life. The programme began in 1982 with the *Zones Urbaines Prioritaires* (ZUPs) – urban priority areas; it became a more formalised programme under the two national plans 1984–1988 and 1989–1993. As Levy (1989) says, it moved beyond the problems of buildings to the ‘territorialisation’ of social policy and the decompartmentalisation (or desectorisation) of social actors and their organisations into a form of strategic, global action. It moves from the Taylorist approach of having interventions designed for specific problems or categories to a new paradigm based on insertion. It stresses the neighbourhood as much as the workplace as the setting for social integration – hence the stress on participation of local people as both a means and end of DSQ (Donzelot and Estèbe 1993; Lafon 1995; Dauge 1988). The term social development was used in the DSQ programmes with deliberate reference to participatory development strategies used in the third world, of mobilising people in the pursuit of social citizenship in the context of long-term unemployment (Damamme and Jobert 1995).

Social development has grown alongside a new social benefit, the *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion*. The RMI also means global action in each area with a *Commission d'Insertion* which brings together those whose work concerns unemployed people. This benefit emerged from the Oheix Report of 1981 (*Contre la Précarité et la Pauvreté*) which had argued that poverty needed to be seen with reference to the dysfunction of the social security system (see Evans *et al.* 1995 for a full discussion on the social security system and exclusion). The RMI was created in 1988 for long-term unemployed people between 25 and 55; it centres on individual contracts to ‘insert’ via training or very broadly conceived work. This can include community work, such as baby sitting or clearing up parts of blocks of flats, or ‘personal’ work such as joining a group for people with similar problems. The idea is that the unemployed are both reintegrated with the insurance system (important for healthcare for instance) and that social participation overcomes the isolation and marginalisation that traditional unemployment benefits impose. Unemployed claimants are not compelled to move to RMI, and there is help from social workers and training agencies in finding appropriate ‘insertion’ experience. In 1993 it had

725,000 beneficiaries, affecting 1.5 million people if families are included (Moreau 1993).

DSQ and parallel programmes have then introduced new relations between the central state and local authorities and within local government by establishing transversal or global action. However, under the XIth Plan for 1994–1998, the conventions of DSQ are giving way to *Contrats de Ville*, now the major vehicle for urban policy (Le Galès and Mawson 1995). These contracts, operated by the state through the *Comité Interministériel des Villes*, continue to stress as goals the improvement of quality of public services in disadvantaged areas, and the geographical dimension of action against exclusion. They last five years, giving time for the state and signatory organisations to coordinate treatment – a problem in France with many small communes. Partner organisations at the local level include semi-public organisations such as housing associations and social housing bodies, associations for immigrants' welfare, the family benefits and welfare agency (*Caisse d'Allocations familiales*) and so forth. National funds are 'globalised' but then broken down within the local contracts to funding for housing and environmental improvements, delinquency prevention, transport, social, cultural and leisure activities, training and work creation, social support.

Overall the policy continues to be about bringing about a better local response to problems and about involving inhabitants of those areas in plans, services and projects that concern them. There must be diagnosis, partnership, globality, citizenship in programmes, equality of opportunity and social cohesion (Lafon 1995). With the first experimental contracts in the late 1980s, by 1993 they had been approved in 185 areas (Le Galès and Mawson 1994). I shall consider some of the achievements as well as the problems later in this article, but turn first to an illustration of social development and anti-exclusion policies on the ground.

3 Promoting Change in Local Public Services: An Example

In this section I use interviews that I carried out in 1995 in the city which I shall call 'Ville' in north western France. Decentralisation in 1982 gave the responsibility for social action and certain public

health services to the *départements*. However, the cities which are at a different level of local government (through their communes), are becoming powerful providers and promoters of local social development, especially with the *contrats de ville*. The social sphere, or social action, used to be a sleepy and dull backwater, but now it is everyone's business:

...notably because of the economic and employment crisis, the urban becomes a decisive, strategic place for policy and the cities have understood that. Urban policies are becoming more and more difficult with the closure of businesses and factories and the problems of the *banlieues*.... So more and more people are saying social work is my business ...

(Interview with M. J.-L. Cardi, sociologist and manager in a welfare agency)

Housing (and social housing is a significant field in France), community health, youth, social services, training, the police, leisure and culture services and schools have a stake (and responsibility) in the prevention of local social decline. Not surprisingly there is conflict.

Social problems are not necessarily easier to manage where more and more people are involved with them. Today there is almost a quarrel over legitimacy - between the technical legitimacy of professionals and the political legitimacy of the *Conseil Général* (the County Council).

(Interview with M. Troussier, sociologist who teaches in a social work college)

Furthermore, urban social development programmes are usually coordinated and run by specialist multi-disciplinary teams consisting of urban geographers and sociologists, psychologists, economists, lawyers and so forth with new titles such as urban social development agent or social engineer. As they are usually based in town halls, there can be conflict with those who have been used to running services in particular ways (Cousin 1995). So local politicians, specialist development workers, and agency managers intrude more into their workers' practice, keeping their work focused on partnership, user involvement and insertion goals but threatening professional autonomy and traditions.

This is causing a certain amount of uncertainty and malaise, for instance in social work (Ion 1993, 1994). In describing how he manages his social workers in this time of change, M. Cardi said

I use my training as a sociologist and I try to help professionals understand this new landscape ... and to understand how their professional practice has to change to be effective in this new landscape... We have to think of social intervention in relation to the evolution of the whole of society... Strategies of *socialisation* must find new mechanisms ... which can't replace work but can help in replacing work. (M. Cardi, sociologist and manager of a family welfare agency)

There is a general view in official discourse and in social practice that the crisis is not just an economic and social crisis, but also a cultural crisis. The decline of solidaristic working class communities has allowed (it is said) the messages of American TV and films – individualism, greed and violence – to take hold. This view shapes much of what social workers and allied professions currently do. Neighbourhoods are well provided with youth centres and centres for families and children. They are designed to attract all local people (and not just those with the gravest problems as the social mix is seen as important) to a range of socio-cultural activities. These activities are about more than just the prevention of delinquency or family problems, as is often the case in the UK, for their rationale is the development of social ties and a sense of belonging to a city and region (see Cannan (1996) for a fuller account of social development programmes with families and children). Asked who and what her *centre socio-culturel* is for, Mme Feret said

Above all, for families, but also for children and young people the *animateurs* who work with adults concentrate on leisure, for instance going on holiday ... as well do-it-yourself for decorating and repairing things in the home. There is also the catering in the centre, for some conviviality when groups decide to stay and eat together after their groups. We concentrate on the home as well as in the larger sense on *l'habitat*, on living in the neighbourhood and the city. The work here includes outings like climbing and we have worked with women who are very

strong yet who had not imagined themselves doing such things... We ... work with people on the qualities of their personal life, ... people share their lives, discuss a lot and make ties. (Mme. Feret, social worker and director of *centre socio-culturel*)

This strong French emphasis on conviviality and social cohesion explains the place of local associations in French social action. These are part the third sector of non-profit, co-operatives, mutual organisations, associations, social enterprises and so forth. This sector, along with more established NGOs, is referred to in France as *l'économie sociale*; formally recognised in 1980 with a government *Délégation à l'Economie Sociale* to promote it, it embodies principles of voluntary participation by members, solidarity among members, independence from government, voluntary boards of directors, and non-profit. The sector has, as in other European countries, become increasingly important in regeneration and development programmes (Welch and Coles 1994: 6, 1995), because its participative principles help achieve the social goals that complement economic goals (Evans, *et al.*, 1995).

Decentralised services that run in partnership with user associations are referred to as *services de proximité*, (translated by Macfarlane and Laville (1992) as 'new community partnerships'). These and other third sector organisations are not just a new way of meeting today's needs – notably for early child care and for care for elderly people (but also care of the environment, leisure, arts, culture) – and for user-centred help, for instance, among people with disabilities. Nor are they just a means of creating 'work' (whether paid, voluntary, as work experience, as training benefits, or as service while on benefit). The sector ties services more closely to the world and needs of users (they are above all local); it creates new partnerships between social movements, associations, voluntary organisations and the local state (Laville 1992:18–23). It develops that sphere between state and market, and between public and private – civil society – while reconceiving the notion of services. Communities now produce as well as consuming welfare, partly through more socially cohesive and integrative networks.

This stress on the social economy and *services de proximité* underpins the work of the city of Ville's *Centre Communal d'Action Sociale*. The city's council is committed to maximising partnerships in planning for social development. Associated with this is the shift from the old form of stigmatised social assistance (*aide*) to a system of 'mutualisation'.

Now we try to see that the person isn't 'helped' by being shut in a system that marginalises them by making them dependent on *aide*. That's to say one gives them the means, the power, to do without us, that's our role here.

(M. Naveau, Director of CCAS)

The means of achieving this change are partnership with local associations.

For the associations which work with us, I'd say they all share the objective that people, whatever their age, take charge of their own problems, ...the principle that inhabitants take part in the decisions taken concerning them, they are actors in the things they do. This is the logic of development rather than assistance...

It wasn't possible for the city to act on social action and development without a team, so we decided to create an association with some autonomy but with the mission to promote ... social development, whose logic is to put the inhabitants at the centre and to work with them so that they do things individually and collectively. It's different from the short-term satisfaction of needs where professionals are at the centre ... It's connected with other services we run. In my team I have social services, a relatively traditional housing service, a prevention team which works with young people ... and APADES which directly involves local people, working on *insertion* and development (*ibid.*).

APADES is an umbrella association of local groups including a local newspaper, a mobile children's library, a women's group (*La Voix des Femmes*), a theatre group, a credit union, an unemployed group (*Starters*) and it is able, under the direction and funding of the city, to provide opportunities for residents to offer, share or exchange their skills and to gain work experience. It operates then as a set of

social enterprises and *services de proximité*. It is directed by the city and it employs its own *agents de développement*. There is a general climate of enthusiasm despite acknowledgement of severe social and economic problems in the area, but, we have to ask, how effective are these policies in preventing exclusion?

4 Power to the People? The Impact of the Social Development Programmes

There has been a number of official regional and national evaluations of the social development programmes, notably that set up under the *Comité national d'évaluation de la politique de la ville* in 1990 (see Donzelot and Estèbe 1994). Levy's report on the DSQ programmes in 1989 had stated that the gains of the new policy were first that the isolation of deprived neighbourhoods was broken, with improved public services, and second that a new attitude was in place: 'in short, the habit of thinking and working in common is installed in the partners, in the attitude to responding to the needs of the inhabitants more than to applying rigid administrative norms.' (Levy 1989: 8.)

There is a consensus that the major successes continue to be that of officials, professionals and local politicians working more strategically and 'transversally' (e.g. Le Galès and Mawson 1995), with improved responsiveness of services to local needs and conditions (e.g. Le Clainche 1994). Some evaluations however have criticised the confusing proliferation of intermediate bodies and commissions which has resulted in a reassertion of sectoral approaches (eg Berlogey's evaluation in 1993, cited in Silver and Wilkinson 1995). Not surprisingly competing rivalries, especially between economic and social planners, also conspire against successful integration of policies and strategies (Donzelot and Estèbe 1994).

Evaluation of the Xth Plan programmes (1989–1993) and the numerous regional evaluations have shown only modest effects. The question of the geographical aspect of exclusion remains open; although it has been argued that isolation has been broken by improving public services, and by making life more decent for local people, the very concentration of people in great difficulty in areas of

monofunctional social housing means that efforts to reintegrate those areas with their wider urban environments are more symbolic than substantial (Lafon 1995).

Contemporary policy is to use the *contrats de ville* more strongly to improve city or regional responses to disadvantage, but, while the direction of change of public services and administration is clear, the logic for and means of citizen participation is less so. Delarue, author of a 1991 report to the City Ministry called **Banlieues en difficultés: la relégation**, had argued that the fundamental objective in all the DSQ programmes is the development of active citizenship. Like others he had been concerned at the low voting rate in disadvantaged areas, and with the parallel decline of work and thus trade union membership, and of church-going and street life. Social development offers new settings for sociability and political participation, by picking up and supporting new areas of local militancy such as tenants' associations. However, he argued that too little time had been spent considering problems of participation and local democratisation, that DSQ even posed the dangers of a 'second dispossession' of the poor by overwhelming them with experts (Delarue 1991).

While a central principle in social development rhetoric then, participation continues in practice to be a weakness in the French schemes (eg Dos Santos 1995). Indeed there are dangers in the new caste of mayors, local politicians and social development experts it has empowered (eg Donzelot and Estèbe 1993; Jacquier 1991–92). Glamour and prestige (and, of course, resources) go with the projects which are presented as dynamic, modern, and futuristic ways of managing cities. Some social workers have stood apart from the social development and insertion schemes saying that it remains the experts who describe what the good society should look like, and the behavioural norms that underly successful participation and acceptable local activism. At the same time, there may be renewed constraints on local activism: the *contrats de ville* seem to reflect a possibly more conflictual interest by the central state in local affairs with the return of the *sous-préfet à la ville* who is regaining authority (weakened under the socialists) to negotiate with local politicians and authorities. Here we see *l'État animateur*, the state animating, orienting

and constraining local actors by providing funding for particular approaches to the problem of exclusion (Donzelot and Estèbe 1994).

Grevot (1995) argues that the bigger crisis is that of values – particularly around race and immigration. The disadvantaged urban areas contain high proportions of 'immigrants' (often born in France with French nationality), mainly originating from north Africa. Yet because the French Republican concept of citizenship is one that emphasises the cement between all in the French community, regional and ethnic and religious claims have been suppressed or at best downplayed. It is a concept of citizenship which dangerously ignores the importance of ethnic identification. Although Islam was established as the second religion of France in 1995 and although social development talks of the needs of 'immigrants' and the involvement of their associations, there is a blindness about what participation and reconstructed services might look like from the minority standpoint. Given that exclusion is a term that can be used to refer (vaguely) to a variety of challenges to identity and nationhood, it incorporates but does not explore too closely questions of multi-culturalism and racism. Nevertheless the strong presence of good quality public services in the areas in which 'immigrants' tend to live has done much to prevent the kind of marginalisation seen in the United States among African Americans. However, and ironically, Wacquant (1993) argues, the very strength of republican notions of citizenship – of inclusion and opportunity for all in France – has meant a greater sense of injustice among north African youth in France.

Behar (1995) argues that the programmes fail to consider rigorously the relationship between poverty and urban problems and that consequently anti-exclusion policies have confused goals. The first is the eradication of pockets of poverty, a line which opens the hitherto taboo (in republican tradition) notion of positive discrimination, legitimated by observers such as Bourdieu or Jazouli. The second is supporting community initiatives through valorising local people's movements; here it is not a question of eradicating poverty but of replacing work and class with new forms of community association. The third (following Donzelot or Rosanvallon) considers exclusion not as a social or spatial category but as a general process of

weakening social ties; its goal is to find means by which public powers can guarantee social cohesion. Behar suggests that urban policy hesitates between these rather different goals, which make both planning and evaluation tautological and imprecise.

Others have also criticised the urban development policies for failing seriously to confront unemployment or poverty, and for providing a instead a highly visible therapy for poor neighbourhoods, with new more comfortable terms like neighbourhood, city, social development as euphemisms for poverty (Damamme and Jobert 1995). Levy's report on the DSQ programmes in 1989 had found that poverty and youth unemployment were not reduced by the initiatives – and national trends show clearly worsening figures. While then there is muddled or inadequate thinking on the relationship between poverty and urban problems, and while there is a gap between reality and rhetoric on participation, we must bear in mind that the central goal of the social development initiatives is to combat exclusion, which is related to but not the same as poverty. Given, however, the range of theories on exclusion that underlie the policies, it is difficult to find definitive statements on the impact and effectiveness of the policies, except in terms of the redirecting of public services and the growth of the third sector.

5 Conclusion: A New Paradigm?

There is then some malaise reflected in these questions of the French social development programmes. But for all this, the French social

development policy is an ambitious attempt to mitigate the consequences of economic restructuring. At its most Utopian it carries a hope that there really could be new forms of solidarity around revitalised neighbourhoods and associations, and that cities could be places in which all participate and in which no neighbourhoods are stigmatised. It begins to address the question of how a world beyond employment could remain cohesive and fulfilling – by reconceiving the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, and by finding new associative anchors for social integration (Offe and Heinze 1992). We see local and regional government in France which can begin to offer some of the hopes of 'thinking global, acting local'. Importantly too, the policies have expanded the number of people with a stake in good provision of local services, with a say in the form of those services, and with the ability, flexibility and power to negotiate and contract with the national state for resources. The French schemes have been successful in getting a wide range of public agencies and professionals to plan together for solidaristic goals.

In the current onslaught on the principles of universalism and collectivism the French programmes provide inspiration because they show (in theory if not always in practice) a way forward. As long as the programmes are understood to be about struggling against exclusion (rather than poverty) and to be doing so by reconceiving public welfare state services, then they must take their place among the more impressive social experiments of the twentieth century.

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