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Article

'Social Mix' as 'Sustainability Fix'? Exploring Social Sustainability in the French Suburbs

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Abstract

The French suburbs, or *banlieues*, have long been associated with marginalization and peripheralization, characterized by unemployment, a high proportion of ethnic minority populations and low education attainment levels. Since 2000, the 'crisis' of the *banlieue* has been addressed through a policy of 'social mixing' which aims to promote mixed communities in certain neighbourhoods, to dilute the 'problematic elements' of the suburbs. This 'social sustainability fix' however has had mixed results. Questions can be raised over whether a policy based on increasing a neighbourhood's social mix is an appropriate sustainability fix for the suburbs, and whether it has actually resulted in the outcomes that were intended. Rather than encouraging social integration, it is argued here that the policy of social mixing reinforces segregation and has done little to tackle inequalities and social exclusion. We suggest that there are alternative solutions to the challenges of fostering social sustainability in the suburbs, which could be implemented in partnership with citizens and neighbourhood-based groups (*associations*) that would be more effective in addressing social sustainability solutions in the future.

Keywords

banlieue; French suburbs; mixed communities; neighbourhood; social exclusion; social mixing; social sustainability

1. Introduction

In May 2018, France's President Macron launched a new programme to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in the French suburbs, or *banlieue*. The *banlieues* have long been depicted as problematic, associated with marginalization and peripheralization, and characterized in the public imagination by high unemployment, low educational attainment and persistently high levels of poverty (Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013). Successive governments have consistently attempted to 'fix' the problem of the *banlieue* with a variety of policies and programmes, not least resulting from the fact that the *banlieue* have been the scene of waves of social unrest that have broken out sporadically during the 1980s, 1990s and most recently in 2005 (Jobard, 2013).

One of the cornerstone policies to address the crisis of the *banlieue* dates back to the year 2000 and has focused on a policy of 'social mixing' (*mixité sociale*), which

aims to promote mixed communities in certain 'problematic' neighbourhoods through diversifying the housing stock. This has involved a programme of housing demolition and rebuilding, replacing older public sector housing with a range of housing tenure types, to encourage a greater diversity of social groups in certain neighbourhoods. However, 18 years on, questions can be raised over whether a policy based on increasing a neighbourhood's social mix is an appropriate sustainability fix for the French suburbs, and whether it has actually resulted in the outcomes that were intended.

In the context of debates around a 'sustainability fix' for the suburbs (While, Jonas, & Gibbs, 2004), it is interesting to explore the notion of social sustainability and how the policy of social mixing might respond to the calls for a 'fix' from a social perspective. If sustainability is a poorly-understood term, 'social sustainability' is even more so. Shirazi and Keivani (2017) highlight the diverse meanings and conceptualizations of the term so-

cial sustainability, including identifying seven key aspects that studies of social sustainability focus upon: cultural development and diversity (e.g., Polèse & Stren, 2000), procedural quality (Koning, 2002), urban policy (City of Vancouver, 2005), physical/non-physical aggregation (Dempsey, Brown, & Bramley, 2012), well-being (Bacon, Cochrane, & Woodcraft, 2012), equity and democracy (Murphy, 2012), and capacity building (Colantonio, 2009). Of these seven themes, cultural development and diversity aligns most closely with the policy objective of creating mixed communities, integrating diverse groups in a just and equitable way, with Polèse and Stren (2000, pp. 15–16) defining social sustainability as:

> Development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration.

This article argues that the policy of social mixing has not in fact resulted in more mixed neighbourhoods that address the challenges of the *banlieue*. This 'social sustainability' fix has failed to achieve its objectives, due to a range of factors, both political, structural and cultural. Rather than encouraging social integration, it is argued here that the policy of social mixing reinforces segregation and has done little to tackle inequalities and social exclusion. Here, however, we suggest that there are alternative solutions to the challenges of fostering social sustainability in the suburbs, which could be implemented in partnership with citizens and neighbourhood-based groups, that would be more effective in addressing social sustainability solutions in the future.

The article is based on research carried out in the Lyon agglomeration, France's second city (population 1.4 million) during the period 2012–2014, that explored urban renewal policies, community consultation and rehousing in the working-class suburb of Vaulx-en-Velin, which is located on the eastern edge of the Greater Lyon agglomeration. The area was developed during the first wave of post-war urbanization and grew from a population of around 10,000 in 1959, to over 20,000 in 1968. The population peaked around 44,000 in 1982, housed mainly in *grands ensembles*, housing estates of towers and high-rise blocks of flats that characterize many of the peripheries of French cities. However, during the 1990s, gradual population decline due to the outmigration of better-off households meant that the population stagnated, fluctuating at around 40,000 inhabitants during much of the 2000s. Since 2010, the population has risen steadily again, mainly due to new-build housing in the town centre and on brownfield land, with the population in 2015 rising to over 47,000. The article here draws on a selection of semi-structured interviews carried out with key actors and stakeholders, explored here from the perspective of social sustainability and social mixing, complemented by an analysis of public policy documents and

other literature. The article therefore provides original analysis of interview material interpreted through a lens of social sustainability, as well as providing a synthesis of original findings from the initial research project.

It is important to note that the suburbs are an extremely diverse landscape, with multiple spatial manifestations across time and space (Keil, 2013). Here, we focus on the peripheral high-rise estates located on the edge of French cities, but there are many varieties of suburban and post-suburban regimes in France (Charmes & Keil, 2015), including examples of the North American model of low density peri-urbanization that brings with it issues of environmental sustainability, due to sprawl, car-dependence and the implications for service provision (Touati-Morel, 2015). Our interest here is in the 'inner- and middle-ring' suburbs populated by a mainly precarious, immigrant population, where the dominant policy has been "urban renewal through partial demolition" (Charmes & Keil, 2015, p. 595).

The article begins with an overview of the history of the French suburbs to contextualize the propos, as well as details of the policies that have focused on these areas through the national *Politique de la Ville*—or the Urban Policy for Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods. The next section critically examines the policy of social mixing, exploring its underlying premises and resultant impacts. The following section explores alternatives to this 'sustainability fix' related to social sustainability, while the conclusions draw out lessons from the French case for the North American context.

2. The *Banlieues*: Growth and Decline

The *banlieues* occupy a particular place in the history of urbanization in France. As a response to the post-war housing crisis from the mid-1950s, large-scale social housing estates were developed on the edge of many French cities. The scale and speed of construction were unprecedented, with monumental housing blocks being erected rapidly on the periphery of urban areas, but often with poor quality building materials and a lack of integrated planning. Between 1954 and 1973, 6 million new homes were built in social housing estates, the equivalent of 20% of France's current housing stock (Charmes & Keil, 2015). Many new families were attracted by these housing projects, as a welcome alternative to the inner-city or rural housing they were moving from. These *cités* (estates) were seen as a symbol of the importance of the welfare state within French society, in facilitating access to social housing, but also in promoting economic growth through a mass housing construction programme that was government subsidized.

However, perceptions of the *banlieue* began to shift in the 1970s due to three factors, which help to explain current circumstances (Tissot, 2007). Up until the 1970s, non-French nationals had almost no access to social housing, due to the discriminatory practices of social housing landlords. The significant waves of migrants in the 1960s

from France's former colonies in North and West Africa mainly found accommodation in substandard housing in the inner city, or in *bidonvilles*, the informal shantytowns on the city's edge. In the early 1970s, the government launched a major slum clearance programme, following which, social housing landlords were subsequently obliged to accept immigrants as tenants, which began to shift the ethnic mix of the cités. Secondly, the early 1970s saw a shift in housing policy, with a move away from construction of social housing, to state incentives for homeownership through low-interest loans. So as middle-class families moved out of social housing into the owner-occupied sector, migrant families were moving into the public housing estates in their place. Thirdly, the socio-economic status of the *banlieue* residents was also shifting. Many were employed as low-skilled manual workers but following the global oil crisis of 1973 and subsequent economic restructuring, many *cité* residents were made redundant, with foreign workers often among the first to lose their jobs. This history of the *banlieue* helps to contextualize the current situation, where the *cités* are seen as places of "advanced marginality" (Wacquant, 1996), characterized by deprivation and segregation, with a high ethnic minority population, and significant economic and social exclusion. Such stark inequalities in French society sparked a wave of civil disturbance in the early 1980s, due to the growing resentment among young *banlieusards*, many of ethnic minority origin, who felt excluded from mainstream French society (Dikeç, 2007).

The issue of ethnicity in France is a complex one, a situation rooted in the ideals embedded within the Republican values of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*. The underlying principles relate to the primacy of the universal citizen, rather than citizens being defined by their ethnicity or religion. Historically therefore, policies formulated to address poverty have been 'colour-blind', with no reference to the role of ethnicity in reinforcing inequalities. However, during the 1980s, in reaction to the social unrest in the *banlieues*, the issue of ethnicity began to be woven into the discourse around tackling the 'social problems' of the *banlieue*. Links were made by both politicians and the media between the disturbances in the *banlieue* and high immigration levels (Tissot, 2007). The resultant Urban Policy for Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods was introduced in the late 1980s, and had a strong emphasis on social regeneration, with measures to address local development, strengthen social ties, promote community links and civic participation (Busquet, Hérouard, & Saint-Macary, 2016). There was little emphasis at the time on physical refurbishment or demolition (Tissot, 2008).

However, a shift in approach came in the late 1990s, as it was increasingly felt within policy circles that previous 'soft' approaches had failed to solve the growing urban crisis of the *banlieues* (Lelévrier, 2004). This change in approach was linked to the discourse of anti-ghettoism that emerged during the 1990s, with fears that concentrations of poverty (and by association, ethnic mi-

norities) could lead to ghettos in the suburbs. A narrative around destigmatization through demolishing tower blocks was also used to reinforce the need to change the image of the *banlieues*, in order to attract a more diverse (read: 'middle-class') population. Remodelling space through the demolition of housing estates was therefore seen as a way of preventing the consolidation of ghettos and encouraging mixed neighbourhoods (Deboulet & Abram, 2017).

3. Social Mix: Sustainability Fix?

Encouraging mixed communities has been central to French urban policy since 2000, on the one hand by obliging a minimum proportion of social housing in all municipalities in large metropolitan areas, and on the other, through demolishing social housing in certain neighbourhoods and replacing it with mixed tenure dwellings. In 2000, the Socialist Government introduced the Law on Solidarity and Urban Renewal (*Loi Relative à la Solidarité et au Renouvellement Urbain*, hereafter SRU). This law required every municipality above a given population in large metropolitan areas—above 3,500 inhabitants or, in the Greater Paris area, above 1,500 inhabitants, included in a metropolitan area of more than 50,000—to either provide at least 20% of their housing stock as social housing by 2020 or face fines (Desponds, 2010). In 2014, this minimum requirement rose to 25% in areas of severe housing shortage, with fines increasing for individual municipalities in line with the local social housing deficit. This approach was supplemented after 2002, following a change in government from left to right.

Under Chirac's right-wing administration, the Borloo Act of 2003 was introduced, with an explicit agenda to demolish considerable swathes of social housing and replace them with mixed-tenure dwellings, through a comprehensive national urban renewal programme launched in 2005, the *Program National de Rénovation Urbaine* (PNRU). While the first policy, the SRU, aims to redistribute social housing into wealthier municipalities, the Borloo Act aims to introduce mixed communities into mono-tenure social housing areas through demolition of mostly tower and high-rise blocks, i.e., "de-verticalization" (Veschambre, 2018) and reconstruction of mixed-tenure developments. Although ostensibly, the policy aimed to demolish housing that was substandard, Deboulet and Abram (2017, p. 145) suggest that:

> It is possible to argue that the level of demolition follows the prevalence of poverty rather than the quality of building structures, and most probably the highest degree of demolition mirrors the concentration of immigrant families from both the French ex-colonies and eastern European countries.[1]

Private developers were incentivized using tax rebates, with new build programmes subsidizing social landlords,

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[1] This cannot be corroborated due to the lack of data on ethnic origin in France.

and incentives to rebuild the same amount of social housing one-for-one, although there was no requirement to replace demolished blocks with the same housing standards or price brackets (Deboulet & Abram, 2017).

Both policies are promoted under the banner of 'social mixing', whereby the concentration of poverty is seen as one of the main drivers of neighbourhood problems, through so-called 'neighbourhood effects' (Buck, 2001), i.e. the premise that living in a deprived area can reinforce and reproduce disadvantage. There are two main underlying rationales implicit in an urban policy that encourages mixed communities. Firstly, it implies that new middle-class households moving into disadvantaged areas will act as a positive influence for local residents, in relation to good citizenship and in particular through more conducive learning conditions at schools. Secondly, it implies that the presence of a more socioeconomically diverse population that is more likely to be in employment, will offer existing residents a range of different opportunities through exchanges of social capital that enhance local capacity (Provan, 2017). However, from studies carried out on both sides of the Atlantic, it is unclear whether the economic opportunities of poorer households are indeed greater after moving to wealthier neighbourhoods, or when more middle-class households move into disadvantaged areas (Musterd, Andersson, Galster, & Kauppinen, 2008; Oreopoulos, 2003). Similarly, the evidence for peer effects at school is mixed. Around half of studies that analyse the effect of socioeconomic background on children's learning outcomes find no impact. The other half show a small, positive effect (Brandt, 2018; Sacerdote, 2014). Therefore, the assumption that mixed communities result in positive outcomes for communities living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods has not been clearly substantiated.

Evidence suggests that the SRU policy has made a small contribution to increasing the social housing stock in municipalities that started with a low share (Bono, Davidson, & Trannoy, 2012), although there are some key municipalities that consistently miss their targets, such as St Didier au Mont d'Or in the wealthy west of the Lyon agglomeration, which registers just 3.6% of its housing stock as social housing. However, the effects of demolition in disadvantaged areas on social mixing overall are questionable. There are issues of displacement of the poorest tenants, as highlighted by one NGO actor:

> Of course, when you show them [the residents] what it'll look like in the future, many of them say, 'yes, we'd like that', but they don't realise what's going to happen. They aren't told that some of these residents aren't going to live there anymore, because at the same time, they were sorting, selecting those who had paid [their rent]. They'd be rehoused. Those who had problems paying their rent, they would go in front of the selection committee. They don't tell them that. (Mechmache, 2014, author's translation)

These most vulnerable residents are often displaced to low-cost poor quality housing in other neighbourhoods without addressing the underlying social issues affecting such populations (Kirszbaum & Epstein, 2010; Posthumus, Bolt, & Van Kempen, 2013). Those rehoused in the neighbourhood often face higher rents than previously, and significantly increased charges (the communal monthly charges to upkeep the building), resulting in significantly higher outgoings. Thus, previously affordable housing is being replaced with housing that is out of reach of the most precarious in the neighbourhood.

This 'sorting' is confirmed by Rousseau (2015), who found that municipalities in the Greater Lyon area carefully assess the profile of potential residents when allocating new housing units, to examine their 'fit' with the neighbourhood. Comparing the wealthier western communes in Lyon with the working-class eastern communes, Rousseau found that in the west, priority was given to those already living in the municipality, while in the east, housing was more likely to be allocated to middle-class households from the eastern part of the agglomeration. A 'politicization' of densification as well as regulations at the intercommunal level limit the possibilities for redistributing populations across the agglomeration, which would contribute to greater social mixing (Rousseau, 2017).

However, the creation of new mixed tenure developments does not necessarily encourage greater social interaction between social groups. Rather than creating mixed communities, new households that arrive in renewal areas often do not integrate with the social housing tenants, unless they have experience of living in high-poverty social housing elsewhere. Demolition has also been found to accelerate the departure of more wealthy tenants from renewal areas, further fracturing the neighbourhood (Lelévrier, 2010). Those tenants that do remain, particularly from younger generations, see demolition as an attack, and an attempt to evict them for their neighbourhoods (Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles, 2013), further undermining public acceptance of the renewal programme (Kirszbaum, 2010). So, from its original objectives to foster social mixing, these policies have shown to be ineffective in addressing underlying issues of poverty or in improving the housing conditions of the most disadvantaged households.

4. Social Sustainability Solutions 'Made in the *Banlieue*'

A damning report from the *Cour des Comptes* (2012) reviewing 10 years of the *Politique de la Ville*, showed that significant inequalities persisted between neighbourhoods, despite a decade of intervention including social mixing policies, and that the number of areas qualifying for priority assistance increased during the same period. President Macron's recent announcement of a new programme of interventions to address the crisis in the *banlieue* could be seen as a response to this criticism, but de-

tails of the proposed programme at the time of writing are limited, and commentators suggest that there is little of substance to tackle concrete barriers that address poverty and social sustainability, such as the lack of crèche provision for pre-school children (Coulevaire, 2018).

So what form would a 'made in the *banlieue*' solution to concerns about social sustainability take? A starting point for thinking about solutions to social sustainability 'made in the *banlieue*' would be to rethink the priority given to demolition, in cases where rehabilitation or renovation may be possible and preferable. Existing communities contain latent energy, with relationships built over years of shared experiences in the neighbourhood. Housing demolition has been shown to have detrimental impacts on those affected (Veschambre, 2008). Communities fractured by demolition and the displacement of neighbours, friends and families, can have serious implications for social sustainability in precarious neighbourhoods, while at the same time, those displaced and rehoused elsewhere can be traumatized by feelings of isolation, dispossession and the severing of daily contact with friends and support networks. A 'made in the *banlieue*' solution would put demolition plans to a referendum of the local community, with sufficient provision of rehousing options within the neighbourhood to implement the 'right to return' and avoid forced dislocation and rehousing elsewhere.

A further solution that avoids demolition and its negative consequences would see initiatives that involve tenants collaborating together with renovation companies in the upgrading of their buildings (Brandt, 2018). With professional assistance, training and the provision of materials, locally-based associations (groups of residents) could collaborate on self-directed rehabilitation projects, possibly through apprenticeships and other training programmes. This would contribute to social sustainability on a number of levels, through involvement in the renovation project, personal investment in the neighbourhood, building social and professional networks, and possibly resulting in employment in the construction sector through upskilling. Such schemes have been successful in Germany (Blanc, 2013) and the US (Kirszbaum, 2013), but require political support to encourage training providers and local companies to buy into the scheme.

Another possible approach to enhance social sustainability would be to embed consultation into a renewal project from the very beginning. The *Cour des Comptes* report (2012) was critical of the lack of meaningful consultation in the *Politique de la Ville*, with residents merely being informed of major renewal projects that were already in train, without opportunities to influence the foundations of the project. There is considerable resistance on the part of elected councillors in France to participatory democracy due to the strongly-embedded attachment to representative democracy within French institutions. This relates to the notion of the 'general interest' in France, that is defined by a centralised, devolved state or by its local representatives. By contrast, in an Anglo-Saxon context, the equivalent concept is 'the collective interest', related to the 'common good' (*bien commun*), that is closely linked to the idea of shared responsibilities. While in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the 'common good' is determined through negotiation of different points of view, the 'general interest' in France is seen as being maintained by French public officials, elected by universal suffrage to take control of decision-making (Rosanvallon & Goldhammer, 2008). Thus, as Gardesse and Zetlaoui-Léger (2017, p. 200) argue, "a deep hierarchical gap has evolved between elected officials and their constituents, as well as between publicly mandated planning experts and residents", through which participatory processes threaten the legitimacy of elected and administrative actors. As a Green Party councillor elected to the Rhone-Alpes Regional Government commented in interview:

> We talk about it [community consultation], but when it comes to actually doing something, we hide because we're afraid of citizen participation. We're afraid to hear, to be listening to citizens, and we are afraid of being upset by the discourse of citizens. (Personal communication, 17th April 2013, author's translation)

Gardesse and Zetlaoui-Léger (2017, p. 205) suggest that "political initiatives to regulate resident involvement in urban development [are] more concerned by potential risk to the representative French democratic system than a real political desire to change the decision-making process".

To respond to this agenda, citizens committees (*conseils citoyens*) were created in 2014 to engage with communities at an earlier stage in the process through the co-production of strategic documents for urban projects, but initial results of their impact are mixed (Martinais, Daquin, & Martinez, 2018). To be successful, these consultation exercises would need to build trust between communities and city councils, to reassure communities that their voices would actually be heard and acted upon, rather than just listened to and then subsequently ignored. In their report to the Ministry for Urban Affairs, Bacqué and Mechmache (2013) advocated an approach that provides financial support for residents' initiatives proposed through consultation exercises, but the French Parliament has been reluctant to adopt their recommendations, partly through concerns about the emergence of religious or ethnic-based opposition groups (Gardesse & Zetlaoui-Léger, 2017). There needs to be a "new governmentality of the suburbs" (Deboulet & Abram, 2017, p. 151) that integrates the voices of residents with respect and consideration.

The crisis in the *banlieue* has endured for so many decades due to the failure of public policy to address the underlining structural issues affecting people and place in the *banlieue*, including long term unemployment, a lack of education and skills, and limited local employment opportunities. Another solution to issues of social

sustainability would focus not on housing tenure to encourage mixed communities, but on a wider programme that looks at structural issues in the *banlieue*, including links to jobs and services, in what are often physically isolated neighbourhoods. One approach would be to improve connections with transport infrastructure, in order to increase access to jobs, services and other facilities. This would likely result in greater social mixing, as local residents would have greater access to employment opportunities and those with rising incomes would choose to remain in the area rather than relocate elsewhere. As one NGO actor noted of the renewal programme in a disadvantaged area in an eastern suburbs of Paris:

> The human and social side hadn't been planned at all. The transport issue…we're a neighbourhood that's disconnected. No business would come and set up here because, if there aren't the transport links, I don't see how they're going to get established. Mixing hasn't happened because schools weren't built, so who would come and live here when there isn't the infrastructure. People won't come and live in a place where you can't find a way to get around, or the jobs and schools that you need. (Mechmache, 2014, author's translation)

Social sustainability would also be enhanced through a 'whole neighbourhood' approach, opening up the area to access opportunities elsewhere. A successful approach would also need to work with local employers to assess skills needs, as well as providing bespoke training, basic workplace skills and language training if necessary. On renovation projects, local employment clauses could be included that require companies to hire local residents initially for a set number of hours a week. This 'whole neighbourhood' or 'integrated approach' that combines issues of accessibility, employment and training has been advocated by the European Union in their policy of sustainable urban development and has been shown to be successful in a number of contexts, in opening up opportunities for marginalized communities (Carpenter, 2011).

Lastly, in neighbourhoods affected by population growth through new housing development, with or without demolition, the social integration of new households is an issue affecting social sustainability. This can be facilitated by neighbourhood events, a 'made in the *banlieue*' solution to the social sustainability question arising from the influx of new residents. Shared community events, such as a street party, yard sale, or communal gardens/allotments, have been shown to bring different social groups together around a common event, and help to create connections between new and original residents (Stevenson, 2016).

5. Conclusion

President Macron's grand plan for the suburbs aims to address disadvantage in the *banlieue* where others over

the last 20 years have failed. Since 2000, a policy of social mixing has been in place, encouraging social housing to be built in wealthy municipalities where there is a dearth, and implementing a policy of demolition in disadvantaged areas, with rebuilding of mixed tenancy housing, to encourage mixed communities and social integration. This policy can be interpreted as a 'social sustainability fix' to the persistent problem of disadvantage in the suburbs. However, as argued here, the policy of social mixing has done little to tackle inequalities and social exclusion in the *banlieues*, while wealthy suburbs on the edges of French cities prefer to pay fines, rather than increase the proportion of social housing on their territory.

Given the political will, however, there are certainly solutions to address social sustainability in the *banlieue* which present a plausible future for the disadvantaged suburbs. These are based on a critical questioning of the supremacy of demolition over rehabilitation, and an engagement with residents through consultation about the future of their neighbourhood, giving a voice to those that were previously unheard in the urban arena. As argued by Gardesse and Zetlaoui-Léger (2017, p. 211), "there is a growing awareness that the spaces of our daily lives must be the product of cooperation between the different actors using and sharing them". These 'made in the *banlieue*' approaches put citizens at the heart of policy, prioritizing citizens' visions for their area, and building integrated strategies to present opportunities for the future.

This problematic of the *banlieues* in France lies in stark contrast to the classic image of suburban landscapes in North America, with low-density, single-family dwellings sprawling out from the edge of cities. But as Charmes and Keil (2015) observe, Canada is characterized by a variety of suburban landscapes, and shares with France a not-dissimilar pattern of peripheral high-rise housing estates, albeit built later than in France, but often characterized by concentrations of poor, ethnic minority tenant populations. Given these are more recent constructions in Canada, the spectre of demolition is not generally hanging over them. But there are similar issues to the French *banlieues* related to isolation, concentrations of disadvantage and a lack of employment opportunities, that would also benefit from a 'sustainability fix' from a social perspective. Bottom-up initiatives to engage with local communities about the future of their neighbourhood can contribute to the social pillar of sustainability, through dialogue, empowerment and building a community based on social equity. These transatlantic lessons offer political choices that can contribute to building more socially sustainable suburban futures.

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Conflict of Interests

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