

# **Presentation of the exchange programme of residents in underprivileged neighbourhoods**

## **Berlin-Lyon residents' Position Paper**

### **The participants**

Persons living in the neighbourhood:

- who play an active role as volunteers in local groups or associations.
- or who are interested in the future of their neighbourhood and attend public meetings about projects for transforming of the neighbourhood.

### **The neighbourhoods who participate in the exchange programme**

These neighbourhoods are working-class neighbourhoods, with a wide diversity of origins among the residents.

It is pleasant to live in these neighbourhoods, social life is active and solidarity is present.

But there are problems linked to the large number of low-income families, young people failing in school and with difficulties finding a job.

### **Action of the public authorities**

The public authorities are conducting in these neighbourhoods much-needed urban regeneration projects where the design of spaces, buildings and roads had not changed in many years though needs had evolved: new streets are being created to better link the neighbourhood with the rest of the city, retail areas and public amenities are restored and, in some cases, a number of residential buildings are demolished, which requires relocating the tenants, most of whom choose to remain in the neighbourhood while others choose to leave.

In preparation for these urban regeneration projects, the public authorities organise consultation meetings with the residents. The residents often have the feeling that they are not adequately informed about the projects, that they are designed without the residents' input. Information meetings are held to explain what has been decided by the local authorities, without considering that the residents are also "experts" of their neighbourhood and that they are capable of contributing to better-designed projects.

In this framework, the participants in the European exchanges are selected among those who play a de facto role as intermediary between the public authorities and the rest of the population in the neighbourhood, who try to defend the interests of the population but in a spirit of dialogue and consensus with the public authorities, rather than creating an opposition or retreating to a sterile, isolated position.

## **The principle of the exchanges between residents of Lyon / Berlin / Birmingham**

In this framework, the exchanges provide an opportunity for the residents:

- to compare their questions and problems with those residents in the same situation in other cities
- to also compare the answers and solutions provided, which can lead to an understanding of the constraints faced by other European cities, as well their own.
- to visit other neighbourhoods of the same type (working-class, with urban regeneration projects) and have the residents of these neighbourhoods act as guides, showing the visitors what has been achieved and what difficulties remain.
- to challenge conventional opinions on other cultures and to learn from others.

This enables the residents:

- to better analyse what is happening in their own neighbourhood, to better understand the specificities of the local organisation in their town.
- to better analyse the role they can play as activist residents for the improvement of living conditions.

The result is that they acquire greater competency on socio-urban projects and they improve their ability to express themselves in their relations with the public authorities and thereby influence decisions.

### **Topics on which the residents have been mobilised:**

- Housing, rent, building maintenance
- Living environment: public spaces, especially green spaces, recreation, gardens and allotments
- The history of the neighbourhood and the importance of local history in the current functioning of the neighbourhood
  
- Support for school children, help with homework
- Children's activities and childcare options (e.g. community centres for children)
- Strengthening the role of parents and handing down values to younger generations
- Support for adolescents through activities and help in finding a job, housing, etc.
  
- Participation of residents in neighbourhood councils and board meetings of public facilities in the area
- Organisation of neighbourhood events, cultural activities: celebrate diversity of cultures, share with others, participate in the activities of theatres or other cultural venues
- Issues of identity, integration of foreigners, respect for their identity, fight against discrimination of all types
  
- Access to the job market, creation of micro-enterprises
- Support for severely deprived persons through appropriate training to aid their integration in the job market and in society in general
  
- Issues related to safety and peace in the neighbourhood

## Results

On the one hand, the results are not entirely satisfactory with regard to the above-mentioned principles: despite the preparation phases, during the exchanges there is not enough time to see everything of interest and to discuss in an in-depth manner with the residents of the host city. It would be interesting to explore certain subjects but the constraints on all parties (public authorities, residents, organisational difficulties) are an obstacle. It would be interesting to try to implement at home ideas from other cities, but it is very difficult. As concerns the organisation, there is a long gap period between two exchange sessions. It is difficult to widely disseminate the results of the exchanges among the rest of the population. It is unfortunate that local political leaders are not always available to participate in the exchanges and have not always managed to take advantage of the participating residents in order to associate them more closely in local affairs afterwards.

On the other hand, very strong contacts are established among the participants, a feeling of friendship that leads residents to stay in contact with each other and sometimes to organise their own trips in order to build new exchanges directly amongst themselves. In addition, the residents of different sectors of a city neighbourhood, formerly isolated from each other, have created new ties and built up an ongoing local network through which they share information and provide mutual support for their efforts. The positive results can also be seen at the personal level for the participants (more dynamic, confident and greater ease in collaborating with project experts).

## Examples

Residents of Lyon discovered:

- people of Berlin who decided on the development of a playground and who are partly responsible for its maintenance.
- people of Birmingham who take turns monitoring video surveillance cameras installed in public areas around the neighbourhood and even in building entryways and lifts.
- a Berlin community centre open every day, where anyone can come in without prior registration.
- Birmingham residents who hold the majority on a steering committee which decides on the use of public funding, based on the needs of the neighbourhood.
- Birmingham residents who collected contributions in order to pay for a police car (Quinzone programme). This was very surprising for the Lyon participants who saw it as assuming the role of the public authorities.
- in east Berlin a social housing developer who provided a two-bedroom apartment on the top floor of a building free of charge to a local association which rents the room to tourists (about 15 euros per night). The management of the project is entirely the responsibility of young people in the association.
- in Berlin, a drawing to decide which residents participate in a commission to decide on neighbourhood projects. The selected residents have an equal voice with the representatives of the public authorities.

Berlin residents discovered in Lyon:

- the day nursery or kindergarten “arc-en-ciel” and the ”Popular University for parents” which is there located; in particular the exchange between scientific investigations into “being parents” and experiences of parents themselves; In Berlin this approach was taken up: people established in an area in Kreuzberg a Popular University for parents by taking the French model as example.
- a residential home for men who came from former colonies and other countries to France looking for work and prosperity and who have lived partly for 30 years in a room with 7 m<sup>2</sup> with common bathroom and kitchen
- radical changes with regard to urban development but also social and intercultural processes
- in comparison to Berlin the impression that people here attach bigger importance to social projects
- beside of the possibility to exchange experiences with Lyon residents Berlin tenants liked within the group the interest for each other, to discuss and to exchange experiences within the “German” group which consisted of people with Turkish, Vietnamese, Spanish, Ukrainian and German roots

*The most important task in the neighbourhoods is to motivate the population to get engaged for their neighbourhood, to become aware of problems and, all together, develop ways to eliminate or surmount them. There are different ways to make people get involved in the neighbourhood: general information about activities, carrying out a public forum or discussion, or the participation in one particular project. And one can integrate the population in the decision-making processes on spending subsidies – until the point to decide almost autonomously on the distribution of the funds.*

Birmingham residents discovered:

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### **A brief assessment so far**

Major differences among cities:

- as concerns projects:
  - o projects are highly focused on the living environment and housing in France, along with local economic development aspects,
  - o there is a strong focus on security issues in Birmingham
  - o there are fewer demolitions and more renovations in Berlin.
- as concerns the project process and the role given to residents: stronger in Germany and England than in France.

But light was shed on some shared principles which need to be recognised by higher authorities:

- when urban projects aim to transform a working-class neighbourhood, they must have an equally important social and economic character, benefiting the population, and not just physical development and construction projects.
- it is not because people have low incomes or are in severe difficulty that they cannot participate in the life of a city, contribute to its vitality and diversity.
- when they organise themselves, when the public authorities help them to “boost their competency,” the residents can become a driving force for projects in their neighbourhood.
- the residents play a dual role:
  - . they remind the public authorities that the city must be designed for them, not against them
  - . they play a leading role with the rest of the population and facilitate “getting along together” among the different stakeholders.