

URBAN PLANNING AND THE ROOTS OF RIOTS IN PARIS

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Abstract

Paris is considered one of the most densely populated cities, accommodating approximately 2.5 million inhabitants. It serves as the hub for a conglomerate comprising 432 municipalities and a population of 10.5 million people, the majority being located within Île-de-France region. The city exhibits a monocentric urban structure, the municipality of Paris itself being surrounded by two concentric rings of decreasing urban density. These rings encompass large-scale housing developments (suburbs) and newly established towns that emerged after World War II.

An analysis conducted by Grzegorzcyk (2013) revealed a higher degree of social segregation in the entire Paris metropolitan region, compared to the city of Paris alone. The most segregated groups were the upper class, followed by foreigners, immigrants, and the lower class. This pattern highlights the significant role of auto-segregation factors and functions. Notably, a consistent division into homogeneous parts exists between the prestigious and affluent western districts and the impoverished immigrant-dominated north-eastern districts.

Our study will focus on analyzing the urban planning in Clichy-sous-Bois, which was a focal point of riots in 2005. However, before delving into that, it is crucial to examine residential suburbs in France

Keywords: Urban planning, Paris, riots, social unrest, civil unrest.

1. PROMINENT RECENT RIOT MOVEMENTS AND THEIR DIRECT AND INDIRECT CAUSES

The riots began in the newly constructed residential suburbs in 1981, subsequently becoming a focal point for rioting and protests.

Prominent riot movements in residential suburbs and associated concepts and reform strategies:

The riots commenced in the Lyon area in 1981, in recently built residential suburbs, referred to as the “hot summer” to describe disturbances that occurred during the school holiday period. These disturbances were characterized by the theft of luxury cars from central Lyon, which were brought to their neighborhood, the “Minguettes Estates”. Subsequent chases between groups or with the police ensued, serving as entertainment, followed by the arson of the stolen vehicles.

Concepts of the suburbs and real estate began to surface in the media, encompassing social concerns such as urban youth unemployment, migration, petty crime, or violence and they became commonly used.

In 1990, the killing of a disabled young man during a police chase ignited a two-day and two-night fire outbreak in “Mas du Taureau”. The incidents involved confrontations between the police and local youth, car theft and arson, looting of a major shopping center and local café in the city center, and the destruction and burning of the local youth club.

During this stage, ethnicity openly entered public spaces, but discussions largely avoided addressing racism. Officially, not a single word was mentioned about the reasons behind the outbreak of riots or the hostile relations between the police and the youth in these neighborhoods, or, on a broader scale, the discrimination faced by the youth.

In 2005, the suburbs of Paris experienced unprecedented violence that originated in Clichy-Sous-Bois, one of the poorest northern suburbs of the city. The riots began after the police chased two children who had taken refuge in an electrical substation, resulting in their electrocution and death. The reason for their escape from the police was their fear of being arbitrarily arrested and sent to the police station, as they were sons of garbage collectors. The riot events were more violent than the previous ones, with projectiles sometimes replaced by firearms. The riots then spread to other neighborhoods throughout the country (around 300 cities) and continued for three weeks. Media outlets around the world published images of burning cars in France. Since the riots, nearly 45,000 cars have been burned in France annually. In 2017, strikes occurred because of police abuse of power in two separate incidents, the first lasting for 11 days and the second ending the following day.

In 2018, a popular protest movement known as the “Yellow Vests movement” emerged to denounce the rising fuel prices and the increasing cost of living and demand the reversal of tax reforms that were perceived to disproportionately burden the working and middle classes while benefiting the wealthy. The initial protest involved approximately 300,000 participants, predominantly retirees, farmers, and low-wage workers, who gathered on Champs-Élysées in Paris. During the protests, acts of violence occurred, including the burning of 190 sites, including six buildings, the closure of a tower, numerous shops on Champs-Élysées, significant museums such as Louvre, and metro stations.

2. INDIRECT CAUSES OF RIOTING [1]

Cities are complex ecosystems, and Paris is no exception. While the City of Lights offers undeniable charm, beneath the surface simmer tensions fueled by a potent mix of urban planning decisions, social dynamics, and economic disparities.

The roots of riots in the Paris region can be found in the intricate interplay between urban planning, social dynamics and spatial isolation, social segregation, and economic inequality serve as breeding grounds for unrest.

The presence of non-European foreigners and large families is closely associated with riots. The second-generation immigrants, resulting from excluding young people of North African origin from the labor market compared to their French peers, represent a voice in these protests. Over time, the suburbs were affected by the decline of manufacturing and by economic difficulties, becoming synonymous with high unemployment, low-quality schools, crime, and implicitly linked to ethnic minorities.

This spatial divide, characterized by strong segregation between immigrants and natives, compounded by deficient urban policies and disparities in public housing, fuels the simmering tensions.

By concentrating marginalized communities in specific areas, often characterized by substandard living conditions and limited access to opportunities, urban planning inadvertently fosters social exclusion and alienation. These marginalized communities, feeling disenfranchised and overlooked by policymakers, are more prone to mobilize and protest against perceived injustices.

Regarding the occupational structure of the region, there has been an upward shift in the past decade, with a significant increase in the share of higher professional classes. These trends have been accompanied by a rise in income inequality driven by wage increases.

Analyzing collective movement in residential areas reveals a stronger preference for staying in Paris among the upper-middle classes. Homeownership is frequently observed in the suburbs with good transportation networks, connecting the middle and upper-middle classes. "Our analysis reveals preferences for non-mobility and staying in areas where living conditions improve, which is sometimes overlooked in studies of residential mobility" [2].

Furthermore, in 2004, the implementation of the National Renewal Program, issued in 2003, aimed at improving living conditions in these cities. However, it was accompanied by tension and uncertainty because of the temporary or final eviction of families living in the most dilapidated buildings, affecting at least 300,000 housing units. The displacement of families from dilapidated housing units underscores the fraught relationship between urban planning decisions and social stability.

In this complex web of factors, urban planning, and policy decisions play a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic landscape, which in turn influences the occurrence and intensity of conflicts and riots.

3. URBAN POLICIES AND RIOTS IN FRANCE

Riots are among the urban issues that French governments have attempted to address through several policies and laws, directly or indirectly associated with urban planning. Firstly, the French government responded to the events of 1981 by allocating significant financial resources to social prevention programs, prioritizing the removal of potential rioters from their cities during the summer season and placing them in summer camps on the French coast or in the mountains. The "City Policy" was also implemented, which involved several programs aimed at revitalizing deprived urban areas and making substantial investments in the impoverished suburbs. These programs included establishing educational areas, DSQ (Social Development in Neighbourhoods), and creating new job centers in urban areas. However, these policies failed to halt the industrial crisis, curb the rise of hate crimes in cities, or prevent the growth of violent acts recorded by the police. Nevertheless, "the suburbs did not show any noticeable urban unrest during the decade, indicating the success of the implemented policies following the Minguettes disturbance"^[3].

This period coincided with the decentralization laws in 1982, which transferred powers from national to sub-national levels.

Secondly, in 1991, the "Law on Combating Ghettos" (loi d'orientation pour la ville or LOV) was enacted, comprising four key points: residential balance, preservation of social housing, urban and social development of large residential buildings, and land policy.

The law requires every urban municipality included in a group with more than 200,000 inhabitants and having less than 18% of beneficiaries of personal assistance to have 20% social housing on its land, within urban development or social housing projects. This serves as a means to combat social and spatial segregation, to promote the reintegration of enormous housing complexes within the city, and to develop urban services, commercial activities, and offices, while preserving socially oriented housing in city centers and old neighbourhoods. To avoid the eviction of low-income individuals during neighbourhood restructuring operations, the law also provided cities with new means of action, re-launching "public land-based institutions, enjoying their special taxes and capable of intervening in land and property markets". Additionally, financial support was provided to companies and administrations to stabilize specific suburbs, accompanied by tax exemptions. In 1996, 751 sensitive urban areas (ZUS) were designated.

Thirdly, the "Solidarity and Urban Renewal Law" (Loi Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbain or SRU) was enacted in 2000.

The Social Solidarity Law is based on three fundamental principles: urban renewal and development balance, urban job diversity and social mix in urban and rural housing, and the economic and balanced use of natural, urban, semi-urban, and rural spaces.

As a result of the protests in 2018, the government backed down from its plan to increase fuel taxes and announced other measures to assist low-income families. The French government also defended the methods used by riot police.

To further understand the impact of laws on urban planning, we will examine the case of the commune of Clichy-sous-Bois, which is part of Seine-Saint-Denis department within Île-de-France region:

^[3] Fabien Jobard, 2015

4. CLICHY-SOUS-BOIS

Clichy-sous-Bois, one of the poorest suburbs of Paris, gained notoriety as the epicentre of riots in 2005 and has been associated with the stigmatization of collective housing. It has been a priority in urban renewal programs.

Historical Context of the City

Urbanization began in 1955 by the construction of the first housing development, La Pelouse, and several private housing and residential properties. It culminated in the construction of 1,600 houses in Clichy and 1,500 in Montfermeil (the master plan aimed at building 10,000 housing units and an unfinished highway connecting two development centers in the northeast of Île-de-France: Roissy-Charles de Gaulle Airport to the north and the new city of Marne-la-Vallée to the south).

Current Situation

Location: Clichy-sous-Bois is situated east of Paris, covering an area of 395 hectares. Road Infrastructure: Currently served by a single highway, despite its central location within a vast network of major highways connecting Paris and Roissy/Marne-la-Vallée, each approximately 15 kilometres away.

Economic Situation: Economic activities are limited and fragile, especially after the closure of quarries, which used to be the primary source of income. Unemployment rates have risen, and statistics indicate a continuous decline in residents' income.

Social Situation: Foreign residents represent 33% of the population. From 1999 to 2006, housing units increased by 6%, with a significant decrease in job vacancies.

Urban Fabric: Both municipalities exhibit highly contrasting urban fabrics, with collective housing comprising 51% of the total housing units in Montfermeil and 76% in Clichy-sous-Bois. Approximately 28% of the housing units are deteriorated, characterized by their large size (several hundred units), severe building and living environment decay, the sharp decline in residential property values, and the city's image.

Elements of Heritage and Identity

Natural Heritage: Clichy-sous-Bois possesses abundant green and water spaces, including the Dhuis Canal, Mairie Park, the Fosse Maussoin Park, and the Bondy Forest.

Urban Heritage: The city boasts several historic buildings contributing to its architectural identity. Some structures are protected, such as the Mairie (Town Hall), its park, and the Chapel of Notre-Dame des Anges. Additionally, there are also unprotected buildings like Château de la Terrasse.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE URBAN PROJECT

To enable urban redevelopment of the so-called "Bas Clichy" area in Clichy-sous-Bois to halt the deterioration of housing units and the urban and living environment.

To improve housing conditions by developing a diverse housing supply that meets the needs of families.

To give this area a structural role at the municipal and regional levels, particularly by improving connections with other areas and enhancing population mobility.

To contribute to the neighbourhood environmental transformation, making it a sustainable, multi-functional, and vibrant community.

The Local Urban Plan (PLU)

encompasses various types of zones.

- UA: Central urban fabric (two zones) that combines central urban functions of housing, public facilities, activities, and shops within the study area.
- UB: Central character area with high to very high density (six zones). These are clusters of residential buildings and housing units.
- UR1: Sectors opposite strategic areas of the city undergoing development processes (two sectors). These are areas subject to urban renewal.
- N: Relates to natural areas and sensitive forests that require protection for environmental or natural reasons.

6. CONCLUSION

During the 1980s, the residential suburbs of Paris witnessed a decline in economic and urban conditions, leading to social problems. This deterioration was attributed to poor urban planning, high-rise buildings, and a lack of human scale.

Paris has also been affected by urban conflicts, including the 2005 riots in the suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. This suburb gained notoriety as the epicenter of riots due to its high unemployment, low-quality housing, and perceived discrimination faced by its residents. The riots sparked discussions about urban planning, housing policies, and the need for social inclusion and diversity in the city.

In response to the conflicts experienced, Paris has undertaken a series of targeted urban planning strategies aimed at addressing underlying social tensions and fostering inclusivity:

Firstly, efforts have been made to promote mixed-income neighborhoods, with the goal of reducing segregation and cultivating more diverse communities. By encouraging socio-economic diversity within residential areas, Paris aims to break down barriers and facilitate greater social interaction among its residents.

Improving public transportation infrastructure has also been prioritized as a means of connecting disadvantaged neighborhoods to key job centers and essential services. Enhancing accessibility to employment opportunities and vital amenities not only promotes socio-economic mobility but also fosters greater cohesion within the urban fabric.

Investments in public spaces and green areas constitute another critical aspect of Paris's urban planning approach. By creating vibrant and accessible communal spaces, the city seeks to enhance the quality of life for all residents, irrespective of their socio-economic background. Such initiatives not only contribute to physical well-being but also serve as catalysts for social interaction and community engagement.

Furthermore, Paris has embraced participatory planning processes, actively involving residents in decision-making regarding urban development projects. By empowering local communities to have a voice in shaping their environment, the city aims to foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, thereby strengthening social bonds and promoting sustainable development.

These holistic approaches aim to address the root causes of urban conflicts and create more inclusive and sustainable urban environments. By prioritizing social equity, accessibility, and community engagement, Paris endeavors to build a city that is resilient, cohesive, and responsive to the diverse needs of its inhabitants.

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