

Resident individualism: life inside and outside the neighbourhood

The example of Isle-d'Abeau

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Resident practices seem to favour two diametrically opposed levels, which are: the micro-territory of the flat or one-family house, and the macro-territory of the whole urban area. The level of the neighbourhood, as a traditional intermediate territory between the place of residence and the town/city, is falling increasingly out of use. Life inside and outside the neighbourhood seems to stand out as a major characteristic of contemporary *citadinité* (belonging to and in a city) linked to the increasing individualism of ways of life. Awareness without nostalgia of a bygone golden age of the neighbourhood, ignorance of one's own neighbourhood, social diversity towards which we remain favourable on condition that it takes place far from where we live, geographical dispersal of activities and sociabilities, *ville au choix* (*à la carte* town), desire to control one's proximities and social interactions, anonymous practice of territorial polycentrism, clubs and societies where they exist, in accordance with a multiplicity of partial and ephemeral commitments – these are the essential components of resident individualism which affects, with no noteworthy or significant differences, notwithstanding a few exceptions, men and women of all ages and of all socio-professional categories. This is what we discovered from the surveys conducted by in-depth interview with the residents of Isle-d'Abeau (Chalas, 2004).

The golden age and decline of the neighbourhood

The neighbourhood had its golden age in Isle-d'Abeau. In the minds of the designers of the new town, the neighbourhood was one of the centrepieces of the community life it was to accommodate. The town planners, and also the architects and policy-makers, saw the neighbourhood not only as the “right level”, according to the parlance of the day, i.e. the right intermediate level between the home and the *commune* (municipality), from which residents could be

involved in municipal decision-making, but also, probably more, as the ideal place for human contact, opening up to the other and social integration.

The first residents of the new town, the “pioneers”, adhered fully to this holistic concept of the neighbourhood. They made it the preferred base for collective action and the feeling of “us”. For them the neighbourhood was also a territory of identity, the only territory of the resident urban identity. The neighbourhood in the new town served as a coat of arms for its residents. Saying which neighbourhood you were from was the same as saying who you were. Attachment to the neighbourhood was strong and sought after.

Mobilisation there was real. The neighbourhood was a daily plebiscite. Urban practices were to a large extent practices founded on territorial division into neighbourhoods-villages where neighbourhood relationships and friendships were very strong and individualism, akin to voluntary isolation, was seen in a very poor light. Some residents still remember the solid, significant family community that the neighbourhood represented at the birth of the new town. “At the start, neighbourhood relations were friendly. There was a bit of an osmosis”; “At the start, i.e. the first fifteen years, there was a mix of different social categories”; “We were very close to each other. We saw a lot of each other. We did work together. We didn't even lock our doors! There was no delinquency. We felt like we were in heaven”.

Stories of the lives of residents of Isle-d'Abeau confirm what was observed by P. Willmott and M. Young (1983) in English working-class neighbourhoods, then, later, by M. Pinçon and M. Pinçon-Charlot (1989) in well-off Parisian neighbourhoods, namely the existence, until around the end of the “Glorious Thirties”, of the neighbourhood experienced and practised as an urban village.



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L'Isle-d'Abeau : Fougères

Things have changed since then. Now, the neighbourhood of the early days no longer exists. The neighbourhood as experienced and built by the first residents of the new town has entered the realms of the mythical. Residents newly settled in Isle-d'Abeau barely believe what they are told by the old residents. Generally speaking, these new residents pay barely any attention to the past glory of the neighbourhood, which seems to them if not real, at least a part of a history of towns or of the new town in particular that is finally over. Their lives, like those of the vast majority of the residents of Isle-d'Abeau, is no longer organised by the neighbourhood and what it represents, namely: the street, the short distances, the neighbours, the local sociability, everyone knowing everyone else, the *entre-nous* ("between ourselves"). They find this form of social life too restricted, too enclosing. In this sense the neighbourhood is not only a myth, but, it must be added, a devalued myth. The neighbourhood is even now one of the most convincing symptoms of the decline of territorial identities. Putting down roots in the neighbourhood, if it has not completely disappeared already, has become secondary.

Ignorance of neighbourhoods in general, neighbourhoods where we do not live or operate and even, in many cases, ignorance of our own neighbourhood, is one of the very first elements indicating that the status of the neighbourhood in the lives of residents has changed, that it no longer

has the affective and functional importance it used to have. But the most surprising thing, in relation to the old discourse revering the neighbourhood as sacred, is that residents do not convey this ignorance with any sense of confession in the interview. They speak about it with ease. Ignorance of other people's neighbourhoods and of their own neighbourhood seems neither illogical nor asocial, but principally a given inherent in contemporary urban living conditions. A few illustrations: "I don't know too much about what goes on in other neighbourhoods"; "I don't have much idea about the neighbourhood"; "Maybe people intermingle in other neighbourhoods. I don't know. Do residents come from different social levels? I don't know"; "I don't know the newcomers anymore".

Although ignorance of neighbourhoods is recounted with neutrality and lucidity, the same does not apply to social diversity, which is seen as positive. In the eyes of residents, social diversity, which they call "blending" or "intermingling", is not only part of the appeal of urban life, but an essential foundation for this urban life and even a factor in social peace. For them, social diversity exists in Isle-d'Abeau alongside or counter to the hierarchy of neighbourhoods and it must be preserved. However, this social diversity is never desired for oneself, at home or next to one's home. It is spoken about as if it were a phenomenon that only existed at a distance from one's home. Social diver-

sity is always sought after anywhere other than where one lives. Social diversity is not in the domain of housing. It is valued and at the same time pushed back far from where one lives, especially if it means daily coexistence with problem sections of the population. “There is far too much social housing in one place”; “It’s true that there is a lot of social housing in our town. Maybe it was needed, but a limit’s been reached. What foreign people need is work. It’s a difficulty of our time. There should be less children in the street during the school holidays”; “It’s very difficult to have social diversity, either from a financial or ethnic point of view. It’s very difficult to mix because ethnic groups prefer to gather in their own area. Whether there is racism or not, it’s like everywhere in France”.

To which space does social diversity belong? Where can one find it and live it? Residents answer this question to an extent in their habits. Residents seek out social diversity away from their homes, at *urbs*-level, in the various public places of the multi-form urban centralities, and at *civitas*-level, in clubs and societies in the urban area.

During this survey, it was the interested parties themselves, i.e. the residents, who were the first to conclude that there was a lack of neighbourhood life as far as their living habits were concerned. “I don’t know if one can really say that there are neighbourhoods. I do not get the idea of neighbourhood here”; “There is no neighbourhood life at all. It doesn’t exist, even in my neighbourhood. There’s no kind of creativity at all”; “Apart from peace and quiet, the Isle-d’Abeau neighbourhood doesn’t offer anything special”; “No neighbourhood life, no, not particularly, it’s quite fragmented”; “No neighbourhood activities. We occasionally invite each other round”; “Not much happens in the neighbourhood”; “I myself don’t have any neighbourhood life at all”; “No, we’re not looking for neighbourhood life”.

Memories just as much as the current habits of residents of Isle-d’Abeau support the accumulated results of urban research conducted since the 1980s on the neighbourhood, according to which on the one hand, the peak of neighbourhood life had already passed, and on the other hand, neighbourhood life was in a seemingly irreversible decline (Segalen, Bekus, 1990; Lussault, 1993; Roche, 1993; Viard, 1994).

Overvaluation of housing

The first component of living to benefit from a decline in the neighbourhood, and to contribute to this decline in a feedback loop, is housing. Like ignorance of the neighbourhood, which does not seem to trouble us, or social diversity, which we do not wish to experience near our place of residence or apartment block, the recognition that we live more in our homes than in the neighbourhood is expressed, sometimes through withdrawal, as an individualistic way of life that goes without saying and is inevitable. “I feel like I live in

my house, and nowhere else”; “I spend a lot of time in my flat. I don’t go out much. And, of course, I spend a lot of time at work. When I leave my place, it’s to do something quite specific”; “Once my day’s finished, I don’t go out much. I like to be at home at the end of the day”; “People here are quite private. Everyone minding his own business. Nothing much happens”; “Everyone minds his own business round here”; “Everyone minds his own business, which is not such a bad thing”.

In the end, the only thing left in the neighbourhood is housing. All the other urban habits that were once part of the neighbourhood now depend on mobility out of the neighbourhood. The area of fixity or attachment to place of residence has considerably reduced. It has changed from the neighbourhood to the home. It is now the home and not the neighbourhood that is the fixed point in urban habits. Emotional overinvestment, or even overvaluation, of which housing is the object on the part of residents, often even with no relation to the objective reality of comfort, available space or aesthetics of decor, conveys clearly this transfer to housing away from the neighbourhood of logics of living based on fixity, i.e. rootedness, belonging, identity and remaining enclosed (Heidegger, 1958; Neefs, 1984; Jarreau, 1995; Cyrulnik, 2006). In other terms, one identifies much more with one’s home than with one’s neighbourhood. Likewise, the boundary – enclosure – separating the inside from the outside, now runs between the home and neighbourhood and not between the neighbourhood and surrounding town. When, during interviews, residents’ comments turn to the issue of housing, it places itself most often at the surprising level of hyperbole, in other words at the level of overinvestment and overvaluation of the dwelling. “The house is great”; “My home is perfect”; “Yes, yes, my house is very pleasant”; “Yes, yes, obviously I’m happy in my house”; “Yes, yes, yes, I am very satisfied with my flat. Finding somewhere to live involves making a choice, it’s a big investment over twenty years. I want everyone to make a success of it”; “Apart from the heating system, the house is great”; “We have a nice home. We are so lucky compared with other people in the new town”.

It would not be quite right to say that neighbourhood life has completely disappeared. It continues to make sense and be a reality for some residents, in a nevertheless limited or partial way. We are thinking about residents whose children go to school in the neighbourhood. The survey showed that the school still has an influence on neighbourhood life. Picking the children up after school, and also parents’ meetings and friendship links between the children themselves, are all opportunities for contact, dialogue and sometimes joint actions for residents of a neighbourhood whose children attend the same school. This is what residents tell us. But they also tell us that school-related neighbourhood life very often does not last beyond the time their children are at school and on condition that the parents comply with the school-zone map.

There is another group of residents for whom neighbourhood life holds a relatively major place in their timetable and thoughts: these are residents involved in political life or civil action. Their commitment encourages them, *inter alia*, naturally to make frequent contact with and regularly meet residents in their own neighbourhood. Also, these residents are quick to announce, in contrast to the majority of residents not committed to political action, that they have a very intense neighbourhood life. But this neighbourhood life, which they describe as intense, is quite personal. It only concerns their activity, way of life or mode of being. It is not shared by all the residents they mix with, and in this sense, it is not in the nature of a collective phenomenon. Furthermore, these committed residents acknowledge this in some way by complaining about the low attendance of residents at neighbourhood meetings, whatever the nature of these meetings, civic or festive. "I think that I have a neighbourhood life on my estate, but only because I am involved with the treasury of the estate association"; "Paradoxically, I find, because I am involved in clubs and societies, that few people get involved. Lots of activities, but not much involvement. The residents don't make much effort".

Lastly, residents of so-called problem housing estates and developments who, for economic reasons and the lack of opportunities for accessing means of mobility, are "*prisoners*" or "*under house arrest*", according to the expressions of the social animators questioned, make up a third group of city dwellers for whom, whether they like it or not, the neighbourhood remains the prime expression of their residence. Residents thus secluded in their problem housing estate or development belong, together with parents of pupils and activists, to the list of exceptions to the rule of urban life inside and outside the neighbourhood.

Territoriant urbanity

In addition to housing, the urban in all its diffuse extent, according to the expression of B. Secchi (2006), and not only the town in the traditional sense, is the other extreme component which benefits from the decline in neighbourhood life, so much that it is possible to characterise this general, extended mode of urban practices and experiences as territoriant urbanity. The reality of territoriant urbanity in Isle-d'Abeau is so present and significant that it seemed to us particularly appropriate to apply not only the qualifier "town-territory" to this new town (Corboz, 1990; Chalas, 2000) – as M. Bedarida (2002) has done –, but also "territoriant" to its residents (Chalas, 2004).

Fundamentally individualistic, by virtue of the type of relationships it involves with places, and highly dependent, as G. Dupuy (1999) would say, on mobility, which is itself individual, this territoriant urbanity is expressed via our inter-

views according to four main modalities, which are: geographical dispersal of activities and sociabilities, the *à la carte* town, anonymous practice of reticular polycentrism, and clubs and societies at urban area-level. These four modalities of territoriant urbanity are sustained by resident individualism just as much as they strengthen it in return. Consequently, like overvaluation of housing, territorial urbanity, even though the public space constitutes its own place, is not exempt from resident individualism.

Geographical dispersal of activities and sociabilities

Even more than withdrawal to one's dwelling, distant social diversity or ignorance of one's own neighbourhood, the geographical dispersal of activities and sociabilities is fatal for neighbourhood life. Already the fact of not working in one's neighbourhood or close by, of travelling long distances to get to the workplace and consequently leaving early in the morning and returning late in the evening, is highly damaging to the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. Residents recognise this unanimously. Furthermore, many of them are commuters who every day or most days commute between the home and the workplace.

An increase in free time due to a reduction in work time could have been beneficial for the development of neighbourhood life. The hypothesis seemed credible, mathematical: less time at work, more time in the neighbourhood. Many players in political life and social leadership believed it. Many also became disillusioned. Work time and time spent in the neighbourhood are not linked with one another like connecting vessels. Between the two there is the whole expanding diversity of practices like consumption or shopping, mobility, sport or even walks in nature, which divert residents from the neighbourhood and prevent the simple, automatic passage from workplace to neighbourhood life. Here too, many residents maintain: when they have time, either they stay at home doing do-it-yourself or watching TV, or they leave the neighbourhood to go shopping, visit friends or travel. In fact, many social contacts are made outside the neighbourhood. "Our friends live outside the neighbourhood"; "Our friends live outside the neighbourhood, as far as Albertville"; "My friends and relations live right out of the neighbourhood, around Lyon and further away"; "My friends don't live either in my neighbourhood or in the new town"; "Most of my relations live outside the neighbourhood".

Social relations transgress the neighbourhood framework. Neighbours even become strangers as time outside work, so-called free or leisure time, increases. One must not be fooled: even though residents continue to value the idea of neighbourhood, it remains simply an idea (Ascher, 2000). People do not actually meet their neighbours and residents acknowledge this readily. Most of the time, their

neighbour simply needs to resemble them in order for them to be satisfied with their neighbourhood. And even when residents state that they have a good neighbourhood, and that they get on very well with their neighbours, and that they invite each other round occasionally for an aperitif or food, they admit equally that they do not really see much of their neighbours. “Yes, we definitely have neighbours. We see one another, but that’s as far as it goes”; “We have a few neighbourhood friends, but not many. Neighbourliness is not a given”; “There’s not much conviviality. We don’t invite one another around”; “We have friends in the neighbourhood, but they are not strong friendships. We say hello, we chat a bit when we bump into each other outside, but we don’t go to the neighbours on a regular basis. We work, we don’t have time, and when we do have the time, we do other things: walks, outings”; “Neighbourhood relations are at a strict minimum. We leave the neighbourhood in the morning and return in the evening”.

The geographical dispersal of activities and sociabilities, which does not seem to bother anyone and which everyone seems on the contrary to manage well and even value (Grafmeyer, 1992), is not just about working away from the neighbourhood and having friends that live far away. It also means doing the bulk of one’s shopping outside the neighbourhood and consequently frequenting shops dispersed throughout the urban territory where there is little chance of meeting one’s neighbours. Moreover, when there are few small local shops, as is the case with many neighbourhoods in the new town, this only increases the dispersal of shopping and leisure habits outside the neighbourhoods. The geographical dispersal of activities and sociabilities is therefore beneficial for the development of the *à la carte* town, which is probably the most expressive manifestation of the town of individuals, or metropolis of individuals as A. Bourdin (2005) would say.

The *à la carte* town

The *ville au choix* or *à la carte* town is one of the main components of the urban reality of Isle-d’Abeau. Defining the urbanity of the new town of Isle-d’Abeau involves not only referring to the very great proximity of nature and the hyper-mobility of its residents, or in a more in-depth way to the overvaluation of housing and the decline of neighbourhood life. It also involves taking into consideration the fact that residents appropriate their town according to the principle of freedom of choice. The *à la carte* town is also a question of resident habits. It has no other reality possible outside the domain of resident habits proper. More than any other characteristic of the new town, the *à la carte* town is an expression of the way of life that residents lead and want to lead across the different spaces of this town. Town planners, politicians and other players owe the existence of this

à la carte town to the residents and to them alone. They are not the designers of it. They are only in charge of it in so far as they have to manage and regulate it afterwards.

The *à la carte* town is not only the town par excellence of resident habits, but it is also a product of individualism. The *à la carte* town is a result of the dynamic according to which residents construct their sociability networks, make both exceptional purchases and those relating to everyday food requirements, use the services of an institution, doctor or bank, and spend their daily or weekly leisure time where they please, very near or very far from home, in the small centralities of their *commune* (municipality) or far beyond, in the old centres of the large towns and cities of their *bassin de vie* (statistical unit designed to be economically integrated for basic services and commuting). Preferring this large supermarket for its fishmonger’s or wine department, another for its shopping gallery and clothes shops, avoiding the grocery at the bottom of your block of flats because its prices are too high, going to a bakery in another neighbourhood because it seems better than your own, going to a dentist on the other side of town because it has a good reputation, or seeing your neighbours less and less and spending more time away from home in another town doing your favourite sport or seeing friends, sometimes to the point that you feel like a resident of this other town, this is living the *à la carte* town.

The *à la carte* town is the individually-tailored town or tailoring of the town, the made-to-measure town or the town that each person fashions to suit themselves, according to their desires and needs. The *à la carte* town is the town of infinite combinations of journeys to make and places to stop at temporarily for activities of all kinds. Residents’ comments on this topic are always very prolific. “I go to Bourgoin once or twice a week. I go to Villefontaine to do my voluntary work. I’ve also got my bank and the tax office there. I mainly go to Bourgoin to stroll about, and go shopping when I’m feeling a bit down. In Lyon we go to a restaurant, go for a walk but not in the same way as when we go to Bourgoin: we go there on impulse. My son plays football in Vaulx-Milieu and I live in Four”.

“I sometimes go to Isle-d’Abeau during the week, mainly to the Bourg. When it’s closed or when they’ve run out of bread I go to the Triforium. I go to the Triforium for the library, if the children want to, otherwise I don’t go. We do small bits of market shopping on Saturday morning at the Bourg. We do our big shop at Carrefour. We don’t buy our ordinary food, vegetables, at Carrefour. We go to a small shop. Same with the meat, we go to a butcher’s and put in an order”.

Anonymous practice of reticular polycentrism

The centre, whether it is an old or new town centre, large or small, or even whether it corresponds to a commercial-



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Saint-Bonnet, village centre, L'Isle d'Abeau

type peripheral centrality, is comprehended by residents as a place that brings everything together and where everything is in situ, according to their own comments. But this everything remains undefined for the residents. It is a potential everything.

For the residents, the centre must be not only the place for all activities, but also and above all the place of all possibilities, all meetings, all quests. Likewise, the centre, as conceived and sought after by the residents, is primarily the expression of a diversity that is just as much functional as social. "The centre is the Phare which has everything"; "It's the same in Isle-d'Abeau. There's a shopping centre, which has most things, plus the shopping area, which has clothes, shoes, flowers, etc."; "Bourgoin is the nerve centre of North Isère: you can find anything there, do anything"; "You have everything in a centre. As soon as something new comes out, you can find it at a centre"; "It's a town centre because you can do lots of things there"; "A town with a centre is a town that offers lots of things, which also allows you to do things you hadn't thought of doing before".

Social diversity, which is so little accepted by residents in terms of housing, i.e. house, neighbourhood, estate, and so poorly put into practice perhaps also by urban policies in this domain, has made a positive mark on centralities. The benefit of a centrality is the intermingling of popula-

tions from different backgrounds, which one contemplates and also takes part in. A centrality must not present any barrier of any kind, be it social, symbolic or physical, that is likely to drive away a category of user. Rich, poor, old, young, children, disabled, tourists, foreigners, everybody must be able to find their place in a centrality worthy of the name.

The richer a centre is in terms of human diversity, the more it is appreciated and representative of the phenomenon of urban centrality. The importance of a centrality is also assessed therefore on the extent of its social diversity. "It's a town centre like any other, in its mix of people"; "The real town centre is Carrefour: a hypermarket. You might not like it, but that's where people meet"; "The Triforium, in the centre of Isle-d'Abeau, is a melting pot"; "The Triforium is popular"; "There are loads of different people from all over, it's very lively. It's a real plus. It's lively and there are people from all over"; "Lyon, for me, is where it's at. It's lively, bustling, changing. Lyon has most appeal for us".

The functional and social diversity experienced and practised by residents in centres or centralities does not mean however that individualistic behaviour is put on hold. Quite the contrary, it could even be the case that the functional and social diversity so highly sought after in centralities is at the service of resident individualism. If one needs

proof of this one simply has to look at the type of excitement that residents seek in centres of any kind. The excitement that residents appreciate in centralities is that of the incessant passage of shoppers and walkers, the coming-and-going of different people working in situ, of cinema entrances and exits and other places of leisure or consumption. Excitement in the minds of residents is not synonymous with conviviality. Residents do not require so much from centres. Excitement accords very well with the mutual indifference of passers-by (Quéré, Brezge, 1993). It is even possible that conviviality is opposed to excitement. For many residents indeed, it is not the purpose of centralities to be or to become convivial places. In so far as it is the product of community or family intimacy and being amongst one's own, conviviality may well disrupt the societal and distant urbanity of the many (Sennett, 1979) that is sought after in centralities. "Excitement is based around the shopping promotions"; "Strolling, you can't go strolling in the centre of Saint-Quentin because it's not covered. You are outside, whereas in Isle-d'Abeau it's covered. There's a cafeteria, restaurant, clothes shops. You can go in at nine o'clock in the morning and leave at six o'clock in the evening, and you don't get bored. It's a town. It's a covered town; commercial, but covered. They have promotions inside".

As shown by excitement as a condition of possibility of attractiveness, a centrality is an expression of mass individualistic sociability. Togetherness or social cohesion, the sociologists warn us, dons the most diverse forms of sociability, including family, clan, community, public, communion and individualism (Kaufmann, 2001), crowd and the masses. These forms of sociability are all necessary, irreducible, contradictory in certain aspects, and also complementary, forms.

All socialised beings participate in this pluralism of forms of sociability and find a balance in participating in this pluralism, which is more or less a pluralism of urban places: housing, public square, auditorium, place of worship, cultural space, sports ground, etc. Each form of sociability has its preferred urban space. By mass individualistic sociability is meant a large gathering of individuals who are anonymous in relation to one another (Petonnet, 1994), for whom centralities, of whatever kind they may be in the contemporary urban polycentrism particularly marked in Isle-d'Abeau, constitute the preferred venues. Anonymity is not a secondary consequence of number, but a substantial given of mass individualistic sociability. In other terms, anonymity is an essential dimension of the centrality and of the quality of social life sought after by residents in centralities.

Observation of centralities leads to an analysis of anonymity and vice versa. Anonymity is not isolation or solitude. Anonymity seems above all to be a meeting of people each of whom has his own rhythm. Anonymity is a form of social life that is both individual and collective,

and which authorises passivity just as much as it encourages contact. Anonymity is also opening up to the unknown and to discovery in that it juxtaposes habit and uncertainty, and it is a particular way of being together that allows the unforeseen to slip into everyday comings and goings. "It is a town in all senses of the word: anonymity, etc."; "Lyon is a big city. There is a much more anonymous side. In Bourgoin, you are in a much smaller town."; "In the centre, everyone gathers together, each with his own independence, his own identity."; "The town centre allows other things, other types of meeting".

Clubs and societies at urban area-level

Clubs and societies, which are particularly important in Isle-d'Abeau, are also, despite appearances, a major expression of individualistic territorial urbanity.

Notwithstanding some exceptions, the residents of Isle-d'Abeau all say that they lead a life highly enriched by clubs and societies, which take up time and energy with the main purpose of benefiting, on the one hand, from the very diverse activities offered by these clubs and societies, and on the other hand, from the many possibilities they provide for meeting other people.

Previously, the neighbourhood offered more immediate conviviality, but by the same token, the disadvantage of imposing forms of sociability and situations of interaction to which the residents were subjected. Nowadays, clubs and societies offer the opportunity of escaping the collective pressure represented by neighbourhood life and of leading a more autonomous and individualistic existence. Cycling, tennis, walking, skiing, basically sport in all its forms, and also cinema, theatre, photography, fishing, philately, cards and boules in a host of clubs and associations allow everyone the opportunity to master their social proximities, i.e. to manage in total independence their sociability, even if it means living in a more mobile and more dispersed way. "It's a town where everyone minds his own business, but not totally, as people meet through clubs and societies. I don't feel isolated at all. I know loads of people. I can go and see them when I want. I think you can meet people if you want". "I do not have a neighbourhood life. I have a club life, but not a neighbourhood life. My relationships have nothing to do with the neighbourhood, but are connected with clubs and societies. My wife does other sports too. So, we have got to know people like that. My wife goes walking and skiing. I had to get involved too. So, there it is, we have relationships based on these sports". "To meet people, you have to make the effort to take part in clubs and societies. It's the only way to meet people, because it's not a very traditional town where you come across people in the street. You have to go through the clubs and societies circuit. You have to take this approach".

A town dispersed amongst its housing

The fact that virtually nothing happens in the neighbourhood does not seem to bother or create a sense of lacking amongst many residents. At best, when the neighbourhood does still exist for residents, it is only in the form of a relative social hub, one social hub amongst many others. Life inside and outside the neighbourhood or, in other terms,

daily life involving overvaluation of one's dwelling and territorial urbanity sanctioning the increased strength of resident individualism, even though its corollary is the decline of the neighbourhood, does not for all that mean the end of the town and the end of all possibility of social life. Rather it marks the advent of a new urban condition in our contemporary societies.

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