



Privatization of large housing estates in France: towards spatial and residential fragmentation

Christine Lelévrier¹

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Abstract

This paper explores the spatial and residential impact of social-mix and urban renewal policies in large French social housing estates. Tenure diversification is one of the drivers of a privatization process that is leading to an increase in private housing, especially home ownership developments. The wholesale urban restructuring of the modernist conception of high-rise buildings and open public spaces of the 1960s provides another vector. Analyzing the implementation of these two national strategies at large housing estate micro level—partly at La Duchère housing complex in Lyon—sheds light on how the design and location of new housing developments results in fragmentation of “residences” and space. To a certain extent, these social-mix policies exacerbate internal socio-residential differentiation by simply “displacing the stigma”. What is new is *rescaling* at the level of small “residences” and *gating* of housing more than the segmentation process itself, which already existed in large housing estates. At the micro-level of large housing estates, this challenges the standardization of urban and social practices through design, the “residualization” of social housing and public space as well as the public management of fragmented space. In a broader context, these changes show how the recent shift in the French social housing model has been embodied in spatial reconfiguration.

Keywords Large housing estates · France · Urban renewal · Privatization · Fragmentation · Rescaling

1 Introduction

In France as in other Western European countries, large housing estates have undergone major changes over the last few decades, partly rooted within a broader scope of neo-liberal transition towards a “privatization of the Welfare-State” (Scanlon et al., 2014; Harloe, 1995; Kemeny, 2001; Forrest & Murie, 1991; Malpass, 2005). The context of housing provision for the working classes after World War II in an era of a strong Welfare State, followed by the shift from a symbol of modernism and social progress to places combining physical decay with poverty and ethnic concentration, is well-known (Hess et al., 2018; Turkington

✉ Christine Lelévrier
lelevrier@u-pec.fr

¹ Paris School of Urban Planning/Lab’Urba, University of Paris-Est-Créteil, Paris, France

et al., 2004; Murie et al., 2003; Wong & Goldblum, 2016). To tackle these negative developments, urban restructuring policies launched in the US and in Western Europe to promote social-mix have generated major spatial and social changes (Bolt et al., 2010; Droste et al., 2014; Kleinhans, 2004; Van Kempen et al., 2005; Rowlands et al., 2009; Watt & Smets, 2017). In France, changes have intensified since 2000, when urban renewal legislation and programs developed housing-tenure diversification, introducing more privatization into “mass-state-led” social housing (Harloe, 1995) even if this does not represent a “market-oriented” or a “complete demolition” “European pathway” of urban policies (Hess et al., 2018, introduction) or the “downsizing of public housing” as in the US (Goetz, 2011: 267).

However, not much research has been conducted into these forms of privatization and how they impact the modern-space configuration of large housing estates.¹ Indeed most national and international urban research focuses on social changes, whether through patterns of deprivation and the consequences of the concentration of poverty, or through the negative impact of urban and social-mixing policies. The impoverishment of these large housing estates challenges the segregation process for increasing social inequality (Hess et al., 2018; Tammaru et al., 2016) and generates controversial debates over the “neighbourhood effects” of poverty concentration on individual trajectories and social cohesion (Friedrichs et al., 2003; Galster, 2007; Gilbert, 2009; Manley et al., 2013; Slater, 2013). Social mix urban renewal policies are broadly criticized both in their narratives and in terms of their effectiveness in reducing social inequalities (Arbaci & Rae, 2013; Arthurson, 2011; Bacqué et al., 2011; Blanc, 2010; Graham et al., 2009; Levy-Vroelant, 2007). Instead of reducing the housing stigmatization associated with poverty and racial concentration, state responses “reinforce rather than resolve” the problem (Carnegie et al., 2018: 12), failing to take account of the structural socio-economic and institutional factors producing inequalities (Sampson, 2019). Moreover, the debate has focused either on displacement of relocated people, gentrification and reduction of affordable housing, or on the type of social interaction emerging in mixed-tenure neighbourhoods (Bridge et al., 2012; Cole & Green, 2010; Deboulet & Lelévrier, 2014; Lees, 2008; Slater, 2006; Tunstall & Fenton, 2006). Some research into social interaction in deprived and mixed-tenure neighbourhoods has nevertheless emphasized the structuring role of diverse spatial configurations in other countries (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2000; Hickman, 2013; Jupp, 1999; Kearns et al., 2013; Roberts, 2007). The role of neighbourhood infrastructure in social interaction has already been highlighted (Hickman, 2013). Place interacts with other socio-economic factors in stigmatization processes (Wacquant, 2007) while the different designs used for private and public housing have exacerbated internal social division and stigmatisation within renewed neighbourhoods (Carnegie et al., 2018; McCormick et al., 2012). Some French scholars have analyzed the rationale behind demolition and renewal at the macro-level of national policies as reflecting a neo-liberal turn in state governance (Epstein, 2013) or a “neo-liberal vision of neighbourhoods as markets referring to the right to the city” (Berland-Berthon, 2009), but not so much the micro-level consequences for large housing projects. More broadly, academics have also analyzed privatization and marketization at the macro-level as challenging the French social housing model shaken up by neo-liberal laws and arrangements since the 2000s and/or their consequences on the reduction of affordable housing for very-low income households (Ball, 2011; Driant & Li, 2012; Guimat & Halbert, 2018; Wong & Goldblum, 2016; Levy-Vroelant, 2014).

¹ We use the terms “large housing estates” or “large housing complexes” as a translation of the French term “*grands ensembles*”, referring mainly to rental social housing built on a massive scale in the 1960s.

Therefore, not so much is known about how the processes of privatization driven by tenure-mixing strategies in France are embodied in socio-spatial change on large housing estates. To what extent can urban renewal be analysed as a driver for “privatization” of large housing estates? How do social mix strategies applied through housing diversification reconfigure the spatial and residential layouts of large housing estates?

This paper aims to fill in this gap, arguing that housing diversification does not actually change poverty concentration but *rescales* the whole urban and residential layout of large housing estates. Moreover housing diversification is also included in a post-modernist *re-planning* of large housing estates through an urban practice of gating known as “*résidentialisation*” which radically standardizes and re-orders public and private space. We argue the whole privatization schemes reinforce internal social divisions and stigmatization between social housing and other private tenures while reducing public space, thus exacerbating policy contradictions. In the first section, we contextualize the main features of large housing complexes and French urban renewal policies, highlighting the turning point of the 2000s in social-mix strategies. The second section first analyses how national implementation of tenure diversification results in *semi-privatization* processes in the ownership of housing. Then, to highlight the concrete residential and spatial impacts, we focus on local examples of large housing estates that we have researched, exploring tenure-mixing and design change in housing and space. The case study of La Duchère in Lyon, where housing diversification has been substantial, illustrates *micro-fragmentation* that exacerbates socio-residential differences.

In terms of methodology, this paper does not just draw upon one specific fieldwork project but combines diverse national and local sources while also reviewing our own local fieldwork conducted in deprived neighbourhoods between 2007 and 2014. First, it uses figures extracted from recent national surveys and local reports, providing an overview of the quantitative impact of urban renewal programmes, mainly on housing tenure diversification. Then, we also revised our own fieldwork conducted both in La Duchère in Lyon on the experience of newcomers, and in certain Parisian housing complexes on “*résidentialisation*” in light of these spatial and residential changes driven by forms of privatization. We updated some of the figures and maps from local reports and we also revisited two large housing estates studied in 2018 to look at changes in design over time. We use photos to illustrate changes in design. Thus, our own long-term fieldwork on social-mixing policies allows us to track such trajectories since the 2000s. This paper, focusing on design and tenure change, highlights one side of urban renewal impact without assuming that space produces social change or that networks are stable and place-based, as has already been highlighted (Gwyther, 2009). It constitutes a first step for further research, articulating these types of change in relation to social change in social groups and living arrangements. The framework and concepts put forward in this paper still need to be examined in depth.

2 French large housing estates: from state-led mass social housing to urban renewal

Although social-mix rationales and segmentation processes are embedded in the history of large housing estates since their production in the 1960s, the 2000s may be seen as a turning point when new tools were deployed in support of social-mix in urban policies and the development of private housing.

2.1 The production of social housing: a “generalist” model, a segmentation process

As in other Western European countries, public housing built in the Post-War-decades was a pillar of the new Welfare State and played a key role in both achieving social policy objectives and providing housing for the working class (Blanc, 2004; Scanlon et al., 2014). Between 1953 and 1973, the number of social housing units in France increased from less than 500,000 to more than 3 million (Tomas et al., 2003; Le Goullon, 2010; Lel vri r & Melic, 2018). Large housing estates, defined as “residential blocks, mass-produced by the industrial sector”, comprising more than 1000 units, account for less than one-third of these (Thomas et al., 2003). Out of approximately 350 large housing estates, 197 have been produced under *ZUP* (Priority Zones for Urban Development) arrangements, a centralized mass-housing “spatial planning scheme” dating back to 1958 (Wong & Goldblum, 2016). Two aspects common throughout Western Europe framed this mass-housing production (Hess et al., 2018; Murrie et al., 2003; Turkington et al., 2004). First, the modernist urban vision inspired by Le Corbusier’s Athens Charter precipitated the decline of the traditional planning scheme of “plots and streets” in favor of large open public spaces, separated car and pedestrian flows, and zoning between residential and other urban functions (Pannerai et al., 1997). Second, large housing estates were regarded as a promising opportunity for social diversity. Due to the “generalist” conception of French mass-housing (Houard, 2011; Levy-Vroelant, 2013), this social-mix ideology lay—and still lies—at the core of housing policies. This urban conception and mode of production was challenged as early as 1973, leading in France both to the end of new large housing projects of more than 500 units and the promotion of more tenure-mix in housing developments to avoid segregation (Circular Guichard) and to a major housing financing reform a little later in 1977. The French “housing financing system” based on State subsidies and support from “financial institutions and non-profit organisations” was established during this period (Driant & Li, 2012).

However, large housing estates reflected the gap between the generalist conception of social housing and resulting segmentation. Indeed, one of the aims of the major housing reform launched in 1977 was to reduce existing segmentation in social housing by abolishing different categories of loans with different rent levels and standards of comfort in order to develop a personal housing assistance system. This attempt was unsuccessful as low-rent social housing remained insufficient and the most vulnerable were confined to the less attractive but most affordable parts of social housing (Levy-Vroelant, 2014). This “dilemma” also challenged large housing estates (Wong & Goldblum, 2016). After 1977, there was more than one type of standard-loan and through other housing policies developed in the 1990s, different types of social housing products emerged leading to three main categories (Driant & Li, 2012): the main standard-category (*PLUS*) available to two-thirds of households; a “very-social” product for the lowest income group (*PLA-I*); and intermediate products (*PLS-PLI*) (for middle-class households whose income exceeds the legal threshold for accessing standard social housing but is insufficient for renting a flat in supply-constrained private markets). In this context, and despite public efforts, rents for social housing built before 1977 remain the most affordable (Table 1). These processes have led both to an internal social segmentation of all social housing due to the different categories and to territorial differentiation that positions large housing estates as the most affordable places.

Table 1 Average rents of the social housing stock by category

	PLA-I	PLUS before 1977	PLUS after 1977	PLS	PLI	Social housing
Average rent/m ² (€)	5.40	4.91	6.09	8.01	8.90	5.64
Average rent for a 70 m ² flat (€)	380	340	430	560	620	390

Source: RPLS (National social housing survey), 2016

2.2 Integrated policies in the 1980s and 1990s: rehabilitation and socio-economic development

The poverty and ethnic concentration process triggered both by deindustrialization, the replacement of middle-class people (leaving to buy their own homes) by low-income and immigrant families hit by increasing unemployment, and a population management strategy that relocated the poorest families to large suburban housing estates is well-known and common to other European countries (Ball, 2011; Blanc, 2004; Hess et al., 2018; Tammaru et al., 2016).

From the 1980s on, successive area-based integrated policies were developed, maintaining a strong public involvement in the physical and social upgrading of large housing estates and attempting to combine physical, economic and social strategies (Droste et al., 2014; Van Gent et al., 2009). In France, the objective was both to improve the living environment of the inhabitants and to favor social-mix, but at this stage mainly through allocation policies. Some demolition of social housing and production of private housing occurred in the 1990's through a specific "Large Urban Projects" (*GPU*) policy tested in 15 housing estates and then extended to 50 areas in 1998. This first attempt to "diversify" and "privatize" part of housing was not as successful as expected as private developers were reluctant to invest in large housing estates in a poor condition and public investment remained weak. Despite these few attempts, public-private partnerships developed little during this period in contrast with other European countries (Booth, 2005). Furthermore, public funding was massively directed towards the renovation of buildings: heat insulation and painting of building facades and halls benefited from 70% of public subsidies. Neither the overall urban design of these large housing estates nor the concentration of poverty changed very much. In the 1990s, demolition was around 8,000 units per year.

More broadly, the neoliberal shift in the Welfare State model of the 1980s (Scanlon et al., 2014; Taylor, 2017) did not affect French social housing in the same way as in the US, the UK, Germany or the Netherlands through the sale of housing units to tenants or to private companies or through the changing status of housing companies (Stephens et al., 2014). Although the State did indeed reduce its involvement in the housing sector, the global withdrawal of public funding was slower and the "housing financing system" maintained a housing supply that was quite exceptional in Western Europe (Blanc, 2004; Driant & Li, 2012; Priemus & Boelhouwer, 1999). The French "mass-state-led" and "generalist" social housing model (Harloe, 1995; Kemeny, 2001; Blessing, 2016) did not yet reproduce

the “residual”² position adopted by most European countries since the 1980s (Driant & Li, 2012). In 2019, 4.8 million social housing units (31% located in “priority neighbourhoods”) represented 17% of the total social housing stock and 10 million people and 70% of households were eligible for social housing (USH, 2019).

2.3 Social-mix and housing diversification in urban renewal: the turning point of the 2000’s

From 2000 onwards, urban policies addressing “territorial inequality” and segregation changed in two ways, making social mix a central objective, and housing-tenure diversification the main instrument for achieving this. Despite the ongoing debate about social mix and especially the controversial ethnic mix more specific to France’s “colour-blind and Republican” philosophy (Blanc, 2010; Doytcheva, 2007) and the increasing poverty concentration in targeted neighbourhoods, successive governments since the 1990s have extended this objective to all housing and urban policies.

The first shift was to implement a national social mix strategy to reduce urban and social concentration through a better territorial balance of social housing between municipalities: the Solidarity and Urban Renewal Law (*SRU* Law, 13 December 2000, amended in 2013) requires municipalities with less than 25% of social housing within their total housing stock to produce more social housing (Blanc, 2010; Levy Vroelant, 2007). While this policy does not directly concern large housing estates, it is part of an overall social mix strategy involving relocation instead of “residualization” of social housing: social housing should be demolished in large housing estates where it is over-represented and relocated to areas that have a much lower proportion of social housing.

The second main turning point in these policies occurred in 2003 when the first urban renewal program (*PNRU*) was launched in 400 deprived large housing projects, followed in 2014 by a new program (*NPNRU*) which will last until 2024.³ The first 2003 program was characterized by increasing and central public investment in the physical and urban transformation of these housing complexes with the creation of a special centralized agency the *ANRU* (National Urban Renewal Agency). Based on the premise that the social and economic action carried out so far had not been sufficient to reduce poverty concentration, the new government advocated a major urban transformation of large housing projects. As in other Western European countries, the overarching idea was that housing-tenure diversification and urban planning should produce social change: the political assumption was that demolition would “de-concentrate” poverty while mixed tenure would de-stigmatise social housing by attracting middle-class groups, favouring social diversity and enhancing the image of social housing (Carnegie, 2018; Graham et al., 2009; Kleinhans, 2004). The land freed up by demolition could be used to build new private housing for rent or homeownership in order to attract middle-income and mid-sized house, in France, two measures introduced by the new National Agency (*ANRU*) were supposed to promote social-mix. First, the social housing demolished should be rebuilt in equivalent numbers, but mainly ² “Residual” and “residualization” are concepts developed by UK researchers concerning the neo-liberal policy of reducing the number of social housing units (mainly by selling) and allocating them for the lowest income groups.

³ In 2014, the urban policy framework shifted to re-establishing large “city contracts” with 3 main focuses: “social cohesion”, “economic development and employment” and “living environment and urban renewal” in 1300 priority neighbourhoods selected based on their poverty rate. Within these more integrated policies, The New Urban Renewal Programme is deployed in 400 of these “priority neighbourhoods”. Large housing estates are part of these poor neighbourhoods and comprise one of the main focuses of urban renewal programmes.

outside of large housing estates. In 2014, the rule was made even stricter: all demolished social housing should be rebuilt, not only outside of large housing estates, but in areas with less than 25% of social housing. In doing this, the State provides more space for privatization inside large housing complexes which are seen as “markets” (Berland-Berthon, 2009). The second tool concerns private housing developments where buyers can get access to preferential loans and a reduced-rate of VAT (5.5%) as long as they don’t sell their property for 10 years and remain within certain income thresholds. This arrangement has been extended to within 500 m of the perimeter of large housing estates.

3 From semi-privatization of large housing estates to fragmentation of housing and space

The urban transformation of large housing estates is driven by two different privatization patterns. Housing-tenure diversification results in enhancing various small-scale home ownership schemes within and on the fringes of a housing complex. Then, based upon policy-makers’ assumption that physical design plays a role in the decline of these housing estates, privatization is also driven by an urban practice affecting existing as well as new properties. This is known as “*résidentialisation*”, a French neologism signifying the transformation of mass-housing into “residences” and embedded in safety ideologies. It involves gating both social and private buildings while reshaping the whole modernist conception of blocks and open spaces. The whole process reinforces both residential and spatial fragmentation as illustrated in the following case studies, i.e., smaller housing units with mixed-tenure and newly-enclosed private spaces around buildings and housing units.

3.1 Housing-tenure diversification: developing affordable locally-oriented home ownership

The French government’s original quantitative objective in 2003 was to demolish 250,000 social housing units in five years, i.e., around 40,000 per year, and to rebuild the same number of new social dwellings, but mainly outside of large housing projects to free up land for private rental housing and home ownership. National assessments contained in the first urban renewal programme referred more to *semi-privatization* than to privatization for two reasons; first, the shift from predominantly social housing to more mixed-tenure has been less marked and quite different to what was expected; second, some of new housing products are semi-private – insofar as purchasers benefit from tax breaks—and still target low- and middle-class households.

First, demolition did not really achieve the ambitious objectives forecast, partly because of the complexity and duration involved in relocating the inhabitants. By 2019, 128,202 social housing units had been demolished in 357 large redeveloped housing estates (Cfgeo/ANRU, 2020). Second, the “one for one” rule for social housing was also adjusted. The 106,089 new social housing units have replaced 82% and not 100% of the demolished units. In part, this could reflect adaptation to diverse local situations, such as declining old northeastern industrial cities where there is falling demand for housing. Third, 53% of new social housing has been rebuilt inside large housing estates while the share of social housing fell from 73% in 2002 to 68% (9.8% of this new rebuilt social housing is intermediate rental social housing, i.e. with higher rents and not really affordable for existing residents).

Three main types of housing providers – corresponding to three types of tenure and housing products – were involved in the production of home ownership and private rental housing. A new private investor, a government partner created by *Action logement*⁴ called “Association Foncière Logement” (AFL)⁵ is in charge of building private rental housing for employees. AFL was supposed to drive social-mix as the first private housing developer operating in the heart of large housing projects on land sold for one symbolic euro.⁶ A few private developers can build entirely market-driven home ownership programmes that target all types of buyers. However, private developers and semi-private social housing organisations can also build affordable home ownership programmes that could benefit from government aid and loans under certain conditions: these “assisted” or “social” home ownership⁷ programs target low and middle-income and first-time buyers (sale prices and income levels are capped). In renewed neighbourhoods, the special tax reduction scheme includes a ceiling on income for purchasers and an obligation not to resell the property for a period of ten years to avoid capital gain speculation. As was the case with demolition, private housing development was also below expectations. Moreover, the manner in which it took place did not conform to the initial expected pattern and resulted in locally redefined strategies. Out of the 80,650 new private and intermediate housing units planned, only 77% was completed by 2019, partly due to the lower-than planned demolition activity (Cfgeo/Anru, 2020). Instead of becoming a major driver in social-mix strategy, the AFL has adopted a cautious low-risk stance, waiting instead for other private developers to invest before building their programs. By 2019, the AFL had built three times fewer housing units than originally planned, with many transactions cancelled or scaled back, accounting for 20% of all private housing. As shown in Table 2, home ownership has been the dominant tenure status, accounting for slightly less than two-thirds of newly-constructed dwellings. Contrary to expectations, due to the context of the 2008 real estate crisis, these programs proved to be less financially risky for developers (Saint-Macary, 2011; Lelévrier & Noyé, 2012). Moreover, developers found new secure markets by realigning supply with local demand from young first-time buyers, instead of trying to attract wealthy households from outside the area, setting up programs with local authorities to provide affordable housing for local residents (Saint Macary, 2011). This highlights the multiple drivers of these regeneration schemes and the complexity of urban neo-liberalism (Mc Guirk & Dowling, 2009). Social housing companies have adopted the same strategy, allowing them to achieve an “endogenous” form of social mix by giving young wage-earning residents the opportunity to stay in the area while upgrading their housing trajectory (Lelévrier, 2013).

⁴ *UESL -Action Logement* “The Union of Enterprises for Employees and Housing” manages the employers’ financial participation in the construction effort paid by enterprises: the aim is to favor housing access for employees and to participate in the social mix strategy of urban renewal through funding and building private rental housing.

⁵ AFL, “Association Foncière Logement” was created in 2002 and is financed by “Action-logement” group. It has a highly specific type of structure and is neither a developer nor a constructor. It participates in social-mixing by producing social rental housing for employees with a long-term aim of using this portfolio to finance retirement pensions.

⁶ The National Urban Renewal Agency (ANRU) also includes intermediate rental social housing (PLS) as part of its housing diversification programme, which we have excluded from Table 2 (4,944 social housing units).

⁷ Different types of affordable home ownership programs are available as part of a national incentive policy and may be secured through interest-free loans or housing aid, depending on income and family size.

Table 2 Housing diversification in large housing estates in 2019 (PNRU, 1st urban renewal program *)

Housing tenure and type of developer	Number of dwellings	%
Private home ownership	23,830	41.0
Social home ownership	13,506	23.3
AFL	11,604	20.0
Other intermediate rental private housing	1459	2.5
Nursing homes and student/young workers residences	5913	10.2
Social housing units sold or changed for another use (531)	1724	3.0
Total new private or semi-private housing	58,039	100

Sources: ANRU/CFGEO—* these data relate to 357 large projects from the first program (excluding old central areas and condominium-type housing units) comprising 1. 020,194 housing units, 68% of which are social housing units

3.2 Spatial fragmentation and residential *rescaling*: the example of Lyon-la Duchère

The changes generated by these new residential and urban schemes vary depending on the scale of demolition and reconstruction. A national study of housing diversification conducted in 2019 (Cfgeo/ANRU, 2020) identifies 50 large housing estates (out of 357 renewed neighbourhoods) that have undergone urban transformation, visible based their demolition ratio which is above the average of 17.6% (nine have a ratio of below 55%). In these 50 large housing estates, the proportion of social housing has decreased from an average of 78% to 62%. La Duchère in Lyon is one of these, originally consisted of 5345 dwellings built in the 1960's and located in the inner suburbs of Lyon, a large city in the south-east of France (513,275 inhabitants) (Fig. 1). In 2014, the poverty rate here was more than 40% (compared to 19% in the Lyon metropolitan area and 14% in France).⁸ One of the key policy interventions was the demolition of several massive 15-storey blocks of flats located in the centre of the neighbourhood and stigmatised as centres of drug trafficking. The objective of the project was to provide affordable housing primarily for active first-time buyers under the age of 35 and local residents. The project was fully in line with the ANRU's strategy of promoting the reconstruction of social housing outside of the redeveloped area. Indeed, 1920 social housing units have been demolished and only 28.5% rebuilt within the large complex. The share of social housing thus decreased from 79% in 2002, to 53% in 2019. In addition, out of the remaining 3,036 social housing units, 9% have intermediate level rents targeting middle-income households (*PLS*). As in other large complexes, there were already a few private dwellings (in this case 1080 multi-family "condominium" units in high-rise buildings). Housing tenure diversification has nevertheless led to a sharp increase in the share of private, rental and owner-occupied housing, which will account for almost half of the total housing stock by 2019, with home ownership alone accounting for 37.8% of the total stock (see Table 3).

⁸ Data extracted from the National Observatory of Priority Neighbourhoods and the project local management (Projet urbain la Duchère, communauté urbaine de Lyon).



Fig. 1 Lyon La Duchère-old social housing block and and new private housing (rental and home ownership)

Table 3 Changes in the housing stock from 2002 to 2017 in Lyon-la Duchère (according to housing tenure)

	2002	%	2019	%
Total housing stock	5345	100	5449	100
Social housing (existing)	4265		2345	
Social housing (new)			547	
Total social housing (%)	4265	79.1	2892	53.1
Private housing (existing- restructured)	1080		1246	
Private home ownership (new residences)			581	
Social home ownership (new residences)			231	
Total home ownership	1080	20.2	2058	37.8
Private rental intermediate housing			212	
Student residences			287	
Total private housing	1080	20.2	2557	46.9

Source: ANRU, project review, 2017

Two characteristics of this housing programme provide a better understanding of the process of residential and spatial fragmentation.

First of all, the design of new home ownership “residences” bears no resemblance to the collective condominiums and social housing of the 1960s. The main differences lie in the number of dwellings per “residence” and the height of these collective buildings, which have a de facto low population density. In place of high-rise social housing buildings of 15 stories and 300 dwellings managed by a single social housing organization, 36 different new private plots and housing programs have been developed, divided into small 4–6-storey residences with 17–43 dwellings per residence, with an average of 50 units.⁹ The design of these buildings has been standardized through small gardens on the ground floor and often terraces or balconies on the higher floors. This design offers a new residential and urban model in contrast to the mass housing and urban planning of the 1960s (Fig. 2).

Second, the location and spatial reconfiguration of the different housing buildings and programs is another important factor in this process of fragmentation (see the map, Fig. 3). The example of this large housing estate is particularly relevant in illustrating two broader types of spatial reconfigurations related to urban renewal and planning strategies. The first is a strategy of redeveloping the densest and most central part of the housing complex,

⁹ In other large housing estates, new private home ownership programs include town houses and, in some cases, individual detached houses.



Fig. 2 Lyon-La Duchère—new residential units with different mixed-tenure configurations (Balmes, Plateau, Sauvegarde)

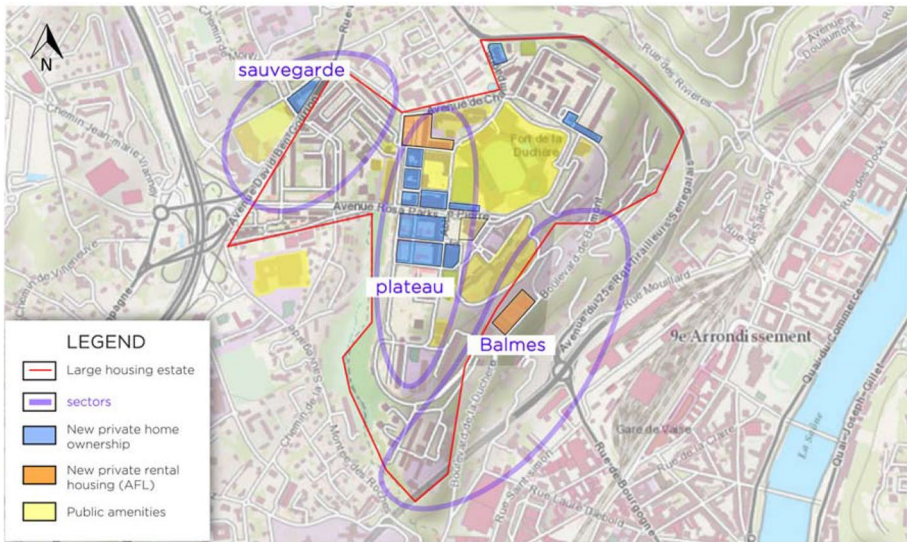


Fig. 3 Lyon La Duchère—residential and spatial fragmentation between different sectors and plots

which was also the one worst affected by drugs and a concentration of high-rise buildings. In this case, diverse tenure-housing programs are juxtaposed along a central street where new facilities and shops have been built (Plateau sector). This spatial configuration is closed to what has been observed in other European mixed-tenure developments (Kearns et al., 2013; Roberts, 2007; Tunstall, 2006). The second process involves boosting property and land values on the fringes of the large complex, which could be seen as a form of “segmented” configuration (Kearns et al., 2013). However, this process is specific to France as it is facilitated by tax reductions for buyers within a 500 m radius. As both the map and Table 4 show, the further the programs are from the “heart” of the neighbourhood, the more expensive they are. Some private developers have therefore chosen to locate their programs away from social housing and sectors afflicted by petty crime for extra security when marketing their products. These programs are located close to wealthier residential areas of detached homes or to city center transportation. This “distant” location on the fringes may also mean being allocated to a different school for children. Indeed, this fragmentation is changing the entire social and symbolic geography of large housing estates, exacerbating internal divisions between existing social housing and the small new private residences, and between social housing tenants and owner-occupiers.

Table 4 Prices in certain private programs for a 3 room-flat in Survey (2011)

Sector	Prices (Euros)
Plateau	€172,282 (€146,881 for social home ownership)
Sauvegarde	€191,135
Balmes	€242,097

Source: Survey, 2011

As this only concerns a very small number of dwellings in relation to the existing housing stock, this process does not change the social composition of the entire housing estate. In this sense, it is “*small-scale gentrification*” on the fringes rather than a massive social change. However, this process is not only visible in this project. Other local research sheds light on the location of private programs “on the periphery” of large housing estates in Strasbourg where small private residences are intended to play an urban transition role with closed areas of detached houses (Gérard, 2011), in Toulouse (Balteau, 2019), in another large Lyon housing project (Gilbert, 2014) and in large housing estates located in the Paris suburbs. These studies also highlight how these spatial configurations change social interaction and the internal social hierarchy between diverse groups.

This process of residential and spatial fragmentation goes hand in hand with an increasing internal socio-spatial differentiation. First, depending on tenure and location, the different private programs have different price tags, creating in itself a social hierarchy, as people who rent private housing have higher levels of income. Moreover, the relocation process for residents displaced from demolished social housing buildings also exacerbates internal social divisions. Relocated households have not been displaced outside the large housing project but inside it, in affordable old social housing adapted to low-income and large households, many of them in La Sauvegarde (see the map) where private programs have also been built in a “segregated” pattern (Kearns et al., 2013) separated by a main road. Due to social-mix strategies, new private housing developments mainly comprise 1 to 3 room apartments while most existing social housing comprises 3 to 5 room flats. Internal social differentiation is not based only on prices and income but also on age and family composition.

Internal social differentiation existed before the urban renewal project as it has been part of the segmentation process of large housing complexes both in France and in other European countries (Grossman et al., 2017; Carnegie et al., 2018). However, housing diversification has *rescaled* such differentiation towards smaller-scale residences of 50 to 100 dwellings belonging to various owners and housing managers. Thus, the whole process of demolishing social housing and rebuilding small enclosed residences has led to “*small-scale fragmentation*”, exacerbating social differences within the housing complex between “micro-enclaves” of home-ownership and intermediate social housing on the one hand, and “*micro-residualised*” “older affordable social housing where the poorest households displaced from demolished buildings have been relocated.. Inside larger housing estates, the impoverishment of undemolished social housing has been increased by the relocation process. Although this paper does not explore the social interaction in these configurations, this *rescaling and parceling* of space and housing is also rescaling social distance and proximity within large housing estates (Balteau, 2019; Gilbert, 2014), replacing the “stigma of place” by “the stigma of tenure” (Hickman, 2013) and the emergence of “a them and us attitude” among residents (Blandy & Lister, 2005, 300; Lelévrier, 2013).

3.3 Restructuring large housing estates: privatization and fragmentation of small gated “residential units”

The demolition-rebuilding process has a strong symbolic and social impact and as such, it constitutes the main research focus, as this process could lead both to displacement of households and gentrification of the areas concerned. However, the less visible but stronger spatial change resulted from “*résidentialisation*”, has impacted 350,000 existing social housing units in the first program. This term is ambivalent as it does not have the same meaning as the English term “residentialisation” – as opposed to gentrification by Slater (Slater, 2009) –quoting the definition given in a paper on regeneration in Britain as “the introduction of more housing and therefore more residents within the city centre... Whereby housing replaces other land uses” (Blomley et al., 2005, 2408). It is much closer to “gating” even if it is different from the process of “gated communities” (Atkinson et al., 2004); gating was promoted as a means of restructuring deprived neighbourhoods at the end of the 1990s. Public discourse combined urban arguments with securitization ideologies. Certain famous planners promoted it as a way to re-design existing housing and spaces in large housing estates based on the principle of “small residential units”. The two main spatial features of “*résidentialisation*” are first a return to a traditional “plots-blocks-streets” layout instead of high-rise buildings surrounded by open public space, and second, the enclosure of smaller residential units supposed to delineate public and private space (Figs. 4, 5). According to planners, enclosure could be symbolic and landscaped while for social housing organisations, the function of the enclosure is also as a security tool to protect their assets and “de-stigmatize” social housing through physical design. Gating for safety purposes has been standardized in “*résidentialisation*” in large low-income housing estates by policy-makers. There is a consensus among practitioners concerning a presumed response to three urban policy imperatives: redeveloping the modernist open and undifferentiated space of the 1960’s, deemed dysfunctional and too far removed from the “traditional” design of the urban “residence” built along a street (Pannerai & Lange, 2000); safeguarding buildings by making space more easily “defensible” to prevent people from committing crimes as set out in the Anglo-Saxon theory of situational prevention (Coleman, 1985; Gosselin, 2016; Newman, 1973); bringing the design of buildings and public space closer to luxury private residences to attract the middle-classes and favor social-mix. This practice has led to legal transactions involving the sale or free transfer of part of formerly public open spaces to social housing organisations. The enclosed residential units of existing social housing buildings were created either by splitting the various entrances of a building into units of 20–60 households, or by putting together larger units combining car parks and buildings (Fig. 4). This goes hand in hand with landscaping the front-space of the buildings, redesigning lighting, waste sorting, car parks along the streets and security systems. Gating small residences and squares also reflects a normative conception of a safer and ordered city aimed at reducing petty crime (Newman, 1973).

Lots of urban planners promote *résidentialisation* as part of a wider post-modern transformation that should result in a better integration of large housing estates within the overall “ordinary” city. This conception often refers to Jane Jacobs’ criticism of American cities (Jacobs, 1961) and is similar to New Urbanism principles, not only applied to existing blocks of social housing but to all new housing developments, amenities, outdoor and green spaces: designing public streets and squares as meeting places with mixed functions (e.g. shops, services), connecting roads instead of having dead-end streets, favoring a mixture of cars and pedestrians, subdividing the ground plan into plots of land to *rescale*



Fig. 4 Diverse enclosure of existing social housing: blocks with car parks (Orly), residential units of 20 dwellings with gardens (Athis-Mons) and gated concrete terraces (Evry)



Fig. 5 Front door and backyard of existing social housing before and after the creation of residential units (20 dwellings) in Athis-Mons

residential units... The standardization through “residentialisation” is based on the debated premise of social changes as a result from urban and architectural change: self-organisation and self-control by residents of smaller enclosed residences, better appropriation of private and intermediate spaces, rejection of drug dealing and petty crime in the public space of the streets (Fig. 5).

This standardization contributes to forms of privatization of land and to the spatial fragmentation and rescaling of large housing projects differently from housing-tenure diversification. One of the results is to clarify property boundaries and management responsibilities for public and private space and to move away from the urban construction plans of the 1960s. It also allows local authorities to sell, cede or reserve plots for future private development, transforming large-scale public housing in markets in line with neo-liberal trends. Meanwhile, the safety issues of gating are barely discussed (Gosselin, 2016) as you would expect the imposition of normative middle-class housing patterns on a working-class area to be. The desire to control spaces and residents’ practices tends to reduce the amount of public space while at the same time complexifying and limiting access to it. Gating plots of housing as well as facilities, schools and green spaces creates residual spaces (Fig. 6). In a way, such new *post-modern* urban redevelopment patterns are as standardized as the urban conception of modern space in large housing estates was in the 1960s, including a normative representation of a safe city closer to middle-class aspirations than to working-class practices. Indeed, this standardization of securitization, “from passive design features to full gating” (Mc Guirk & Dowling, 2009: 121) is also defended by some architects and not only reflects the “neo-liberal city”. Through gating legitimated as part of a “de-stigmatisation” of social housing, policy-makers expect more social control denying all local attachments and the long-term practices of working-class people in modern spaces.



Fig. 6 Residual public space and reduced/complex public access (Athis-Mons and Paris)

4 Conclusion

The whole system of “state-controlled mass-social” housing (Harloe, 1995) and the “generalist” model that has lasted longer in France than in other Western European countries is undergoing deep changes and these have accelerated in the 2000s.

At the large housing estate scale studied here, housing diversification implemented through urban renewal and social-mix strategies have resulted in *semi-privatization* of public land and housing, from mono-tenure to mixed-tenure-based fragmented property and management. The spatial configurations of social-mixing highlighted in other contexts, i.e., “segmented, segregated or integrated”, are also visible in French estates (Jupp, 1999; Kearns et al., 2013; Silverman et al. 2005; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2000). However, notwithstanding local variations, specific standardized French patterns are visible in all redeveloped large housing estates as an “intertwining of location, mode of production, design and built form” (Kearns et al., 2013: 11). First, on the one hand, this fragmentation tends to create micro-enclaves of homogeneous private residences on the fringes of neighbourhoods where private developers get tax breaks from the State. On the other hand, social housing is “residualised” within large housing estates in sectors where blocks of social housing have not been demolished and where very-low income families are living, some of whom have been relocated. Second, the architectural design and housing programming of “résidentialisation” – partitioning existing housing blocks as well as new housing in small enclosed residential units – is *rescaling* the fragmentation process. However these concrete changes highlight two paradoxes; social-mixing as a policy prescription aimed at reducing stigmatization and enhancing social cohesion ends up fragmenting housing tenure and land property at the smaller scale of the “residence” within large housing estates; urban standardization of modernist and functionalist mass-housing space, as a planning idea, ends up as normative safety arrangements that tend to reduce access to public space when applied to poor stigmatized large housing projects. This echoes the analyses of an American researcher that highlight enclosures in architecture as “segregation by design” (Gordon-Lasner, 2020).

In contrast to “gated communities” (Blandy & Lister, 2005) and the “privatism” way of life of master-planned residential estates (Dowling et al., 2010), the whole scheme is more imposed than chosen, especially by the lower-income groups whose neighbourhoods’ practices are more stigmatized and negated.

These local privatization, fragmentation and rescaling processes also raise broader issues concerning European trends. First, even if tenure-mixing does not achieve the “dismantling of public housing” (Goetz, 2011), the reduction of affordable social housing inside large housing estates as a result of mixed-tenure policies will lead to a wholesale reduction in affordable housing. This is especially problematic in supply-constrained urban areas where market prices have increased considerably (Goetz, 2002; Levy-Vroelant, 2014; Watt & Smets, 2017). Indeed, one new social housing unit is not equivalent to one demolished unit in terms of affordability: rents for new social housing rebuilt outside of large housing estates or in better-off areas are higher than those in large housing estates where the most affordable stock is concentrated.

Second, beyond the complexity of social interaction in mixed-tenure and fragmented spaces already demonstrated (Arthurson, 2011; Balteau, 2019; Gilbert, 2014; Graham et al., 2009; Kearns et al., 2013) is the uncertainty of home ownership management and occupation. The social outcomes of private affordable homes targeting “lower middle-class” households is one of the crucial issues in avoiding distressed and run down areas comprising small, condominium-type dwellings. Moreover, the fragmented management between properties held in co-ownership with different interests and unequal capacities to maintain their residences is not risk-free as has been demonstrated in different Eastern European contexts (Tsenkova, 2008). There is a risk that residents will be forced to bear higher maintenance costs and responsibilities together with requests (Doling and Ronald, 2010) for more stringent municipal regulations. The broader more recent legislative context neither safeguards the future of these projects nor alleviates the internal fragmentation of social housing. The general reduction in public funding goes hand in hand with an increasing devolution of responsibilities to local authorities and social housing organizations and the requirement to sell housing units in a recent law enacted in 2018 (ELAN)¹⁰ (Guimat & Gloor, 2016; Guimat & Halbert, 2018). These wider changes may affect large housing estates in two ways. As has been the case in the UK (Jones & Murie, 2006; Malpass, 2005), the sale of the most attractive parts of the housing stock risks reinforcing stigmatization and concentrating poverty in the most deprived “residualized” parts of large housing estates. This would also weaken housing managers’ ability to provide local services and management.

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¹⁰ In 2019, only 10% of all social housing organisations are the required size. The rate of sales has been maintained around 4000 units per year between 1998 and 2009, reaching 8000 units per year from 2012.

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