

THE FUTURE OF THE “SCHOOL YEARS” IN SENSITIVE URBAN AREAS

Summary of Report no. 352 (2010-2011) of 10 March 2011
by Mme Fabienne Keller, Senator,
on the behalf of the Senate Forecasting Delegation

Background

In France, the period between 1950 and the end of the 70's was marked by rapid urbanisation, due partly to the rural exodus, partly to the influx of repatriates from Algeria and partly to immigrant workers in a general context of high economic and demographic growth.

With the industrial crisis of the 70's, the tower blocks in districts originally modern and well provided for rapidly became 'places of banishment' for immigrant or disadvantaged socially fragile populations.

Following a number of successive plans that met with mixed results, the Borloo Plan of 2003 reflected a determination to transform the physical appearance of the districts concerned with reconstruction of the dwellings and the public amenities together with high-quality external works.

Today, a very large number of schoolchildren live in the underprivileged districts of our towns and cities, as large families often live in them, unable to find accommodation in or nearer the city centre.

Like their parents before them, these young people encounter a lot of obstacles in the way of building a positive life. And since it is the youth of our society that is the issue here, it is important that we understand the possible future of this “school years” generation and the areas they live in so as to be able to anticipate it.

What are the possible developments in the decisive factors of their future? What does 2025 hold for these adolescents? These are the two questions asked in this forecast study, which covers both the

schooling of this age group and the non-scholastic life of the family or the district.

This study seeks to analyse the realities of the young people in their family, in their district and among their peers, during the years that strongly influence their future plans and their choice of life.

Our standpoint is based on **numerous meetings and field visits** in Seine Saint-Denis, Roubaix, Marseille and Montbéliard.

Our thanks go all the participants for their availability: teachers, educationalists, sociologists, state education leaders and associations, town councillors, policemen and gendarmes, as well as to the schoolchildren, former schoolchildren and their parents.

Their skills and their commitment have been of valuable help. The visits were complemented by thematic round tables, interviews, a prospective workshop, video sequences and a film presenting the study to be found on an Internet blog (<http://blogs.senat.fr/annees-college/>).



Student's Work, Collège Romain Rolland de Clichy-sous-Bois (Seine Saint-Denis)

I – Schoolchildren today in sensitive urban areas

► Young people are very numerous in fragile districts

■ **Example:** the Bosquets district in Montfermeil: **44% of the inhabitants are under 20 years of age**; 25% of the total population of Montfermeil and 40% of its young people live there.

► The young people in these districts have tremendous energy

■ **Because they grow up early, they are quick to become aware of their particular situation:** The whole challenge is to direct their energy into a positive future project and a constructive attitude towards society.

■ **The Americans have a strategy designed to emphasise the worth of the leaders in these districts,** a strategy which often reveals some strong personalities.

► These districts embody economic and social fragility

■ In 2008, in sensitive urban areas (ZUS), the percentage of persons **below the poverty level was 28.8%, compared with 12% in the rest of the country** (excluding ZUS).

■ In 2009, the **unemployment rate was 18.6% in the ZUS compared with an average of 9.2% in metropolitan France.** Youth unemployment was very high: **41.7% of the 15-25 age group compared with 19.1% outside the ZUS.**

■ Certain districts are gradually becoming **ghettoised** due to the growing gap between the rich and the poor, with persons of foreign origin the worst affected. According to demographer Michèle Tribalat, the percentage of young people under 18 of foreign origin (at least one immigrant parent) has risen very sharply in the last 30 years in these districts. For example, in **Clichy-sous-Bois** between 1968 and 2005, it rose **from 22% to 76%.**

► The vast majority are unfamiliar with these young people, who are subject to a great deal of prejudice

■ Their districts have **few amenities and shops; and few people go there apart from the residents.**

■ Relegated and feared for decades, **they are very much disadvantaged by the image created by the media and not helped by the traumas of insecurity.** Urban violence and the resultant image effectively discourage outsiders from venturing into these areas. The negative image is very persistent and regularly reinforced by the news.

■ The negative image of these districts is perceived by the inhabitants as **a form of stigmatisation and injustice.** Internalised, these stereotypes create a **low self-image.**

“The stereotype of a young person from a deprived district precludes any possibility of normal relations and impedes every interaction. With these young people, the media attribute to them, directly or indirectly, behaviour which they then get blamed for” (Didier Lapeyronnie, sociologist).

■ **The district and the public square are seen as dangerous places:** nothing’s right; *“in the square, people are pushing drugs, planning nefarious deeds”.*

► And yet overall, the schools are doing a very good job

■ The field visits enabled us to meet **committed teams where the youth of the teachers went hand in hand with involvement and a strong sense of purpose.** Moreover, experienced teachers sometimes choose to remain in a priority education zone (ZEP) because *“achievement under difficult conditions is a source of pride”.*

■ **The assistance they give to the young and their investment in practical projects go largely unrecognised.** And yet teachers are exemplars for young people and their role is worthy of greater appreciation.

► **The systems are not up to the challenge**

■ **222,000 schoolchildren go to school in a ZUS.**

■ **115,000 young people** go to “ambition achieved system” (RAR) schools.

■ **6,300 places in state-funded boarding schools** (the target is 20,00)

■ **150 places** in the 2010-2011 school year in school reintegration establishments (ERS)

► **The role of the public players is complex**

Decentralisation and the realities of the French administrative system have **very**

much complicated the intervention of the public sector in this field:

– **the Regions**, for vocational training;

– **the Départements**, for Social Action, specialised prevention, housing, school technical personnel;

– **the Cities**, for local Social Action, the assistance of associations and the creation of numerous public services for the population;

– **the Conurbation**, for urban renewal, transport and housing policies, management of public services complementary to those of the city;

– **the State**, for access to care, extremely vulnerable persons, schooling;

– **major public players** (National Employment Agency, the Post Office, the public housing bodies) who also play a decisive role.

II What future for tomorrow's schooling?

Effective forecasting is designed to help the decision makers by making it easier for them to plan ahead. It is based, firstly, on aspects marking the areas in which the young people generally live and also on other variables concerning more particularly the adolescents themselves and their interpersonal relations. Various hypotheses can then be made to see how these variables would develop and scenarios established.

► **The key variables for determining the future of schoolchildren in sensitive districts**

■ **Demographic factors**

- Household structure by age and size
- The proportion of the population
- Household income
- Access to employment

Quote

In Marseille: “*The people fill their dwellings up with a lot of inessential gadgets and appliances so that their children won't go and play in the street, which is seen as riddled with dangers*”.

Again in Marseille: “*At the age of 12, the child is a lookout, at 13 or 14 he's selling stuff and he's a ringleader, so at 16 he's already got his career all worked out*”.

■ **Lifestyle factors**

- The urban structure and urban renewal
- The housing stock / developments
- Public amenities and services
- Economic and social activities

■ **Social environment factors**

- Insecurity and the image
- Social relations
- Health

■ **Factors to do with the organisation of the schools and the educational institutions**

- The educational offer, the image of the establishments and the future they offer
- The ambition of the students
- The educational, sports and cultural activities available in the district

► **Three scenarios of possible futures**

*These scenarios are not intended to predict an already known future, but rather to **give a picture of what might happen tomorrow** and so provoke reactions and reflection on the levers that could be used encourage or, conversely, stand in the way of one or another discernible trend. Hence they describe logics of possible events without ignoring the diversity of the sensitive districts whose **futures will necessarily be different**.*

■ **Scenario 1: the ghetto schoolchildren**

This is the spiral, the district closing in on itself.

The public services and the local amenities gradually taper off and **the social life of the district is run by gangs or radical or extremist religious sects. Official authority vanishes and is replaced by a communitarian structure.**

Truancy increases and reinforces the feeling of exclusion of the young, who find themselves in a world of scholastic failure and social exclusion. Their lives, their codes and their activities belong to the anti-society of the ghetto.

■ **Scenario 2:
The status quo schoolchildren**

The districts grow old. The differences between the rehabilitated districts and the other districts become more marked.

The scourge of unemployment persists. But the Welfare State allows a relative social peace to be maintained.

The young live their rejection as an injustice, but the risks of a social explosion are contained.

■ **Scenario 3: Schoolchildren in the ordinary districts**

This is the most favourable scenario for the district.

The highly social nature of the districts has already been provided for. Comprehensive and effective public services are already in place.

The district is now gradually merging into the city as a result of the urban renewal operations and demographic policies encouraging a social mix.

Two contra-scenarios may be envisaged:

– **young people in districts that have become “bohemian middle-class”** owing to the increased price of property; This applies especially to gentrified central districts; **the young are happier with a social mix;**

– **abandoned young people in “alternative” districts** inhabited by *déclassés* marginalised as a result of a society marked by the explosion of families and communities.



The Students of the “Café Philo” at the Collège Albert Samain de Roubaix (Nord)

III Levers of action to prevent the worst case scenario

► *Doing the essential memory work and discussing the relationship with the dual culture and with religion*

■ The schoolchildren in sensitive districts often belong to the third generation of immigrant families.

■ Writing a common history would be the first step in building a “*living together*” based on the model of the Franco-German manual, one possible approach.

■ Religion is an important subject which must not be overlooked in a prospective reflection, as it is the subject of concerns because of the radicalisation of certain Muslim or sectarian practices in the districts.

► *Giving their rightful place to women and young adolescents*

■ Some girls “*hug the walls*” and are unaware of their rights. Others have no access to training on sexuality and their relationship with their bodies.

■ Supporting every initiative designed to encourage discussion on these subjects with young adolescents so as to make them more aware and **develop their thinking**.

► *Lifting the scourge of unemployment*

■ The disappearance of industrial employment leads to a loss of reference points, social status and pride.

■ As socialising is a large part of work, the question of employment in sensitive districts and the forms of this employment (insecure jobs or working irregular hours) are priority issues.

■ Taking steps to **reduce fragmented work in unqualified jobs** for low-income families, a form of labour which often leads to absent parents and schoolchildren left on their own.

■ To create ambition and foster social decompartmentalisation, the introduction of various training programmes right from the fourth form is a potential lever.

■ But as things stand, the fourth form is a good reflection of how the districts are self-confined. Despite the obstacles to geographic mobility, improvements could be made so as to **make such courses a real moment of discovery** for young people in sensitive districts.

► *Opening debate on the appeal of learning and on how to implement a common learning base*

■ The situation of schools in an urban renewal area means that the **pedagogic structures in place have to be adapted**: Interdisciplinary work, thematic projects and classes, and sport are an encouragement to more effective learning.

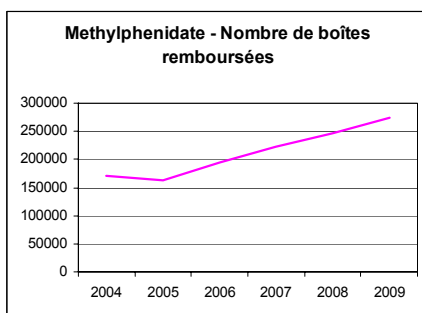
■ Taking into account the “**Facebook generation**”: The new technologies enjoyed by the young (mobile phones, the Internet, etc.) need to be more fully exploited by the schools as they offer a host of opportunities:

- **decompartmentalisation of the district;**

- **intellectual and cultural development “connective intelligence”** (Vincent Cespedès), that is to say the ability of a group to create a shared knowledge base, collaboratively and reactively, in regard to current events.

► **Preserving physical and mental health throughout the school years**

- The health of young adolescents attending school in sensitive urban areas has been deteriorating in recent years: obesity, oral hygiene, vaccinations, addictions.
- The health lever is undoubtedly a major means of avoiding the worst case scenario, particularly in its psychological, even psychiatric dimension.
- Taking precautions against the use of neuroleptics such as Ritalin to calm down young hyperactives in schools in ZUS.



Methylphenidate – Number of Reimbursed Boxes

► **Increasing urban renewal and more effectively coordinating urban policy**

- The traditional city has many times been built and rebuilt on itself. Thus there is every reason to invest heavily in the sensitive districts.
- Certain districts have been left out of the programmes so far adopted. This calls for a new phase of urban renewal. Thus the effort must not be relaxed, for a positive dynamic and credibility have been achieved thanks to the initial programmes.
- The rehabilitated districts deserve especially to be maintained in sectors where the population per square metre is well above the national average.

► **The situation is complex, a leader is essential: the mayor, naturally; but some suggest the State.**

- These projects are for the most part conducted with great strength of

purpose, ensuring a good “return” on the money invested in terms of general interest. But overall management is highly complex in operations involving a multiplicity of players.

- The different levels of local authorities and the various ministries give priority to problematic districts. Each one can offer at least one skill.
- Laborious coordination takes up too much of the players’ time to identify and decide on the action of each one for each project. The coordination structures should more generally entail reflection on the governance of the civic policy.

Quotes

“Coordination should be a plank in everyone’s programme, the teachers’ in particular”.

“Coordination? We coordinate to some extent, but not really on a sustained basis. Because we’re bogged down in the machinery of insecure contracts”.

- The leader needs to organise coherently the different steering committees without regard to the financiers or project management organisations, ANRU, CCUS, CLS, MOUS, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Whilst it is unlikely that any of the suggested scenarios will come to fruition at French level, it is possible that all of them will be realised at different places and at any time.
2. Work on the non-quantitative variables has highlighted the importance of some of society’s choices concerning values rather than budgetary commitments.
3. Focusing on “school years” involves seeing the young adolescent not only as a schoolchild but also as a human being.
4. The school plays a decisive role in the mental and social development of France’s younger generation. But this generation must be taught using methods adapted to the realities of today’s society.