

THE FRENCH “POLITIQUE DE LA VILLE”: URBAN POLICY AND CITY CONTRACTS

Introduction

For 60 years, France developed an urban policy targeting deprived areas (priority districts), called “Politique de la ville”, whose objectives are the following:

- to reduce the development gap between districts or cities within the same urban area
- to restore the republican equality in disadvantages districts;
- to improve the living conditions of the disadvantages districts inhabitants (5.5 millions of people living in priority districts)

This area-based policy has a national legal framework and is implemented at the local level through “City contracts”.

1. The French policy framework: city contracts in a glance

The last change of the national legal framework came around through the urban and cohesion programming law in 2014. It defines the new contour of the “Politique de la ville” (Urban policy targeting deprived areas).

Main principles of “Politique de la ville” in France are the following:

=> The national level determines the priority districts (areas which have the largest concentration of low income people, see the definition later).

=> City contracts are developed at the scale of “priority districts” (whose perimeter is defined at the national level) or of “active monitoring districts” (districts concerned by the previous, 2007-2014 urban policy but do not fit any more with the new priority districts’ criteria, the law income rate).

=> City contracts are based on a 6 years period: 2015-2020.

=> A city contract is signed by the state and local authorities (municipalities and inter-municipality structure). Other local stakeholders can sign it according to their field of work and the actions of the city contract (e.g. the regional council will sign the city contract if it includes actions, which are linked to the field of work of the regional council). This is a contractual process – there were 425 signed city contracts in 2017.

=> One city contract can cover one or several priority districts from one municipality or several municipalities from a same inter-municipal organisation.

=> City contracts are integrated into wider existing strategies (at the scale of inter-municipal organisation). Indeed, some challenges of priority districts depend on higher territorial scale (eg. transport, employment, education...).

=> City contracts are conceived in 3 main steps: diagnosis, strategy and action plan (around 1 year long process).

=> City contracts are made-up of actions from different fields: economic, social (employment, education, culture...), environmental (mobility, biodiversity...) and urban renewal (urban infrastructure...). It means that they combine soft interventions and physical investments.

=> City contracts should be defined and implemented with a participative approach involving citizens.

2. Key-points of City contracts and the French urban policy

2.1 Intervention areas

The urban policy targeting deprived areas is based on several types of perimeters:

- Priority districts, which are identified by the national level (with a consultation of local elected representatives) on the basis of two main criteria: a minimum number of inhabitants in the district (at least 1000) and the inhabitants' low-income criteria (concentration of populations having resources lower than 60% of the national median reference income). On that basis 1514 priority districts were assigned in France in 2017.
- Active monitoring districts, which were concerned by the previous wave of urban policy in the 2007-2014 period, but do not fit any more with the new priority districts' criteria, i.e. which are above the low income rate). Even if they are not considered as priority districts any more, they can have a city contract. These two first perimeters are the intervention areas of city contracts.
- Living territories (Quartiers vécus) : areas, which are not in a priority district but next to it. The living territories concept refers to the area which covers the inhabitants' daily routines, i.e. the places where they usually go (school, leisure and social activities, services...) outside their neighborhood. These areas have not defined perimeters but can benefit from actions in the framework of the City contract, as the improved infrastructure/service will also be useful for the residents of the priority district.
- Districts benefiting from the urban renewal national program : 450 among the 1514 priority districts, being the most deprived, concentrating the most urban dysfunctions.

2.2 Budget and financing

Broadly speaking, the urban policy targeting deprived areas is mainly financed by the national level, in the following way.

Main national source of funding	Modalities of allocation
<p>- Specific urban policy credits (430 million euros per year) allocated to each region (by the state) according to the number of city contracts and of inhabitants living in priority districts.</p> <p>=> eligible areas: all the priority districts (incl. their "living territories")</p>	<p>The money goes to the region prefects (state deconcentrated service at the regional level), according to the number of city contracts and of inhabitants living in the concerned districts. Then, these credits are spent by the intermunicipality structure itself and by local stakeholders through call for projects. They mainly support "social cohesion" action (62,4%) and "Employment and economic development (27,6%).</p>
<p>- National sectorial policies/mainstream policies budget (education, health, safety...) with some prescribed percentage of measures, which should target people living in priority districts.</p> <p>=> eligible areas: all the areas (incl. Priority districts)</p>	<p>Projects and actions mentioned in the city contracts can be financed with national measures related to employment, culture, transport... For example, the interdepartmental agreement between the Ministry of territorial cohesion and the Ministry of employment defines that 20% of people benefiting from the "Garantie Jeunes" measure (national measure for NEETs) must live in a priority district. It means that actions linked to the objective "reducing youth unemployment" of a given city contract can be financed by a national measure – but it is the role of the urban manager to "catch"</p>

	these funds...
<p>- Budget of the urban renewal national programme (10 billion euros) concerning the most deprived priority districts (450 among the 1514 priority districts). These funds come from ANRUE (National agency for urban renewal).</p> <p>=> eligible areas: sample of priority districts</p>	<p>The eligible priority districts define an urban renewal project. The analysis of each project's proposal is made by ANRUE (at the county level) and the concerned municipalities and intermunicipality organisation can present their project during a national ANRUE Committee, which decides to finance it and will follow-up the works after their approval.</p>

Of course, other local funds can also support the actions of city contracts, according to their respective skills (Regional council, county council...).

To conclude, the "Politique de la Ville", which targets urban deprived areas, is financed from three main national financial tools: the sectorial/mainstream policies (with prescribed percentage dedicated to priority districts), the specific urban policy credits (430 millions/year) and the funds from the national agency for urban renewal (10 billions for 10 years).

2.3 Thematic fields covered by city contracts

Each city contract is made-up of 3 main pillars in order to articulate urban dimension with the human one:

- Social cohesion: support of NGOs and social stakeholders, social and leisure activities, childcare and health services, strengthening of intergenerational links, poverty reduction...
- Living conditions and urban renewal: creation of new infrastructures, renewal projects favouring social diversity, improvement of relationships between public services and the population, improvement of housing quality...
- Employment and economic development: creation of economic activity, reinforcement of the presence of "Pôle Emploi" (national employment agency) and "Local missions" (youth employment agencies), and entrepreneurship support...

2.4 The governance of the city contract

The governance of city contracts is defined in the programming law of 2014, as follow:

- a Steering committee: it is co-chaired by the State, intermunicipality structure and municipalities. Other stakeholders are involved: the Regional Council, the county Council, Pôle Emploi (national agency for employment), Citizen councils... Its role is to validate, monitor and evaluate city contracts.
- a Technical committee: it is co-moderated by the State, intermunicipality structure and municipalities. It also gathers technicians from organisations, which are involved in the steering committee. Its role is to prepare the steering committee and organize the different thematic working groups.
- Thematic working groups on each city contract pillar and on transversal axis (men/women equality, youth, fight against discrimination, sustainable development, youth...). For each thematic, the working groups define a diagnosis, objectives and an action plan. They support the technical committee in the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders in the elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of city contracts.

2.5 Institutional management

Once signed, the intermunicipality structure is in charge of the city contract piloting/steering at the intermunicipality level. The Municipality/ies for its/their part should implement the city contract on his/their own area.

Then, the human resources dedicated to the implementation of the city contract is crucial and is supported by staff recruited by the intermunicipality organisation and/or by the different concerned municipalities according to the local context.

2.6 Participative approach

The participative approach is an obligation required from the national level. It can be formalised through 2 different modalities:

- the establishment of the on-site “house of the project” in each districts benefiting from the urban renewal national program. Concretely, it is formalized by a reception equipment accessible for all the inhabitants providing information on the project, its planning and its purpose and accommodation for meetings and workshops or a place for the office of project managers.
- the creation of citizen councils for each priority districts or covering several priority districts. Their aim is to encourage the expression of inhabitants, to co-build city contracts on each pillar of the contract at each step and to stimulate and support citizen initiatives. The members are selected by the drawing lot principle (on the basis of electoral lists, social landlord’s lists, and electricity supply list...). They are made-up of 2 main colleges gathering inhabitants and NGO representatives. The inhabitants’ college should respect the gender parity. Concerning the number, there is no limitation but usually the number of members varies from 15 to 50.

2.7 The process of decision-making in practice

The process of decision-making, i.e the allocation of money between the three thematic fields (social issues, urban renewal, economic development) and the selection of the real projects can be described as follows.

Each area defines its own city contract by involving the different governance bodies: working groups prepare the diagnosis on each pillar, define the strategy and the action plan; at each step technical committees add some informations and they prepare a synthesis of the action plan; This synthesis is presented to the Steering Committee, which validates it. All the process involves also the citizen councils, which means, that the local stakeholders propose the distribution of priorities/actions between the 3 pillars. Concerning the real influence of citizen, this varies area by area. There are some municipalities and intermunicipality organisations, which really want to promote a participative approach and act accordingly, while others mobilise the citizen council only at a minimum level.

2.8 Evaluation of city contracts

The 2014 programming law explains that a local evaluation organization has to be identified in order to undertake an evaluation at mid-term and at the end of the city contract (2020). It can be carried by the steering committee or an ad-hoc organization. Its role is to assess the city contract results. All city contract signatories have to communicate their data. The Citizen council should participate to the evaluation process but the 2014 programming law does not explain the concrete modalities. The evaluation can be financed by the national urban policy specific credits.

An evaluation methodology has been provided in February 2017 by the national observatory for urban policy (ONPV). The ONPV is a public structure created by the programming Law (2014) in order to improve the knowledge concerning priority districts.