Occupying, neighbouring, opposing: how local residents defend a place. The case of Bois Hardy

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Abstract

This article draws upon an ethnographic study of a discreet protest underway in the district of Bas-Chantenay in Nantes. It is a local movement that began in a disagreement with the planning authority and subsequently stimulated various processes of territorialisation to develop its activity. The investigation focuses on the construction of forms of engagement situated around the defence of a place, a locus of everyday local practices that make collective protest action possible. The article focuses on the ordinary uses and routinised forms of political practice afforded by the occupation of a garden, but it also emphasises the social relations, the regulations and the construction of a set of arguments that depend on it. Local space is then analysed as an agent of the collective dynamics and a basis of politicisation which we can place in dialogue with other forms of occupation in which urbanism and metropolisation are factors.

Keywords: mobilisation, locality, urban planning, occupation, ethnography

Résumé

Cet article s'appuie sur une ethnographie d'une contestation discrète à l'œuvre contre la densification d'une friche urbaine dans le quartier Bas-Chantenay à Nantes. Il s'agit d'une mobilisation de proximité qui, partant d'un dissensus avec la collectivité

aménageuse, combine divers processus de territorialisation pour échafauder son action. L'enquête porte un intérêt à l'élaboration de formes d'engagement situées autour d'un lieu à défendre, support de pratiques quotidiennes et riveraines qui rendent possible l'action collective contestataire. Le texte se centre sur les usages ordinaires et les formes routinisées de pratiques politiques offerts par l'occupation d'un jardin, mais il insiste aussi sur les sociabilités, les régulations et l'élaboration d'un argumentaire qui en dépendent. L'espace proche est alors analysé en tant qu'acteur de la dynamique collective et socle de politisation nous permettant de le mettre en dialogue avec d'autres mobilisations prenant l'urbanisme et la métropolisation comme enjeux.

Mots-clés : mobilisation, riveraineté, aménagement urbain, occupation, ethnographie

Introduction

Nantes is seen as an exemplary French metropolitan region (Fritsch, 2006), generating models that have been the subject of previous studies,[1] whether relating to the connection between culture and planning or to municipal and inter-municipal practices. In recent years, it has also emerged as a stronghold of opposition to large and unnecessary projects that are imposed on the community (GPII).[2] The occupation of the Notre-Dame-des-Landes (NDDL) protection zone (ZAD) and its interpretation have been the subject of numerous studies (Subra, 2016; collectif comm'un, 2019; Verdier, 2021; Pailloux, 2015). Used for its capacity to reveal alternative possibilities, the protection zone model tends both to nurture and to overshadow other less visible or less unified dynamics of protest, linked to processes that generalise a discourse based more on familiarity and proximity to places (Déchezelles and Olive, 2016). Although local movements have attracted less analysis than major planning conflicts (ibid.), the experiences to which they give rise reveal a diversity of actors and processes that lay claim to various degrees of legitimacy, closely linked to the status attributed to the places concerned. The study of local mobilisations against a plan provides an opportunity to explore the role of space: how does the occupation of a place that is undergoing change and is close to the neighbourhood affect the forms of collective action? This article is based on the hypothesis that these mobilisations link different regimes of engagement (Thévenot, 2006) enabled by specific forms of place attachment (Stedman, 2003; Lewicka, 2011; Devine-Wright, 2009; Altman and Low,

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1. Models discussed in a seminar in Nantes in 2017 jointly organised by Laurent Devisme and Renaud Epstein, entitled "Circulation of urban models, between local and global".
2. A term used to refer to "large-scale development and infrastructure projects deemed disproportionate (in terms of economic and environmental costs), 'useless' (because they do not benefit the public interest but the profits of major corporations) and 'imposed' without consultation with the inhabitants" (Aguilera, 2021, p. 218).

1992). Defined as an affective connection between individuals and a familiar place (ibid.), these forms of attachment can be captured in a pattern that brings together individual, collective and spatial dimensions (Scannell and Gifford, 2010), and can attain a political dimension in the case of planning conflicts (Sébastien, 2022).

This understanding of the role of space, whether contested or familiar, is based on an ethnographic survey carried out with a group of local residents in Nantes who came together in opposition to a project to densify an area of wasteland, the Bois Hardy hills. After outlining the issues specific to local mobilisation, I describe this collective by tracing the stages of its activity. I take into account the localised dimension of their engagement in the practices, demands and sociabilities afforded by the use of gardens on an occupied site. Finally, I put these results into perspective to examine the status of a group that is both oppositional and residential, and the processes of politicisation that this facilitates. Combining forms of attachment to space with specific collective action strategies, the gardens of Bois Hardy appear to be the medium, the objective and the reason for political experiments specific to a local area. This case study is an opportunity to show that there are engagements that are sub-political and others that are more radical, and that they can coexist not only within a group, but also within the engaged individual.

The coteaux du Bois Hardy collective: local action against a metropolitan urban project

In his observation of the proliferation of urban struggles in the 1960s, Manuel Castells (1973) identifies the living environment and everyday life as loci of protest and social emancipation (Lefebvre, 1958 [1947]), although their political impacts remain under threat from the *local trap*[3] (Mayer, 2016; Purcell, 2006). The vocabulary employed distinguishes local movements by: "the often limited perimeter of the population concerned, the small size of its audience and the circumstantial nature of its motives" (Dechézelles and Olive, 2019, p. 10), associated by some authors with political forms that are "'impoverished' (localism), compromised (clientelism) or deviant (communitarian insularity without a common goal)" (ibid., p. 11). According to these observations, the local is perceived as a scale at which authentic democracy is mythologised or not fully representative (Melé and Neveu, 2019).

The literature on planning conflicts has, however, highlighted the need to move beyond criticism of the Not in My Back Yard (Nimby) position to analyse forms of

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3. "Local trap" understood as "the assumption that locally made decision-making processes would be more democratic and generate more social and environmental justice" (Purcell, 2006, p. 5).

collective action that are locally territorialised, by giving more space to their effects and representations (Cefaï and Lafaye, 2001), particularly in terms of the political socialisation of those involved (Lolive, 1997; Trom, 1999). The present study fits within a tradition that highlights the value of regimes of engagement (Thévenot, 2006). These regimes, "arrayed along an axis of ways of acting in the world" (Centemeri, 2015, p. 3) open up to the pluralism of systems of action and actor coordination.[4] This perspective can be pursued by continually examining the ordinary implications of the latter in everyday life and political practices (Bonny et al., 2012) or the value of place attachments as a process of politicisation (Sébastien, 2022; Caro, 2020) that enables mobilised groups to undertake a process of "redefining their spatial and territorial embeddedness" (Melé, 2013, p. 7). The aim of this work is to show how space, considered "as the expression, crystallisation and product of specific social relations" (Combes et al., 2016), conditions the forms of collective action (Auyero, 2005). Starting from the fact that neighbourhood spaces are specific sites of social organisation and regulation (Haumont and Morel, 2005), the objective of this article is to give an account of the characteristics of forms of occupation marked by neighbourliness, using the case of the Bois Hardy collective as a point of departure.

Located in the extended Chantenay-Bellevue-Sainte-Anne district, the Bois Hardy hills area is a discreet place. Framed by a boulevard at the entrance to the town and a business park, it also borders the gardens of homes on the working-class Arthur Benoît housing estate and of the townhouses on rue du Bois-Hardy. From here, two separate alleyways lead to a partially cultivated 4-hectare wasteland, developed as a squat by the coteaux du Bois Hardy collective since 2016. Its members make a distinction between the first half of this area, which they describe as "natural" (fallow land, meadows, orchards, community and private gardens, etc.) and the other half, which they describe as "artificial" (car parks, sheds, waste facilities, etc.). On these slopes, formerly used as allotments for vegetable growing throughout the 20th century, the practice of gardening (which has continued throughout) has become more regulated with the creation of the collective.

The development plan announced by the Métropole in 2016 provided for the construction of a 400-unit housing scheme, along with offices and car parks. It is one of five operational subsections of the Bas-Chantenay urban development zone (ZAC), managed by Nantes Métropole's regional planning department and its local public company, Nantes Métropole Aménagement (NMA). Also included in this ZAC was the

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4. Engagement is understood here as a constraint and a capacity for individuals to grasp their environment. Research into the sociology of action began by highlighting engagements relating to the pooling of "goods" on the basis of justifications (legitimate magnitudes or shared higher principles defined by the "estates" model) (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991), then on the basis of familiarity (politics of closeness) and planning (rationality with a view to achieving objectives) (Thévenot, 2006).

creation of a *Heron Tree*[5] in an "extraordinary garden", which was more widely opposed, notably by the La Commune de Chantenay collective,[6] and finally abandoned in September 2022.

The coteaux du Bois Hardy collective is a heterogeneous group consisting of around thirty active members, most of whom live in the immediate vicinity of the wasteland. They are fairly diverse in age and background, although most belong to the middle or upper socio-economic categories.[7] Most of its members are also first-time activists, and this is their first experience of urban protest. The few people who belong to activist or party organisations rarely refer to this and present themselves as apolitical, just local people. The collective does, however, welcome representatives of friendly organisations, such as the Mouvement national de lutte environnementale (MNLE), the Droit au logement association (DAL) and other groups involved in the Métropoles en lutte network,[8] which it joined in 2018. The skills highlighted by the most active members relate to professional experience (law, journalism, local government, etc.), as well as community, cultural or artistic experience (some local residents have drawn on past experience in self-organisation processes to help build the collective).

The demands made by the coteaux du Bois Hardy collective in an attempt to influence the project were developed over the course of their interactions with the public authorities, as part of a gradually emerging critique of metropolitan urban production (Garnier and Devisme, 2022). The events that punctuated their group action confirm an already documented interdependence between conflict and institutional participation (Bobbio and Melé, 2015). The collective was structured in 2016 around two distinct groups: a group of third sector professionals united around food project leaders (market gardeners, restaurateurs, naturopaths, etc.), and a "citizen" group made up of residents engaged by the local aspect of the issue. Following the publication in the local press[9] of an article on an initial meeting instigated by a small group of

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5. Carousel designed by François Delarozière and Pierre Oréfice (the La Machine and Machines de l'île company).
6. This collective was formed out of a neighbourhood committee of support for the NDDL protection zone (ZAD), and brings together local residents and activists more widely involved in other campaigns in the conurbation. It opposed the Miséry quarry project by contributing to the writing of two books within the PUMA collective (Pour une métropole appropriée, autogérée, aquatique, assez chouette, amoureuse, à compléter, etc.; For an appropriate, self-managing, aquatic, pretty cool, loving, unfinished, etc. metropolis) (PUMA, 2019; 2021) and has been involved with other organisations (collectives and parties) in the Stop Arbre aux Hérons platform since winter 2021.
7. Data collected at the Îlots regroupés pour l'information statistique (IRIS) level by the Institut de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) in 2015 confirm that sub-neighbourhoods in the Chantenay-Bellevue-Sainte-Anne district are undergoing gentrification, although the Bois Hardy sector has been identified as an area that is "maintaining an average profile" (Rivière and Batardy, 2022).
8. An inter-collective formed in 2018 under the impetus of the Nantes Collective Against the Airport (CNCA), it brought together groups opposed to various urban projects carried out by the Nantes metropolitan area up to 2020.
9. « Le Bois-Hardy réclame un poumon vert », Ouest-France.fr, le 17 mars 2017.

neighbourhood residents, Nantes Métropole Aménagement set up a consultation process that led to the drafting of a set of recommendations for the urban project management team (Nantes Métropole Aménagement, le Bois Hardy, recommendations list, January 2018). The coteaux du Bois Hardy collective took part in the meeting and seized the opportunity to produce documents that it used to share an alternative vision of the project for the neighbourhood (collectif des coteaux du Bois Hardy, le collectif d'acteurs des coteaux du Bois Hardy, shared vision, annexes to the recommendations list, January 2018). This formalisation marked the definition of a joint set of demands based on a territorial consensus, the "T vert" ("green T"), a name inspired by the distribution of natural areas visible on the map. This spatial delimitation allowed members opposed to any new building to reach agreement with those who took the view that building could be limited to land where development had already taken place. The consultation confirmed the points of disagreement (including the requirement for 400 dwellings) left pending by the institution for a year. By 2019, the collective had become disillusioned, hardened its positions and took back control by rejecting the mediation with the Métropole called for by the project's supporters. In the summer of 2019, the statutory consultation period associated with the public enquiry prior to the creation of the ZAC enabled the collective to brandish the threat of legal action, which it initiated in April 2020. In the run-up to the municipal elections in March 2020, the local authorities were reviewing their objectives and pledged to "rethink the project and a different distribution of land use", according to a statement made at a public meeting in December 2019, abandoning the requirement for the construction of 400 homes. A new service provider was hired to manage the consultation process, and began to plan informal discussion seminars–interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic–between the residents' collective and city officials. A new round of official consultations resumed in summer 2021, with members of the collective taking part in limited numbers (restricted by the local authority) alongside a panel of randomly selected citizens. This second consultation, which I attended remotely, stifled the momentum of opposition, which was waning by autumn 2022.[10]

The movement initiated by the members of the coteaux du Bois Hardy collective was part of a drive for spatial justice, notably insofar as they linked their actions with the protection of biodiversity corridors in the city and opposing inequalities in access to environmental amenities in the urban environment. In helping homeless families to settle in houses compulsorily purchased and left empty by the Métropole, the collective also took a stand against inequalities in access to housing. Finally, by demanding a place in the decision-making process, its members set out their stall for the

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10. Divisions re-emerged when some local residents accepted the local authority's offer to participate in the development of the community gardens without challenging the plan for the adjoining housing development.

democratisation of urban production. It may also be considered that the collective came to terms with particular ways of achieving a wider impact, notably rooted in the occupation and use of local space. The uses of the area show how different regimes of engagement specific to a conflictual local space coordinate the actions of its members.

I build on ethnographic work conducted as part of my doctoral research in urban planning, which analysed mobilisation processes in and against metropolitan authorities. Observation of the coteaux du Bois Hardy residents' collective in Nantes ran from February 2019 to the summer of 2021 and continued remotely until July 2022. The study employed a number of methods to compensate for the fact that I was not living on the site, in particular by showing up regularly as a participant observer at formal and more informal group events. Thus, I openly took part in many aspects of the life of this collective (internal meetings, work camps, festive occasions, negotiations with public authorities, meetings with other organisations), even as an active member of the association's board of directors in 2020. Anxious to limit the influence of my presence on the ground, I responded to the collective's requests with material assistance linked to my training as an architect (maps, models, posters, etc.) without getting involved in the drafting of strategies and demands. Paying attention to the forms of interaction between protesters and decision-makers (Aguilera, 2018) also led to tracking the work of Métropole officials in the neighbourhood. Combined with personal involvement, my position fluctuated between engagement and distance.

Gardens as real-world places of practice and experiment

The Bois Hardy site was a place where demands could be made and expressed, but also where routine political practices could be deployed. In this sense, three types of superimposed uses could be found there: environmental uses, through the management of the gardens; activist uses, through actions linked to mobilisation; and relational uses, through the ordinary social relations that it afforded.

The gardens in which the collective's daily life was embedded were of different kinds (see Figure 1). Individual plots of land that preexisted the protest movement coexisted with plots that had been cultivated without formal rights in order to combat the housing project. There was tolerance over the use of the space, which had not been appropriated in its entirety by the collective, as evidenced by the fact that some gardeners still paid rent to Nantes Métropole. The gardens included vegetable patches and orchards. Some plots were managed more collectively than others, such as those dedicated to monocultures (potatoes, beans, etc.), which required occasional mass participation by the local population. Some were allocated to friendship or affinity

groups which joined forces to work on specific crops (medicinal plants), or even to individuals recognised for their diligence and dedication to collective tasks. One market gardener, who shared the goals of the collective and was close to the NDDL ZAD, had a plot of land from a family inheritance that he refused to sell to the local authority. For a while, a "forest garden" project, reflecting a more "entrepreneurial" vision of the site on the part of the project leaders, as a tool for negotiation on public space, played its part in the history of the movement. Finally, with a view to conserving areas of biodiversity that the members described as "non-anthropised", the collective decided to maintain areas of fallow land (brambles, meadows, etc.).
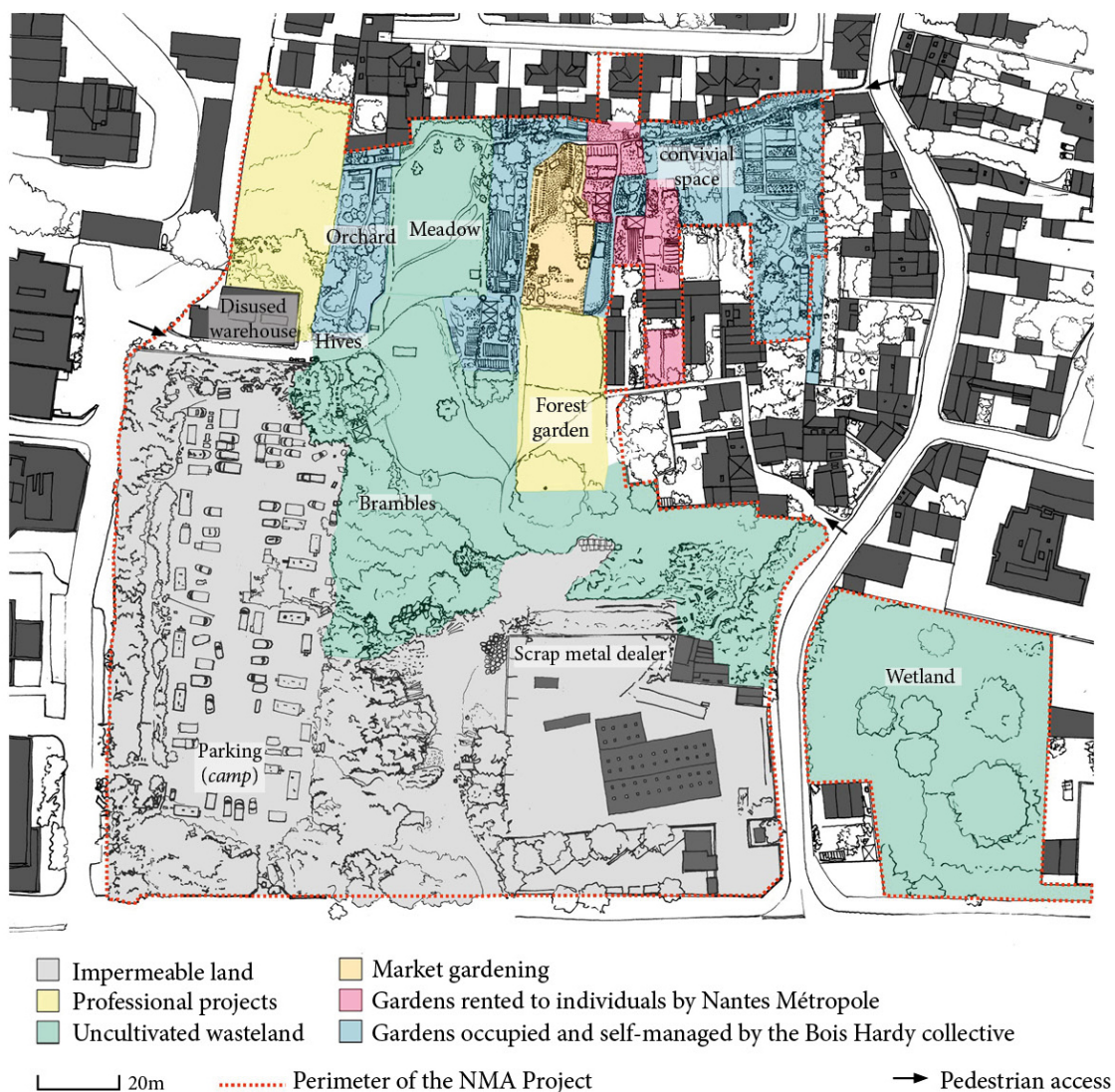

Figure 1: Sketch and location of the various Bois Hardy gardens

Source: Lucile Garnier, 2023

Sundays were designated as communal gardening days, although other informal get-togethers took place during the week. Weekly schedules organised other tasks that required consistent and regular commitment, such as maintaining beehives or footpaths. Gardening was a way to accumulate knowledge about soil behaviour, endangered species, wild flora, wetlands and so on. All this knowledge was reinforced by the collective's participation in public enquiries and in counter-assessments conducted as part of the opposition to the public project, thus constituting the environmental component of the land use case.

More broadly, the occupation of the gardens was a strategic process in which the positions that gave rise to collective values were justified. They represented the physical and localised embodiment of the value of the collective's presence and, by extension, of the possibility of imagining, designing and managing public spaces in this way. They were places to walk around in meetings with decision-makers, to rally support, to welcome a group of friends or journalists, or to bring local residents together, as happened at the citizen consultation organised by the collective in May 2019. Used in workshops initiated by the collective (notably with local schools), the gardens attracted potential new supporters (parents, community groups, etc.). With no permanent equipment, they could be used for the collective's weekly or occasional meetings–except in bad weather, when meetings took place in the participants' homes–and were a material medium for activism associated with protests against the public project. At these meetings, formal decisions were put to the vote, such as the decision to break with the project's initiators or to set up an association.

Punctuated with shared facilities (furniture, bread oven, games, bar, greenhouse, etc.), the wasteland as a whole was a stage for special social events, where occasional encounters could develop into long-term friendships. The site provided a regular venue for ordinary social events (see Figure 2) as well as more special occasions, such as the civil union of a neighbourhood couple or the birthday of the neighbourhood's senior female resident. It was also the arena for more formal festive events such as musical evenings or the annual Bois Hardy festival, which provided an opportunity to discuss the urban project (a model, a donation and petition box were provided), negotiations with the Metropole and gardening or strategy projects. Attended by more than fifty people, these events attracted outside visitors and neighbours not involved in the political activities or the gardens. During the study, they proved to be as much opportunities to celebrate neighbourhood life and develop networking as they were ways for all members to become mediators in their own right.

Figure 2: A meal between neighbours after a meeting of the collective
Source: Lucile Garnier, 2020

In this way, local residents formed a community of support, creating a special network of mutual aid out of which neighbourhood solidarity developed. The collective's group message service was used to organise specific purchases, to help the elderly, to support an evicted neighbour or to find solutions to technical problems in occupied homes. The mobilisation also seems to have encouraged the development of this community, which had grown over time, as one of its first protagonists recalls:

> "We had a bit of trouble getting the ball rolling [to] defend this place. And then P. came along and bought the so-called house of the neighbours, which they renovated. I didn't know her before. [...] One day, she knocked on the door and so we talked about it. And as I'd always wanted this area to be preserved, we bonded immediately." (extract from interview with L., local resident, 28 June 2019)

Key players in different roles created and nurtured the links that foster engagement. As the main interlocutors of the public authorities, they would report on the reasons for the mobilisation of local residents, which they were able to interpret

and put into context. Through their involvement in management and cooperation within the collective, they had a particular role to play on the arrival of new members, informally "showing them the ropes":

> "We introduce them to the place, show them where the keys are, how this garden works and how everyone can really make it their own. We also want this to spread by word of mouth." (presentation of the coteaux du Bois Hardy collective by P. at Superville Festival #4, 2 July 2019, field notes)

The upkeep and care of communal areas or plots, as well as tackling collective tasks, forged powerful common references, enabling people who played less of a part in the protests but who were regularly involved in the gardens to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of the other residents.

The use of the site was thus regulated by the political dimension of the occupation, but also by informal legitimacies such as the allocation of new plots, based on mutual agreements between gardeners. This was particularly the case during the lockdown in spring 2020, which gave the gardens a particular appeal. The involvement of new members was encouraged by the most prominent members of the collective. This opening up of new plots led to a debate on the legitimacy of access to space during a pandemic and on the "anthropisation" of the wasteland through cultivation, going against the argument for preserving "reservoirs of biodiversity" used against the development project. At the same time as reminding the new arrivals of the basics of the group's engagement, the key players in the mobilisation clarified the political dimension of collective gardening on a protection site, a dimension that was sometimes forgotten by certain members. This episode forced the group to formalise the use and management of the communal space by preparing a charter (which remained incomplete) to regulate the sharing of resources according to four types of commons-related criteria: land (approaches to the occupation and use of plots), money (collecting and spending the sums needed to acquire equipment), the sun (a metaphor for moments of celebration and conviviality) and water (tracking the commitment of the gardeners throughout the year and particularly in summer).

The space as a whole was governed by familiarity and mutual acquaintance: the degree of engagement in the gardens, in collective events, in organisational meetings, and also in ordinary neighbourhood social relations, all played a part in coordinating collective action. The place attachments arising from the uses of the wasteland made it possible to express mobilisation through action (rather than theory) and to open up informal arrangements based on familiarity (Blanc and Paddeu, 2019), both between members of the collective and with respect to the institution. They were therefore the site of a *sub-political* engagement, in the sense of a discreet practice of resistance akin

to "ordinary citizenship" (Carrel and Neveu, 2014) and taking forms other than "openly declared activities" (Scott, 2009, p. 216).

From the domestic to the political, the ambivalence of a mobilisation fuelled by a variety of forms of engagement

The social relations developed through the protected space were the product of forms of "valuation" (Centemeri, 2015) nourished by place attachments. At Bois Hardy, these attachments were projected onto the qualities of a protection area tended by a neighbourhood community which, as it was built and experimented with its role, assumed ambivalent attitudes to protest.

The district's working-class history and legacy were enlisted for the protection of the site. Building on academic work, such as a 1982 dissertation (Pinson, 1982), the links between the industrial city and vegetable gardens in the 19th century cited in the written work produced by the collective to promote alternatives to the initial project. As the hills were of poor quality for cultivation (the granite bedrock makes it difficult to irrigate the plots), the inhabitants drew on local memory for their social history and its collective dimension. This legacy was underpinned by family stories such as that of the neighbourhood's oldest female inhabitant, who had spent her life there, or that of "Jules' grandson", a market gardener who cultivated his grandfather's plot of land in order to oppose the development project and maintain a "cultural heritage" (remarks by the market gardener collected at the public consultation organised by the collective on 14 May 2019, field notes). Participating in the production and defence of neighbourhood life became a demand in itself, as expressed by one of the most committed residents:

> "What brings us together and what we want to defend is the neighbourhood life we've invented, which is incompatible with the fact that here, space is being covered in concrete, or [...] we're told how the gardens should be laid out." (M.'s presentation of the mobilisation at the citizen consultation organised by the collective on 14 May 2019)

This "neighbourhood life" acquires form in a collective that organises the development of alternatives (urban, dietary, cultural or democratic) that are valid in other places. The collective sees itself as a guarantor of the balance between human activities and biodiversity, but also as a political conduit between current and future residents and the Métropole.

By demonstrating an "already there" and a future to be defended, the history of the gardens enhances the qualities of a familiar, endangered territory shared by

everyone. It is also the product of a collective identification that gives meaning to the co-presence of local residents and politicises their day-to-day experience. This commitment to residential protest was publicly expressed at a press conference organised in response to the eviction of the families living there. Around thirty people came together as "a group of local residents in solidarity [performing] an act of resistance" (comments made by local residents during the press conference held in front of one of the occupied houses on 24 August 2020, excerpts from field notes), linking their commitment to "protecting the land" with that of helping the homeless. Building an engaged community also enabled the collective to take part in wider activist networks such as the intercollective Métropoles en lutte, or to participate in protest events such as the Balade des lieux à défendre (BLAD), a bicycle protest organised in the Nantes metropolitan region in 2019. Some members maintained informal links in their individual networks with people involved in these local struggles, who were often cited as examples at meetings. However, alliances with these groups rarely led to long-term coordination, as was the case with the neighbouring Commune de Chantenay.

Indeed, the observation that the majority of these group members participated in their capacity as local residents emphasises the fact that they had come together unintentionally, placed in a "situation of interdependence" by their spatial proximity (Haumont and Morel, 2005, p. 3). Their togetherness is thus based less on deliberate political aspirations than on common residential origin. Attracted by the gardens as a place of action and social connection, while at the same time opposing the development project, the participating local residents demonstrated multiple forms of engagement. The *sub-political* dimension of the collective actions undertaken there meant that the venue was open to a public that was both more neighbourhood-focused and more ideologically diverse. The specifically local configuration of the movement enabled members to choose whether or not to take part in shared moments and to commit themselves outside or alongside professional and family constraints. The interweaving of the public and private spheres was a key factor in the involvement of certain neighbours. This de facto co-presence could give rise to conflicts over shared space, conflicts that were intertwined with the issues at stake in the movement. A dispute over the storage of equipment adjoining one member's home resulted in his exit from the collective. The group's ambition was "to promote good understanding and good neighbourliness" (remarks made by a member of the collective at the press conference on 24 August 2020, excerpts from field notes), in combination with acts of resistance. This drove the need to maintain the practice of consensus and to engage in an almost permanent process of conflict resolution over issues that might arise from the occupation of the site, the management of the commons or alternative projects.

This dimension blurred the line between what was a matter of political choice and what depended on the care taken to ensure the maintenance of friendly relations.

Differences in political sensibilities could also lead to longer decision-making processes, with the result that the pathways needed to build a position were structured differently. This was demonstrated by the fact that the collective engaged both in informal and in more structured negotiations with institutional representatives. Although there was never a consensus among the members over participation in the various deliberative processes proposed by the contracting authority (to the point that it became a recurring source of internal conflict), this participation was seen as a means of expressing a critique of public action from within the mechanisms of consultation. Indeed, the collective's participation was conceived as a way to accommodate differing sensibilities while experiencing the metropolitan region's participatory processes, obtaining information, bringing in new residents or remaining visible as a group of opponents. This positioning was also developed through informal links maintained over time between key players in the collective and institutional leaders (city, development company, neighbourhood team, local councillors). On-site appointments and meetings with these figures enabled negotiations to take place outside the frameworks of Dialogue Citoyen, the municipal and metropolitan structure tasked with heading citizen participation initiatives. As a result, some members turned away from these strategies in favour of direct action, by stepping up the occupation of the site (collective work camps, organisation of events, etc.). These different negotiation tests were designed to protect them from the accusation that they were the guarantors of a privileged "insider group", while at the same time distancing them from the stereotype of the "anti-construction" activists. While these arguments led to disagreements, they confirmed the multiplicity of the allegiances with which local residents had to contend.

Conclusion

For the coteaux du Bois Hardy collective, the persistence of its opposition to the logic of public and private action and its ability to produce a reasoned position were rendered possible by the development of good social relations and by the possibility of testing the effectiveness of political engagement in the materiality of a place. This characteristic enabled it to construct an argument against the urban project, both in the near and distant future, which contained a set of arguments that were valid both for other urban situations and a very specific territory (its morphology, its history, its potential in the contemporary city). Involved in and through the neighbourhood's local space, the neighbourhood ties that bound its members influenced the collective dynamic and its political expressions.

In the same way as occupying practices marked by "prefigurative" engagements (Pleyers, 2016) or of a more "totalising" kind (Déchezelles and Olive, 2017), the local dimension of the mobilisation facilitates the durability of links through daily practice and "co-presence in the same locus of protest" (ibid.). Here too, the sharing of a space of experiences (whether ordinary or more exceptional) is one of the underpinnings of oppositional engagement, encouraging the emergence of processes of common politicisation (ibid.). This engagement does, however, have an impact on the ways of constructing a position, constrained by accommodations between the challenges of the struggle and the maintenance of a degree of conviviality necessary to the pursuit of collective action. The plural (and non-exclusive) commitments of the collective's members, both protesters and ordinary residents, demonstrate the need to take into account the role of space as an agent of collective mobilisation (Ripoll, 2006): experiencing its management or regulation on a daily and familiar basis can have an effect on a group, by influencing its structure or allowing the redefinition of what prompts it to action. In a local context informed by models of urban struggle, the framing of a local movement leads us to consider the sometimes predominant *sub-political* processes. These engagements should not therefore be contrasted with more radical activist practices, but prompt us to think about the interactions between different types of mobilisations, from the most visible to the most discreet. This contribution is an invitation to conduct a broader analysis of what is at stake in the arenas of opposition to metropolisation.

To quote this article

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