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Cureghem: from demolition to revitalisation

Cureghem : de la démolition à la revitalisation

Kuregem: van afbraak naar herwaardering

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Cureghem: from demolition to revitalisation

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This article focuses on the changes initiated by the new public policies for the urban revitalisation of 'vulnerable' neighbourhoods in Brussels. The analysis of Neighbourhood Contracts in Cureghem allows a better understanding of how the pre-existing context shapes this institutional innovation and of how a new public policy contributes to transforming political action. With the Neighbourhood Contracts, the municipal authorities of Anderlecht have gone from a project to demolish Cureghem to a project to revitalise it. However, this change was gradual. At first, the implementation of this mechanism in Cureghem revealed considerable inertia on behalf of the municipality due to its political and administrative culture and its lack of involvement in this new project. The objectives of this regional policy were achieved with the partial reconstruction of the local political landscape and the learning opportunities provided by the mechanism. The case of Cureghem thus demonstrates the role of local stakeholders in the creation of a public policy.

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Introduction¹

Cureghem is often in the spotlight: the feeling of insecurity, the social distress of its inhabitants, events in the news, police supervision, etc. As in other central neighbourhoods of Brussels, the lengthy disinvestment on behalf of the municipality led to a physical decline and an increase in social problems. Since the 1990s, the regional, federal and European levels have taken over these issues and have reinvested in these 'vulnerable neighbourhoods' by creating new public policies: the FIPI,² the Security and Prevention Contracts, the Neighbourhood Contracts and the Federal Policy for Big Cities (PFGV). These 'municipalist policies' (Nagels and Rea, 2007) give an important role to the municipalities and enable the financing of actions in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, led by municipalities confronted with financial difficulties resulting from their mode of financing, deindustrialisation, urban degradation, the high concentration of disadvantaged populations and the middle class flight to the suburbs. Paradoxically, their introduction has met with resistance on behalf of certain municipalities.

The municipal management of Neighbourhood Contracts targeting Cureghem sheds light on this phenomenon.³ The analysis of this case is aimed at drawing attention to the difficulties linked to the legitimisation of public intervention in central

¹ This article stems from the doctoral research currently under way relating to the comparison of new policies to combat social and spatial segregation in Brussels and Montreal, supervised by Andrea Rea (professor of sociology at ULB, Métices) and Serge Jaumain (professor of history at ULB, CENA) and financed within the framework of the IRSIB programme 'Prospective Research for Brussels'. This research is aimed at determining the degree of convergence and homogenisation of public action involved in the diffusion of this type of public policy. Due to their specificities, the analysis is based on several case studies of the two cities, centred on the neighbourhoods targeted by these policies in order to understand the elaboration processes involved.

² FIPI stands for the *Fonds d'impulsion à la politique des immigrés* (Impetus Fund for Migrant Policy).

³ For an overview of the management of new urban policies in Cureghem, see the dissertation presented by Laurent Picard in 2007 in view of obtaining the title of town planner from ISURU, Brussels, entitled *Outils, acteurs et projet de revitalisation urbaine : l'exemple de Cureghem en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*.

and immigrant neighbourhoods in Brussels as a new political priority, as well as those linked to the implementation of new local management practices. In a neo-institutionalist perspective, it enables an understanding of how the pre-existing context shapes this institutional innovation and of how a new public policy contributes to the change in political action. Furthermore, it underlines the centrality of political sensitivities of the local staff involved in the creation of public policies. To do so, it makes use of a qualitative study composed of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the creation of this public policy, documentary research and a review of press coverage.

We shall begin with a brief description of the main characteristics of the Neighbourhood Contracts. We shall then examine the limitations related to the introduction of this new public action approach in Cureghem. Finally, we shall discuss the elements which explain the partial and gradual lifting of these limitations.

1. Characteristics of the Neighbourhood Contracts

The Neighbourhood Contracts follow the operations to renovate blocks of houses (1977), which failed to produce the planned number of housing units due to a lack of interest on behalf of the municipalities and the sluggishness of the administrative procedures necessary for their implementation (Noël, 1998). The decree on the revitalisation of neighbourhoods of 7 October 1993 thus created a new instrument of public action, intended to improve the effectiveness of interventions. These contracts break with the traditional social and housing policies in several respects. Firstly, they are based on **territorial targets**. The definition of a priority area allows a concentration of resources in the most vulnerable places, implying a break with the principle of the universal redistribution of public resources which characterises the welfare state. Generally speaking, each year the regional government selects three or four neighbourhoods within the Area of Reinforced Development of Housing and Renovation (*Espace de Développement Renforcé du Logement et de la Rénovation*, EDRLR), which covers mainly the central neighbourhoods located in the inner ring of Brussels. This area was defined based on environmental and social indicators: the high concentration of derelict or vacant buildings, the lack of comfort of housing, the degradation of public spaces, the high population density and unemployment and school drop-out rates.⁴

Secondly, the **integrated or global approach** of these contracts considers both urban and social problems, thus initiating the shift from renovation centred on buildings towards a revitalisation of neighbourhoods which pays attention to the multiple causes of their decline (Thibault, 2001). More concretely, the contracts concern the production of social housing and medium-sized dwellings regulated by the public authorities or in partnership with private developers (sections 1 to 3), the renovation of public spaces (section 4), the construction of community facilities such as sports halls, community centres and nurseries, and the financing of projects aimed at the social and economic revitalisation of neighbourhoods, such as social and professional integration and financial aid for minor housing renovations (section 5).

⁴ DELOITTE & TOUCHE, ARIES and MORITZ B., 2001, *Bilan des Contrats de quartier 1994-1998 en Région bruxelloise. Phase B. Mise en œuvre des programmes*, Brussels, p. 3.

The Neighbourhood Contracts promote a project approach. The project is aimed at mobilising stakeholders from the territory concerned – including public and private stakeholders, collective organisations and inhabitants – by the political stakeholders, to consider the future of the territory in relation to its current situation, the available resources and the public policy objectives (Pinson, 2004). The aim is to create a network of different stakeholders in the territory resulting in a coproduction of public action which favours a less vertical and hierarchical definition of the local project, as well as a better recognition of local specificities. The partnership proposed goes beyond the example of the public private partnership (PPP). These new means of defining public action create a diversification of knowledge and resources upon which it is based, in as much as the elaboration processes and procedures prove to be as important as the content of the project itself. The Neighbourhood Contracts include several instruments aimed at encouraging mobilisation at local level: for the private stakeholders, the production of housing in partnership in section 3 and the expected spill-over effects; for the inhabitants and the collective organisation stakeholders in the neighbourhood, the tools for participation and consultation (local committee for integrated development and the inhabitants' general assembly). Despite the multiplication of stakeholders involved in the creation of the project, the political stakeholder nevertheless plays a central role, given that it is responsible for mobilising stakeholders and determining priorities, among others.

Fourthly, as the name indicates, the contracts are based on a **contractualisation** of the making of public policies. Thus, the contract between regional level and the municipality focuses on the formulation and the implementation of a local action programme for a duration of four years, to which are added two years for the realisation of real estate projects, and it sets the amount of regional intervention. The instrument is thus aimed at improving the efficiency of public intervention, by reducing the amount of time required to carry out the projects of public authorities and by limiting the available financing, as well as at increasing the responsibility of the municipalities by requiring municipal co-financing.

Finally, the contractualisation and the project approach involve a decentralisation which values the local level as being the most appropriate in defining solutions to the crisis experienced by these neighbourhoods (Rea, 1999; Schaut, 2007). This valorisation of the local level is accompanied by the implementation of a specific political and administrative culture, whereby the role of the traditional stakeholders of public action is somewhat marginalised in order to open up the processes of elaboration to the public and to the stakeholders concerned.

2. Difficult beginnings

2.1 Much debated results

Since 1997, Cureghem has benefited from six Neighbourhood Contracts.⁵ This mechanism has contributed to transforming the image and the physical environment of the neighbourhood – in particular through the elimination of eyesores and the development of public spaces – as well as to meeting certain needs of inhabitants in terms of housing and facilities. It has also produced its share of dysfunctions. This is why – although the programme does not have authority to resolve all of the problems of a neighbourhood and its objectives are not always clear⁶ – the transformation of the neighbourhood could have been more extensive. Indeed, several projects were called off or took many years to materialise (sports hall in Rue du Chimiste, nursery at Place Lemmens, etc.), required sums of money which were much higher than the initial estimates, or led to an under-use of infrastructures or to the construction of poorly finished housing. Whilst part of these failures must be attributed either to a lack of thorough knowledge on behalf of the municipal administration of the rules governing this new programme or to problems of vandalism, the problems regarding management and the political will of local councillors, the lack of long-term vision as regards the use of the community facilities created, and the difficult conditions for the participation of inhabitants are also to blame. The criticisms do not only come from the outside, from inhabitants or from collective organisations. A member of the local Socialist Party made the following remarks:

In Anderlecht, I think it was very clear that there was poor management. And I say it all the more readily because we were the ones in power in 1997. So it is no longer a question of political majority. [...] I think that after four Neighbourhood Contracts, things have not yet evolved as they should have done. I think it is a rather exceptional situation in Brussels, where we are about to begin the third regional funding in the same area. [...] It is therefore clear that the needs in the central neighbourhoods of Brussels are such that we cannot content ourselves with one Neighbourhood Contract. But I think that it is incredible to have a third Neighbourhood Contract and still to be in a situation which is, needless to say, not ideal.

In the following pages, we shall illustrate the extent to which these criticised results may be attributed to the different municipal political majorities. Two elements will be emphasised: the lack of legitimate intervention in the neighbourhood of Cureghem and the distance with respect to the administrative and political culture introduced by the Neighbourhood Contracts.

⁵ Cureghem has been the object of six Neighbourhood Contracts: Rosée (1997-2001), Goujons-Révision (1999-2003), Pecqueur-Aviation (2000-2004), Chimiste (2001-2005), Conseil (2004-2008) and Lemmens (2007-2011). A seventh, Canal-Midi, has been under consideration since 2009.

⁶ We are referring to the implicit objectives of replacement of the resident population and gentrification under cover of a policy aimed at reducing social exclusion, underlined in the report of the Court of Auditors presented to the House of Representatives entitled *Politique fédérale des grandes villes. Examen des contrats de ville et des contrats de logement 2005-2007*, December 2007, pp. 47-48. See also the article by Mathieu Van Crielingen and Julie Charles (2007) and the work by Abdelfattah Touzri (2007).

2.2 Putting Cureghem on the political agenda

In a context of intense politicisation of the integration of foreigners from the waves of post-war migration, the Neighbourhood Contracts have – in their way – imposed intervention in disadvantaged and immigrant neighbourhoods, establishing it as a political priority on the municipal agenda. The concentration of people of foreign origin in the EDRLR puts this programme in the category of public policies for integration and social compensation, in as much as they initially provided access to sociocultural and sports activities to parts of the population who did not have the means (Rea, 2006). In the Brussels region, some of these neighbourhoods have for a long time been the object of a political disinvestment which favoured real estate speculation, the weakening of the residential function of the city and their physical decay (Schoonbrodt, 2007).

Cureghem is located southwest of the Pentagon and is bordered by the South Station, the railway line, the Charleroi Canal and the boulevards of the small ring. It is therefore separated from the other neighbourhoods of the municipality of Anderlecht by the canal. For several decades, Cureghem has been a neighbourhood of transit, i.e. a gateway to the city for new migrants waiting for an improvement in their socio-economic situation. The neighbourhood is composed of a large working-class immigrant population,⁷ and took the brunt of the effects of deindustrialisation: an increase in the rate of unemployment, the development of eyesores, urban degradation, cohabitation problems, the feeling of insecurity and an increase in school drop-out rates.

Due to its geographic and social isolation, Cureghem was also abandoned by the municipal authorities. With its mainly immigrant population, the neighbourhood was of little interest with respect to elections (Meert, Mistiaen and Kesteloot, 1995). This political indifference was translated not only into the symbolic municipal marking,⁸ but also into the content and outcome of certain projects in the neighbourhood. Thus, the municipality had planned the disappearance of part of the neighbourhood, either for the construction of a motorway leading to its industrial area (Schoonbrodt, 2007), or for the construction of a group of housing and office towers based on the model of the North Quarter (Mistiaen, 1994). These municipality development projects conveyed the institutional and political racism⁹ of the municipal authorities, which categorised the population of Cureghem as being dangerous and undesirable. Following the 1991 riots, Jacques Simonet – head of the liberal opposition and future deputy mayor and then mayor of Anderlecht – expressed his opposition to

⁷ Working-class and immigrant populations settled there due to the low cost of renting the homes left by the middle-class people who moved to the suburbs (Mistiaen, Meert and Kesteloot, 1995). These working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods remained and grew due to the economic crisis. In Cureghem, people from an immigrant background represent approximately two thirds of the population (Mistiaen, 1994).

⁸ The sign announcing the entrance to the municipality of Anderlecht was located at the beginning of Rue Wayex just at the edge of Cureghem, or in other words, on the other side of the canal.

⁹ According to Andrea Rea (2006), institutional and political racism includes the refusal of certain municipalities in Brussels to register foreigners, an openly racist view of immigrants expressed by all of the traditional parties and the refusal to grant them the right to vote.

the reinforcement of social prevention policies in this type of neighbourhood, declaring that the financing of programmes for the integration of immigrants should be brought to an end and that the money should be earmarked for the promotion of the police effort (Rea, 1999). Supported in particular by the socialist mayor, Christian D'Hoogh, who stated shortly afterwards, 'Keep Cureghem out of my sight',¹⁰ J. Simonet mentioned the return of illegal immigrants to their countries of origin or more security and firmness with respect to foreigners¹¹ in his criticism of the integration and cohabitation policy led by P. Reniers.¹²

Until the mid-1990s, the main party in the municipal council – the SP (Socialist Party), which had been at the head of the municipality for several decades – converged with the LRP (Liberal Reform Party)¹³ – the municipality's main political opposition group until 1993 – regarding the principle of minimal intervention in Cureghem, thus reinforcing the marginalisation of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. Although there had already been a first attempt at concerted and integrated intervention specifically targeting the neighbourhood, the political and administrative hostility towards any type of intervention in the neighbourhood undermined this experiment. Between 1989 and 1994, Pierre Reniers, CSP (Christian Social Party) deputy mayor of urbanism, urban renovation and collective organisations, tested an integrated approach to neighbourhood revitalisation.¹⁴ A social development charter was adopted in June 1989 by the municipal council, on the eve of the field visit to Cureghem by the members of the European network 'Regeneration of Neighbourhoods in Crisis' (Jacquier, 1991). However, this formal recognition of the Social Development of Neighbourhoods (DSQ, *Développement Social des Quartiers*) was accompanied by considerable inertia on behalf of the municipality in the participation in the elaboration and implementation of the action programme, whilst the new South Station favoured real estate speculation in the neighbourhood. In addition, P. Reniers was called the 'deputy mayor of the damn Arabs' by the members of the municipal council and civil servants, due to his action in Cureghem.

In 1997, with the granting of the first Neighbourhood Contract to the municipality of Anderlecht by the Brussels-Capital Region targeting the area around La Rosée Park in Cureghem, there was a decisive move from a project to demolish Cureghem to a project to revitalise it. However, this turning point should not be overestimated. The

¹⁰ COUVREUR D., VUILLE, N., HANNAERT P., 'Anderlecht connaît déjà son champion', in *Le Soir*, Saturday 1 October 1994.

¹¹ 'Simonet répond à Reniers', in *Le Soir*, Friday 1 July 1994.

¹² VUILLE N., 'L'immigration, la sécurité et la propreté comme thèmes de campagne, Jacques Simonet déjà en 1^{er} échevin d'Anderlecht', in *Le Soir*, Tuesday 3 November 1993.

¹³ In May 2002, the LRP, the FDF (*Front Démocratique des Francophones*) and the Catholic Citizens' Movement (*Mouvement des Citoyens Catholiques*) gathered to form the Reform Movement (*Mouvement Réformateur*).

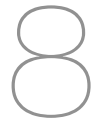
¹⁴ The Social Development of Neighbourhoods (DSQ, *Développement Social des Quartiers*) is a programme which stems from the European network 'Neighbourhoods in Crisis', implemented in Cureghem in 1989. The DSQ had objectives which were quite similar to those of the Neighbourhood Contracts in terms of local economic and social development, improvement of the physical surroundings and reinforcement of social ties, but with more modest instruments and resources. Furthermore, the DSQ is one of the sources of inspiration of the Neighbourhood Contracts.

project supported by the municipality in several Neighbourhood Contracts did not correspond to the philosophy of the Neighbourhood Contracts in terms of the rehabilitation of the residential function and public spaces in vulnerable neighbourhoods, or to the new city-making processes. On the one hand, the municipal majority had revitalisation plans in connection with increased activity in the car sector, mentioning the sector's potential for local development and the continuity of the commercial function, as well as its historical function. This conception did not take into account the environmental pollution of this type of activity, its incompatibility with renewed residential promotion in the central neighbourhoods of Brussels, or the conclusions of the DSQ, which advocated supervision and the gradual decrease in this activity (Mistiaen, 1994). On the other hand, measures within the remit of the municipality such as the maintenance of existing municipal facilities or the reduction of traffic in certain streets were not taken to improve the quality of public spaces. Furthermore, certain development choices were more in line with revitalisation in terms of security, thus proving that they were influenced by a distrust of the residents rather than an improvement in their living conditions. Finally, the collaboration with the inhabitants and collective organisations in the neighbourhood in the definition of the action programme proposed by the mechanism was often neglected or even sidestepped by the local elite.

Although the disinterest and distrust on behalf of the municipal majority (SP-LRP-FDF) as regards Cureghem no longer went hand in hand with a public disinvestment in the neighbourhood, they reduced the extent of the revitalisation. In Cureghem, the municipal stakeholder represented a veto point – according to the term used by Ellen Immergut (1992) – which was important for revitalisation, i.e. a stakeholder which was capable of slowing down or impeding the effects of this new mechanism. The representations of local stakeholders in connection with the neighbourhood weakened its impact. As underlined by Jacques de Maillard (2002), the systems of stakeholders and earlier representations do not disappear with the introduction of new public policies.

2.3 Resistance to the new methods of public intervention

In addition to simply transforming the building environment and public spaces in these neighbourhoods or proposing new facilities and services to their residents, the Neighbourhood Contracts initiated a rationalisation of the methods of public intervention. Since the granting of the first Neighbourhood Contract to the municipality of Anderlecht, this mechanism has been managed by the Urban Renovation Department (SRU, *Service de Rénovation Urbaine*). The department was created on this occasion and was added to the existing administrative structure in order to spare the already busy civil servants this task. However, this seemingly rational choice caused delays in the realisation of certain projects. Furthermore, the considerable compartmentalisation of the municipal administration isolated the department, as collaborations were much more difficult to establish between departments than between people in the same department. These reasons for resistance to collaboration were mentioned on several occasions with respect to obtaining planning permission and the design, management and maintenance of housing and facilities. Cooperation was all the more difficult given that the SRU staff – apart from its head of department – were newcomers in the local public service. The SRU therefore benefited



very little from the administrative and practical expertise of the municipal administration.

The low staff numbers also contributed to the difficult functioning of the SRU. In the beginning, there was an average of three or four people in the department: the head of department and the staff. With the granting of new Neighbourhood Contracts to the municipality, the rotation of social and technical coordinators prevented the continuous follow-up of contracts, the accumulation of expertise regarding the procedures, situation and needs of the neighbourhood, and the establishment of a lasting dialogue between the SRU, the representatives of collective organisations and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

These obstacles to the realisation of an integrated and project-based approach proposed by the Neighbourhood Contracts would not have been as significant if the municipal executive (SP-LRP-FDF) itself had not been fragmented. The majority practice – which still applies today – consisted in allowing each deputy mayor the autonomous management of the activities within his or her remit. The lack of political will and political fragmentation reinforced each other mutually. Much of the administrative resistance could have been overcome if the different deputy mayors concerned had ordered the departments under their responsibility to deal with it. The existing local and administrative political culture therefore adapted quite poorly to the necessities of the new approach proposed by the regional authorities.

3. The emergence of a new political and administrative culture in Anderlecht

With time, certain dysfunctions have been recorded thanks to political and administrative changes. These transformations are not necessarily related to the Neighbourhood Contracts, but they have an impact on their management and together they explain the gradual legitimisation of intervention in Cureghem and the production of new methods of public action. This new municipal culture – which nevertheless coexists with the former one – has allowed improvements in the management of the mechanism.

3.1 The reconstruction of the local political landscape

In the political sphere, the attitude of the municipal majority has evolved with respect to the neighbourhood as well as the new practices introduced by the Neighbourhood Contracts. The political culture which still dominated in the 1990s weakened as a result of the slow reconstruction of the political landscape. In the leading parties, there was therefore a partial and gradual conversion of the municipal political class to the objectives of this public policy thanks to the changes which took place at local and regional level. Firstly, due to his regional and national political ambitions, J. Simonet, mayor of Anderlecht between 2001 and 2007, softened his position regarding immigrants (Goldman, 2000). He did not prevent the interventions which were planned in the neighbourhood, but did not encourage them. Secondly, the accession of Eric Tomas – head of the socialist opposition on the municipal council of Anderlecht between 2001 and 2006 – to the position of regional minister in charge of urban renovation in 1999 contributed to the conversion of Anderlecht

socialists to the philosophy of revitalisation and confirmed the party's interest in this neighbourhood, with the granting of several Neighbourhood Contracts.

The renewal of political staff also contributed to the change in attitude of the local political class regarding Cureghem. Let us mention first of all the pioneering role of P. Reniers (CSP), who began the revitalisation of the neighbourhood with the DSQ. There was then the arrival of the Green Party (Ecolo) on the local political scene, which saw a continuation of this growing openness of the local political elite towards an intervention centred on Cureghem and methods of public intervention inspired by participatory democracy. Finally, the retirement of C. D'Hoogh and the 'cure of opposition' of the SP in Anderlecht imposed a certain renewal, which provided more room for elected representatives from the new generation of the SP, in particular those from a Northern African immigrant background with a less stigmatising view of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants.

Thirdly, the changes in the criteria for obtaining the Belgian nationality for citizens of EU member states and non-member states, as well as the right to vote in municipal elections granted to foreign residents, modified parties' strategies – with the exception of far-right parties – in order to obtain votes from this new electorate (Jacobs, Martiniello and Rea, 2002; Boussetta, 2006). Along with these reforms, territories with large concentrations of immigrant populations such as Cureghem became electoral stakes and the object of political reinvestment. Although there was an alignment of parties with respect to this stake, this interest was initially motivated by the need to stand out in the local electoral race.

In the prolongation of the reconstruction under way in the local political sphere, a renewal and a conversion of the local administrative staff also took place. The recruitment of a new generation of administrative staff who were sensitive to the integrated approach and the stakes involved in vulnerable neighbourhoods thanks to their work experience with collective organisations or their training, facilitated the implementation of coordination and cooperation between the different municipal departments.

However, this reconstruction did not fully eradicate certain beliefs. Indeed, the incivilities and the events in the news which are part of the daily life of the neighbourhood are still an argument used by certain political and institutional stakeholders to refuse or transform certain development projects financed by this public policy – such as the construction of a pedestrianised street – and to uphold more repressive measures. A wariness of certain fringes of the population of Cureghem still exists, which contributes to the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood.

Although it has not led to the emergence of a leader who is capable of upholding the revitalisation of the neighbourhood, the reconstruction of the local political and administrative landscape has nevertheless favoured the legitimisation of public intervention in Cureghem and the acceptance of new methods of public action. This reconstruction, which has taken the form of a true generational split, has facilitated the adoption of certain practices related to the project approach. Beyond ideological and partisan support as well as institutional structures, the impact of reconstruction on the implementation of Neighbourhood Contracts illustrates the fact that the stakeholders involved in the creation of this public policy are not neutral. They impregnate it with their ideas, beliefs and ways of working.

3.2 Learning opportunities

Thanks to the renewal of the political and administrative staff of the municipality of Anderlecht, the Neighbourhood Contracts also provided opportunities to gain knowledge, which mainly represented lessons learned from past experiences (Rose, 2005). These learning opportunities led to adjustments to local realities on behalf of regional stakeholders as well as adaptations at local level to the recurrence of this type of mechanism.

On several occasions, the regional government revised the functioning of the mechanism by further specifying the procedures:¹⁵ the functioning of participatory areas was detailed, the content and phasing of the basic programme subject to approval by the regional government were set, and instruments for support provided to the municipalities were created. Thus, for a certain time, the Regional Secretariat for Urban Development (SRDU, *Secrétariat Régional au Développement Urbain*) was a support tool for municipalities in the facilitation of participatory bodies and in determining the social measures. The regional level therefore adapted itself and sized up the existing limitations in certain municipalities by reinforcing the vertical and hierarchical character of the mechanism.

At municipal level, several changes provided these learning opportunities.

The multiplication of mechanisms of this type contributed to a gain in knowledge and the spreading of the integrated approach at local level. On the one hand, there were several successive Neighbourhood Contracts. On the other hand, mechanisms from different levels of government such as Urban II, Objective 2, PFGV (Federal Policy for the Big Cities) and the *Quartiers d'initiatives* (initiatives areas), reinforced the weight and legitimacy of the integrated approach as well as the territorial targeting of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. As such, they participated in the spread of these principles and these new practices within the municipal entities.

The strengthening of the SRU through the hiring of staff, the restructuring of its operations and the reduction in staff rotation, encouraged a gain in knowledge with respect to past experiences, which led to a better follow-up of Neighbourhood Contracts, collaborations, innovative projects and a more long-term vision of the use and financing of community facilities. Thus, in spite of the administrative division still in effect, initiatives such as the organisation of urban workshops dedicated to La Rosée neighbourhood or the online publication of documents related to the 'Lemmens' Neighbourhood Contract by the *Maison de la Participation d'Anderlecht*, show that collaborations between the municipal departments are being established, are multiplying and are going beyond the sectoral boundaries of administration, by becoming more independent of politics through the competence, knowledge and experience they develop with respect to the mechanism.

The mobilisation of collective organisations, residents and certain elected representatives in the criticism of failures due to the poor municipal management of Neighbourhood Contracts also played a role in revising the management methods of the mechanism. On the one hand, it is not unrelated to the changes within the SRU. On

¹⁵ The decree on the revitalisation of neighbourhoods of 7 October 1993 was revised on two occasions by the orders of 20 July 2000 and 27 July 2002.

the other hand, the objections have led to the division of powers related to the Neighbourhood Contracts between the different deputy mayors concerned. This new division of powers within the municipal majority (SP, CDH and FDF) is aimed at reducing the under-use of financing, improving coordination between the actions undertaken, increasing collaboration between deputy mayors, producing a municipal vision of the use of Neighbourhood Contracts and distributing funds among the main partners of the majority.

This last point shows that alongside these splits and evolutions, a degree of inertia still remains. In October 2006, due to the number of votes obtained, the political negotiations between the constituents of the municipal majority (RM-SP-SPA-CDH) led to the third renewal of the mandate of the deputy mayor who had been in charge of the Neighbourhood Contracts since 1997, even though her management of the contracts had for a long time been associated with many delays.¹⁶ This responsibility was not taken away from her, although she now focuses on the management of matters related to housing and programme coordination. When all is said and done, her management qualities are rather inadequate. The fact that this belief is shared and that it leads to no tangible changes has two major consequences. The first is related to the effects it produces. At symbolic level, there is a feeling of abandonment and inertia which still exists and is expressed by many residents and stakeholders on the ground. The second is the result of what is learned as regards the links between partisan logic and the obligation for public interventions to be effective. In spite of all that is said about good local governance and the merits of municipal autonomy, this political confirmation proves the coexistence of two political cultures rather than the complete disappearance of the older of the two.

4. Conclusion

The evolution of the management of the Neighbourhood Contracts in Cureghem presents several valuable elements in the analysis of public policies. Firstly, a new public policy does not completely change the behaviour of stakeholders and institutions involved in its creation. The binding nature of a public policy is limited, but is not non-existent. In Cureghem, it initiated the move from the demolition of the neighbourhood to its revitalisation. Therefore, in order to achieve its objectives and purpose, a public policy must be supported by stakeholders with the same principles and the resources to make them operational, as they are not neutral. In Cureghem, certain dysfunctions were overcome thanks to the reconstruction of the political and administrative staff, and to the collective gain in knowledge. The change initiated by the Neighbourhood Contracts was therefore incremental and gradual. Finally, despite the diversification of stakeholders, the local political stakeholders continue to play a crucial role in public policies: they are capable of influencing certain priorities as well as certain aspects of the functioning of municipal administration.

¹⁶ VERSTRAETEN G., 'Vanpévenage doit s'expliquer. Jacques Simonet menace de lui retirer ses compétences', in *Le Soir*, 9 May 2007.

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