



Membre de
UNIVERSITÉ DE LYON



International Conference

Community organizing : empowering the citizens?

**ENTPE, Vaulx-en-Velin, France
14, 15 & 16 March 2012**



**This conference is organized under the Umbrella of the UNESCO chair on
“Urban Policies and Citizenship”**

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coming soon

In large cities, many projects involving the inhabitants of deprived neighbourhoods are being set up under the “living together better” banner, with social goals such as poverty alleviation. However, these projects often find it particularly difficult to mobilize local inhabitants, especially the most disadvantaged. More generally, participative projects are often limited to consultative mechanisms that do not grant the inhabitants any real power to act or make decisions.

In view of these limits, community organizing methods are presented as innovative means for mobilizing a wide diversity of individuals around issues such as housing, wages, jobs, security and political exclusion. These methods are designed to bring to the fore intermediaries between individuals on the one hand and the state and the market on the other. Supported by community organizers, inhabitants set their own political agenda and expect the economic and political elite of the territory in which they organize to be accountable. As a result, their capacity to exercise their democratic rights and to participate in political action is strengthened locally.

In France, as in other countries, interest in this model of social action and political participation is growing. This is a result not only of the “Obama effect” - Obama having been a community organizer in Chicago - but also of the limits of the urban regeneration policy and the frustration expressed by social workers. Representatives of political parties and of local authorities are showing an increasingly keen interest in these methods of mobilisation.

In order to articulate academic work with the work of those involved in citizens organizing efforts, the conference will be held over three days:

The purpose of the two first days is to review multidisciplinary knowledge (in sociology, political science, geography, urban studies, etc.) on community organizing. In the broad sense of the term, it is regarded as a toolkit for the local organization of individuals and groups in view of promoting political and social change. As these tools can be used differently, to potentially contradictory ends - depending on the approach through which they are applied -, the idea is to open comparative perspectives. This will be done by examining community organizing (along with community development) in a French context in relation to its understanding in other European or North American countries. Four main topics in the form of questions are suggested.

The third day will be devoted to practical applications in France: it will overview diverse citizens' initiatives in relation to community organizing and propose strategic workshops on the subject. A part of the speakers of the two first days are involved in action research around community organizing in their countries (USA, Canada and UK). Therefore, this conference will also be an opportunity to question the links between academic research and practices.



8h30 Welcome and registration

9h30 Introductions

Welcoming speeches

Presentation of the conference, **Hélène Balazard** (Université de Lyon)

10h15 Introductory conference

Marion Orr (US, Brown University)

Mark Warren (US, Harvard University)

11h30 Topic 1 - Community organizing as a toolkit :

What tools are used to mobilise individuals and how are they taken up?

Community organizing is often seen as a toolkit for mobilising people. Which of the techniques in this toolkit are used most, in which situations ? What mechanisms mobilise individuals who ordinarily would remain on the fringes of the public sphere ? How are the various local interests reconciled, especially when they diverge ? How are decisions made ? How can mobilisation be sustained ? Apart from case studies, how and for whom is a repertory of professional knowledge constituted ? What are the modalities of training and dissemination of this knowledge and these techniques ? How are these techniques transposed from the English-speaking countries where they originated, to other countries such as France ? How does the importing of these techniques lead to the renewal or even the transformation of existing approaches ? What difficulties are identified with regard to the transposition or to the existence of different traditions of public action ?

Joan Minieri (US, New York University)

Eric Shragge (Canada, Université Concordia)

Jane Wills (UK, Queen Mary University)

13h45 Lunch

15h00 Topic 2 - Which policies for which participation ?

Between the state's disengagement and citizen counter-power

Various, often ambiguous attempts have been made by neoliberal policies in English-speaking countries and international organizations to "harness" community organizing. Generally attached to the notion of empowerment, it is promoted as a technique enabling civil society to organize itself in order to compensate for the disengagement of public authorities with regard to housing, security or economic development. This perspective seems to correspond to David Cameron's definition of the missions of a community organizer in his Big Society vision, but clearly differs from Saul Alinsky's conception originally proposed. Alinsky argued that community organizing serves above all to organize citizen counter-powers.

Hence, widely diverse practices are put under the community organizing banner. How the tools of community organizing are disseminated, and how have they been transposed via collective bottom-up actions, community development initiatives and public policies aimed at "communities"? What are the forms and effects of the public's participation in these different approaches ?

Robert Fisher (US, Connecticut University)

Marie-Hélène Bacqué (France, Université Paris Ovest)

Maurice Glasman (UK, Metropolitan University)

17h30 End of Day 1



9h30 Topic 3 - Which communities? Who is mobilised by whom?

Which communities are mobilised in community organizing ? What is the scale concerned : neighbourhood, town or region ? Is community organizing based on an ethnic group and the solidarity networks linked to it ? Or is the reference rather to a social group defined by a spatial perimeter, such as a neighbourhood ? In this case, has France, with its policy of social development not done community organizing without knowing it ? More broadly, what are the criteria on which a community is defined ? Are these criteria peculiar to the community concerned or are they determined by an outside institution ? The reference to the notion of community is not trivial, especially in France. Could we talk about "communauté" by translating the word "community" ? Why do Anglo-Saxons put this special emphasis on the notion of community ?

Cherry Schreker (France, Université de Nancy)

Joseph Kling (US, St Lawrence University)

Luke Bretherton (UK, King's College University)

12h00 Lunch

13h30 Topic 4 - What citizenship ? What Democracy ? Community organizing and the fear of communitarianism

A cross-cutting question is: what type of citizenship is promoted through community organizing ? How does this movement enhance the functioning of democracies ?

While new types of collectives are created, which do effectively constitute counter-powers and enable some citizens to participate in collective life, what is the nature of the political interests constituted in this way ? More broadly, what models and understandings of politics and democracy are implied or suggested by community organizing ?

In France, taking "communities" as a base seems contrary to the republican ideal of universalism where cultural diversity is tolerated but has to remain in the private domain and not "invade" the public sphere. The state does therefore not seem to be in a legitimate position to encourage or even to tolerate the action of community organizations in neighbourhoods where a large proportion of immigrants, with their own cultural practices and values, are living. What forms of citizenship does community organizing favour in the English-speaking countries? Are such forms of citizenship peculiar to the political culture of these countries ?

Pierre Hamel (Canada, Université de Montréal)

Jacques Donzelot (France, Université Paris Ouest)

Harry Boyte (US, Minnesota University)

16h00 Conclusion

Yves Sintomer (France, Université Paris 8)

Peter Dreier (US, Occidental College)

17h30 End of Day 2



« **Developing community organizing in France : stakes and challenges** »

Co-organised by practitioners, professionals and activists, supported by le collectif Pouvoir d'Agir.

Temporary program

9h30 Views on citizen empowerment experiences

11h00 Strategic workshops. How can community organizing be developed in France ?

Essential skills, best practices, funding, professional and militant stances, relationships with authorities...

12h45 Lunch

14h15 Strategic workshops

16h00 Conclusions and debates

17h00 End of conference



Organization Committee

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Localization

Conference will be held at the Ecole Nationale des Travaux Publics de l'Etat (ENTPE) :

Université de Lyon

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Access plan : www.entpe.fr/fr/internet/contenu/l_ecole/situation_et_acces

Registration

The participation fee includes lunch and interpretation :

Full : 150 euros TTC

Reduced fee : 55 euros TTC *Phd Students & Post-Docs and members of associations whose purpose is related to the conference theme.*

An official training agreement and/or attendance certificate may be established on demand.

Registration details will follow soon.

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