Abstract – This paper examines the impact of government action on the rise and fall of low-income home ownership in France. It focuses on the political construction of housing markets, and specifically on how the Ministry of Public Works (Ministère de l’Équipement) stimulated the supply of low-cost single-family homes in the early 1970s by implementing a policy that resulted in the construction of nearly 70,000 houses known as chalandonnettes. Based on records from the ministry, the paper analyzes the role its senior officials played in this policy. In the late 1960s, they had little doubt that direct and centralized government intervention in the production of low-cost housing was the best way to regulate the sudden growth in suburban housing. However, as the balance of power shifted within the public institutions involved in housing policies in the 1970s, this type of public action lost legitimacy and was replaced with a more indirect form of government intervention in the low-cost housing market, which redefined low-income home ownership.
How did successive forms of government action stimulate or hinder low-income home ownership in France? This paper attempts to answer this question by focusing on the *chalandonnettes* episode and more generally on the origin and decline of the centralized policy introduced in the early 1970s, which the French public administration referred to as a “policy on clustered single-family homes.” *Chalandonnette* is a nickname for a house built as part of large, dense clusters of prefabricated single-family homes created as part of a competitive scheme launched in 1969 by the Minister of Public Works (*Ministère de l’Équipement*). Officially known as the International Competition for Single-Family Homes (*Concours International de la Maison Individuelle* – CIMI), this competitive scheme was in fact a policy aimed at regulating and influencing the production of single-family homes by private actors. Despite receiving little support from home builders, senior officials in the ministry hoped that this policy would stimulate a new and more rational supply of low-income homes. The term *chalandonnette*, which derived from the name of the Minister of Public Works, Albin Chalandon, when the scheme was started, emerged only later and was used pejoratively to refer to the 60,000 to 70,000 houses built under the scheme, which were criticized for their poor quality. This paper examines the origin of this centralized policy and the negative image that quickly emerged of the forms of low-income housing it promoted.

The paper combines two types of inquiries. Firstly, it considers how history and urban sociology interpreted the emergence of normative models of low-income housing within central, regional, and local governments and related institutions, including the Social Museum (*Musée Social*), the Deposits and Consignments Fund (*Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*), and the Paris Region District (*District de la Région Parisienne*) throughout the twentieth century as well as the link between the standards generated and those who generated them. Starting in the mid-1960s, how did senior officials in the Ministry of Public Works disseminate a legitimate representation of low-income homeownership? As part of the Chalandon scheme, they promoted a specific form of such ownership, namely “new villages” consisting of prefabricated houses. The way these rationalized single-family homes were defined is part of the long history of attempts by central government agencies in charge of construction and urban planning to regulate the spread of suburban housing. Proponents of these new villages contrasted them with the unregulated spread of private


residential developments, which were seen as presenting the risk of reviving the defective housing estates of the interwar period. A few years later, as a power struggle got underway at the highest levels of French public administration on the topic of reforming housing aid policy, the same administration played a part in the critique and symbolic devaluation of this rationalized form of housing, which had become synonymous with low quality. Records of the scheme and how it played out can elucidate how various views on developing low-income home ownership aligned at first and then came into conflict in the ministry, thereby contributing to the paradoxical fate of the chalandonnettes.

Second, this paper examines the political construction of housing markets and analyzes modes of government intervention in the construction sector. In doing so, it appropriates one of the perspectives of the collective study of the economics of single-family homes led by Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, the spread of single-family home ownership among low-income groups should not be viewed as the mere outcome of “natural” aspirations to own single-family homes but as the result of a dual construction of supply and demand by housing policies. However, in the specific case he examined (namely the spread of prefabricated homes in the 1980s), the political construction of the market took the form of remote intervention by the state mainly via the 1977 reform to housing policy, which shifted housing aid toward individuals and facilitated households’ access to home loans. These modes of action contrast with the more direct intervention that from the 1950s enabled the Ministry of Construction (later renamed Ministry of Public Works) to strongly influence technical aspects of low-income housing, whether houses or apartments, financed by subsidized loans. However, looking at the case of the policy on clustered single-family homes, it appears that in the late 1970s, the ministry was still trying to intervene from the top down to regulate the supply of low-cost housing. At that time, it was still using modes of intervention aimed at lowering construction costs that had been tried and tested during the prior decades. To influence supply, it made it necessary to meet specific technical criteria in order to obtain government-subsidized financing, (including price caps, maximum square footage and acreage, limited number of models, mass production, and minimal size of operations). However, this attempt at creating new supply met with resistance from private home builders, whose modes of production officials in the ministry intended to modify. The ministry thus failed to create in the private sector a group of American-style builders, to use a term dating back to the start of a scheme intended to facilitate the widespread construction of clusters of low-cost homes. Only public and semi-public developers,

low-income housing bodies, or subsidiaries of the Deposits and Consignments Fund (Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations) temporarily endorsed the policy, and in the late 1970s, the option of prefabricated homes became the main channel for access to low-cost housing.

This paper covers three time frames. First, it addresses the origin in the Ministry of Public Works (created in 1966) of a new approach to rationalizing the growth of single-family homes, which had been tried and tested prior to the Chalandon scheme. Second, it examines how the ministry made the principle of centralized intervention appear the obvious choice for changing the then-dominant production modes of single-family homes and for stimulating a new type of supply. Third, this paper examines the doubts raised over this consensus following the critical review by the ministry’s Directorate of Construction (Direction de la Construction) in the second half of the 1970s of the outcome of the Chalandon scheme, whose productions were then given the pejorative nickname of chalandonnettes.

Box 1. Government Records of the Policy on Clustered Single-Family Homes

The records of the Ministry of Public Works attest to its increasing involvement in the production of clustered homes in the late 1960s followed by its withdrawal from this area in the mid-1970s. Most records examined for this study pertained to the CIMI and come from various divisions of the ministry: the minister’s cabinet (CAC 19770813, Max Stern files, the Minister’s technical advisor), the Directorate of Construction (Direction de la Construction, CAC 19840592), and the Directorate of Land Use and Urban Planning (Direction de l’Aménagement Foncier et de l’Urbanisme, CAC 19770706). These records were compared, particularly those pertaining to preparations for the scheme (preliminary meetings, market research, and selection of competitors and evaluators) and its progress (correspondence with developers, local officials, local offices of the ministry, and progress reports). This comparison reveals the process whereby competition rules were set and winners selected. To place the competition in the context of the ministry’s prior interventions in the supply of single-family homes, this archival analysis was supplemented by reviews of both earlier and later records. In chronological terms, the first records reviewed pertain to “Villagexpo” (CAC 1977153), displays of model houses the ministry began sponsoring in 1966. A document submitted by the office of Construction Economics (Économie de la Construction, CAC 20010298) regarding the promotion of industrialization places the case of single-family homes in the broader context of technical policies addressing construction. Lastly, a large set of records on the preparation and implementation of the 6th plan (1971–1975) in relation to public works, urban planning, and construction (CAC 19850389) contains files on the policy on clustered single-family homes that reveal how the Chalandon scheme evolved over time. Changes to the technical and economic definition of “clustered single-family homes” reveal how this model took a different course and lost its legitimacy.
Rational Solutions to Low-Income Home Ownership: 
The Ministry of Public Works and the Single-Family Home Market

When the Chalandon competitive scheme was officially launched, it was portrayed as a break from previous housing and urban planning policies. In reality, its modalities resembled prior administrative practices aiming at regulating the spread of single-family homes and the growth of low-income home ownership. In the 1950s, officials in the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning (Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l’Urbanisme) made efforts to standardize the construction of collective and single-family residences. The rise of low-income home ownership in suburban areas in the early decades of the twentieth century and the fact that defective housing estates and deprived segments of the population became a public concern helped make the unregulated development of single-family homes a counter-model for the public administration overseeing housing and land-use planning in the postwar period. According to Fourcaut, the urban planning office for the Paris region (Service d’Aménagement de la Région Parisienne) designed plans that during the interwar period unsuccessfully attempted to limit growth in the Paris suburbs. While the suburban development of the interwar period was stigmatized, senior officials did not oppose single-family homes themselves but rather their unregulated spread. The first major rebuilding effort of the postwar period (the Courant Plan of 1953, through which the government provided support to the private sector) led to the creation of a new category of subsidized housing known as Logecos, a public program designed to finance the construction of affordable single-family homes and apartment buildings. The ministry then continued pursuing the goal of increasing productivity in the building sector and of lowering construction costs by introducing technical standards that had to be met if builders were to receive loans under the Logecos program. These loans were only issued to builders who adopted blueprints approved by national or regional authorities and that met specific technical criteria (including maximum square footage, amenities level, and price caps). Nearly one million residences, many of which were houses intended to be sold, were built according to these specifications between 1953 and 1963. However, this policy had the greatest impact on apartment buildings, and standards in this area of construction were taking

great leaps forward. In the mid-1960s, most single-family homes were built by small private contractors, a state of affairs Minister of Construction Pierre Sudreau criticized in 1962, claiming that he did not want the sector to remain in the hands of “land traders and isolated builders.”10 In 1965, nearly 80% of the 150,000 single-family homes authorized for construction were built by small private companies.11

In the second half of the 1960s, the rationalization of single-family homes took a new direction when the Ministry of Public Works was created, in which civil engineers from the Corps of Bridges and Roads (Corps des Ponts et Chaussées) played a central role and began to emphasize land development and urban planning.12 Regarding single-family homes, the aim was no longer simply to apply a technical policy on standardizing affordable housing. Rather, this area of public policy now fell under the authority of the new ministry, which felt it needed to promote a form of urban planning that contrasted with chaotic housing estates by pursuing the policy on clustered single-family homes. This shift is visible in the way the Villageexpo displays evolved after their creation in 1965.

From Technical Standards to Urban Planning: Villageexpo

When this project was first mentioned in early 1965, the goal stated by what was then the Ministry of Construction was to “find rational solutions for the construction of single-family homes.”13 These were the words of Yves Aubert, a graduate of École Polytechnique and civil engineer with the Corps of Bridges and Roads, with 43 years of experience. This senior civil servant specializing in industrialization and building standards headed the ministry’s Directorate of Construction, where he spent most of his career. From 1958 to 1961, he was director of the research and programs department, which was tasked with selecting model projects eligible for Logecos loans,14 before becoming technical advisor to Minister Sudreau at the time when the Priority Areas for Urban Development (Zones à Urbaniser en Priorité – ZUP) were being put in place, offering ideal locations for standardized construction. For Aubert, the rationalization of single-family homes was a technical issue15 that would entail industrializing production in order to make these units more affordable. Thus from

---

15. Records of the Villageexpo project were submitted by the Office for Technical Policy, also known as the technical division or the technical office of the Directorate of Construction (61 items submitted to the National Archives under number 19771153 and entitled “Villageexpo Operation,” Section des Missions at the Centre des Archives Contemporaines).
its inception, this operation was designed to create a selection of affordable houses, a distinct feature of which was that selected models would be on show as an open-air display future potential buyers could visit. As Aubert saw it,

"The goal is to open a display of single-family homes in the Paris region by December 1965, when many families come to the capital for Christmas shopping … Several prototypes of various homes will be built on a site in the Paris suburbs. After the display closes, they will be sold as homes and lived in."

The planning documents for the project, which was not yet called “Villagexpo,” made no mention of urban development. Aubert addressed neither the type of urban setting nor the plots on which these model homes would be built. In the note cited above, which was devoted to the technical aspects of construction, he specified that: “Since it is not my area, I assume that land will not be a problem.” The evaluation panel first met in the summer of 1965 to assess the architectural qualities of the models designed by builders wishing to participate in the display, not to discuss the land on which the prototypes would be built. This drew criticism from the National Board of Architects (Conseil Supérieur de l'Ordre des Architectes), which objected to the lack of discussion about the clustering of houses.

Since the architects on the evaluation panel found the quality of the models submitted unsatisfactory, the display was postponed until 1966 to give participants time to improve their proposals. In the meantime, the operation was renamed “Villagexpo” and the display was scheduled to be held at Saint-Michel-sur-Orge (Essonne). However, its supporters no longer presented it as a mere technical experiment but as an innovative urban planning operation. In the meantime, the former Ministry of Construction and the Office of Public Works merged to form the new Ministry of Public Works. Public works and housing officials appeared to want to change the goal of the project, just as their institutions were being reformed. Edgard Pisani, the new Minister of Public Works, and Roland Nungesser, State Secretary for Housing, both stated at the opening and closing ceremonies of the project that they were more interested in its contribution to urban planning than in the question of construction techniques, which they deemed less useful. In fact, while the Ministry of Public Works was being created, Pisani strongly pushed for it to emphasize coordinated government action in the area of urban planning. Meanwhile, Nungesser, a former president of the Paris Region District, worked with Paul Delouvrier in cre-

16. CAC 19771153. Art. 2. Note by Yves Aubert, head of the Directorate of Construction, to the minister on the industrialization of single-family homes (February 1965).
18. Paul Delouvrier (1914–1995), inspector of finances and member of the General Directorate of Planning (Commissariat Général au Plan), became Director General for the Paris Region (Délégué Général du District de la Région de Paris), a role which he combined with that of prefect of the new Paris region in...
The Chalandonnettes Scheme

ating a master plan and in launching new cities. When Villagexpo was first opened to the media, Pisani emphasized that the purpose of the project went “well beyond a mere technical demonstration” and showed that it was possible to avoid the “dual pitfall of excessively dispersed houses and oversized housing estates.” He contrasted the design of this “new village” (to use the expression appearing in the newspapers) from an “isolated house in the middle of a large plot,” a symbol of rural ownership now outdated or excessively scattered. As Pisani put it,

We now have proof that it is possible to increase density without undermining the principle of the single-family home . . . the days of planting carrots in the garden are over. In a speech entitled “For a policy on single-family homes,” Nungesser was just as clear about the meaning of the operation, stating that: “It is more than an exhibit, it is a trial village.” He depicted the project as a symbol of the government’s desire to amend the ZUP policy and to shift the focus away from collective housing. He also designed the layout of the display, which featured smaller private spaces and consisted of small clusters of houses called “hamlets.” This was intended to serve as a possible model for the future development of single-family homes in urban areas. In his words,

In these conditions, we should identify areas to be devoted primarily to family housing. Depending on the site, two options are possible: areas of clustered single-family homes (or “hamlets”) with 25 houses per hectare, and areas of more dispersed single-family homes with no more than five houses per hectare, for example in wooded areas. These two options should end the chaotic development of suburbs, the negative aspects of which were well documented after World War I.

Since no land was set aside for these new sets of clustered homes, at the conclusion of the operation, Nungesser asked Delouvrier, now prefect of the Paris region and director of the Master Plan for Development and Urban Planning (SDAU), to search for land on which other clusters of 300 to 500 houses could

20. CAC 19771153. Art. 3. Press clippings on visits to Villagexpo under construction. “In a few months, a new village will have been created from scratch.”
21. CAC 19771153. Art. 3. Pisani’s statements to the media during the inaugural visit to Villagexpo. September 23, 1966.
22. Villagexpo consisted of 22 hamlets, with a total of 187 homes on ten hectares.
be built in a way “similar to what was done at Villagexpo.”

Although he agreed to join the ministry in financing 12,500 houses over three years in clusters of at least 500 houses, only a dozen construction sites were operating three years later, bringing the total number of houses to fewer than 2,500. Clearly, convincing developers to undertake such large-scale projects was no easy task.

**Stimulating Supply: The Ministry of Public Works’ Struggle with Builders of Single-Family Homes**

The issue of single-family homes changed categories, from technical policy to urban planning, as well as hands, going from Aubert to Nungesser and finally to Delouvrier. To achieve its goals, the ministry had to undertake additional work. Other than finding land, it also had to convince single-family home builders to become subdivision developers. However, such developers were virtually non-existent in France at the time. Very few large subdivisions had ever been built by a single company. In 1966, just one building permit was issued in all of France for a cluster of over 500 houses, and only 36 for clusters of over 100 residences.

The majority of single-family homes were being built by small private contractors. Prefabricated home builders participating in the scheme had previously met the demand from clients who already owned land — whether an isolated plot or one located in a subdivision — and who wanted to have one of the model homes built on it. The planning documents for Villagexpo drafted by Aubert acknowledged these practices. The goal was to attract large numbers of future buyers to the display, where they would select a model to have built on land they had to find themselves. Nungesser was surprised by the widespread appeal of Villagexpo and by its high attendance (with 230,000–250,000 visitors) because in his eyes, this project was intended for professionals rather than the general public. As he put it,

> The operation was highly successful among professionals and the general public. Those in charge of Villagexpo thought that it would primarily appeal to specialists: companies, industrialists, technicians, architects, semi-public construction companies, private developers, or representatives of local government, and large numbers of people from all of those categories came from all over France to visit Villagexpo. However, the exhibit also greatly appealed to the general public.

The secretary of state believed that the exhibit would foster a change in professionals’ practices by promoting the “creation of a fully-fledged single-family

---

23. CAC 19771153. Art. 5. Letter of October 12, 1966, and press release of October 21, 1966, by Nungesser in which he asked Delouvrier to find ten 20-hectare areas in the Paris region, each of which would be able to accommodate the construction of 500 single-family homes.
The Chalandonnettes Scheme

home market to replace the piecemeal approach in force until now.” In October 1966, Aubert, still the head of the Directorate of Construction in the new Ministry of Public Works, called a meeting of representatives of the National Federation of Developers-Builders (Fédération Nationale des Promoteurs-Constructeurs), the National Federation of Builders (Fédération Nationale du Bâtiment), and the Public Housing Union (Union HLM) at which he expressed an “urgent need” to build subdivisions consisting of the most sought-after models. 26 In late 1966, Pierre Charlet, the general commissioner of the display and director of the technical office at the Directorate of Construction, reiterated this recommendation when addressing a meeting of professionals, calling on them to restructure the single-family home sector, arguing that,

Villagexpo paves the way for a complete shift in the process of building single-family homes. It is based on the principle of American-style home builders, whereby developers buy land, design model floor plans, build a few models, draw up rigorous plans for the entire area in question, and then sell the houses to buyers after they visit the models on display . . . This will industrialize the home building sector and replace the piecemeal approach with a coherent market-oriented approach.

However, builders of single-family homes did not view these recommendations in a positive light. The conflict taking shape between the ministry and builders’ representatives united under the Single-Family Home Builders’ Union (Syndicat des Constructeurs de Maisons Individuelles – SMI) pertained to what conclusions should be drawn from the success of Villagexpo. Nungesser argued that the high number of visitors meant that people “were no longer interested in having their houses built independently” and were attracted to a “new urban concept that was so different from housing estates” 27 based on limited private spaces and large common areas. Charlet reiterated this stance to building professionals, stressing that visitors to the display were “attracted to the approach” he called “horizontal co-ownership” and that they “left the display no longer interested in buying land and then building a house of their choosing on it.” 28 However, one SMI representative argued that the opposite was true:

At the booth of single-family home builders, we noticed the opposite trend. Nearly 50,000 people visited it. We cannot cite survey data, but one very common question was: “How can I buy land?” I see my share of clients, and I am absolutely convinced that French people want at least one enclosure around them and their own unique home. 29

26. CAC 19771153. Art 3. Note from Yves Aubert to the Minister of Public Works, October 6, 1966.
27. CAC 19771153. Art. 3. “Closing Speech” by Nungesser at Villagexpo.
29. Ibid. Speech by M. Calmon, SMI representative.
Charlet then informed the SMI representative that the expansion of single-family residences in urban areas could no longer follow the housing estate approach, which used up too much land. He argued that this approach had to be replaced by clustered houses requiring buyers to settle for less private space, claiming that “although buyers have been accustomed to the piecemeal approach taken until now,” which forced them to purchase their own land, they appeared willing to change their minds as soon as they were offered the possibility of purchasing a prefabricated home. However, a survey commissioned by the State Secretary for Housing showed the SMI’s argument to be correct as the majority of visitors to Villageexpo claimed they were seeking a “truly individual” house, or at least one built according their own specifications on a plot of their choosing, whereas only 30.5% were attracted to the clustered approach. This conflict persisted during the years between Villageexpo and the launch of the Chalandon scheme. Several meetings were held on the issue of single-family homes with government representatives and building professionals at which both sides cited studies and experts whose conclusions often diverged. The ministry therefore commissioned studies of “what people want” from single-family homes. One of these studies’ goals was to demonstrate potential buyers’ interest in the clustered homes approach. Prior to the Chalandon scheme, a document was drafted for future winners, giving them an overview of their future client base. It claimed that clustered residences did not appeal to executives but to blue- and white-collar workers, who were “four times more likely than high-income households to embrace the concept of large subdivisions consisting of single-family homes, believing that these offered them financial advantages.” However, these results were largely determined by the questions asked since respondents had to make their selection on the basis of a fictitious scenario in which a house located in a cluster was 50% cheaper than an isolated home. This left the case unproven. A meeting on single-family homes was held in 1969, which focused on the technical aspects of the costs of building single-family homes and of the determinants of these costs. At this meeting, André Pux, SMI president and CEO of Maisons Phénix, the largest French builder of prefabricated homes, claimed that the clustered option was not necessarily more affordable and pointed out that “homes prefabricated to varying degrees built on buyers’ own land” could be just as affordable. Following changes to

The Chalandonnettes Scheme

the ministry’s scope of action and duties, its officials ended up promoting a new standard model for individual home ownership based on high densities, reduced private spaces, and large-scale urban projects, which they claimed fulfilled the wishes of low-income families. However, conditions in the private building sector were not ripe for this model to flourish.

The Chalandon Competitive Scheme: Regulating the Rise of Low-Income Home Ownership

Launched in 1969, the Chalandon scheme was a means for the ministry to have more direct influence over the private building sector and to spread the model of clustered single-family homes its officials had been working on for three years. In a public speech on his “new urban development policy,” at which he officially announced the scheme, the new minister34 portrayed it as the symbol of the end of government intervention in the building sector that had been typical of the 1950s and 1960s. The actions of a number of large public and semi-public bodies were criticized. Seen as supported by an “administrative technocracy,” these bodies were blamed for housing estates and the ZUPs, which were criticized as having resulted in “mediocre” and “restrictive” urban development, out of touch with what French people wanted in terms of housing.35 The Chalandon scheme was meant to mark the end of centralized intervention that worked counter to the aspirations of low-income groups to single-family homes:

That policy was based on the same philosophy as all government actions, a philosophy that assumes that the public administration, which is a tool of the state, knows best and outperforms everyone. This outlook is what for years enabled a highly centralized administrative technocracy to define single-handedly the terms of urban development . . . In this matter, what French people want needs to be taken into account.36

Such critical words likely contributed to the Chalandon scheme being seen as a turning point in housing policy, with many textbooks and academic studies portraying it as a sign that the building sector was entering a market-driven system and that the government was shifting its focus from rented public housing

34. Albin Chalandon, a specialist in Gaullist policy and inspector of finances, was appointed Minister of Public Works and Housing on July 12, 1968, after a brief stint at the Ministry of Industry. He assumed this position under the last government of the de Gaulle presidency, retaining it following de Gaulle’s resignation and Pompidou’s election to the presidency, and holding it until July 6, 1972.


It is not the aim of this paper to address the details of this account but rather to simply point out that the scheme was launched several years before the official end of housing estates and the decline of publicly funded construction and rented public housing, and instead paralleled a trend already well underway in the direction of increasing home ownership and of growth in the single-family home sector. However, to understand the links between public action and forms of low-income home ownership, it is important to note that in terms of its actual modalities, the Chalandon scheme was aimed more at promoting the growth of a certain type of single-family residence than at supporting home builders in general. In effect, it was an extension of the criticism of suburban housing estates and piecemeal home construction and a move toward densely clustered single-family homes delivered ready for immediate occupancy by developers. Far from being a time when the ministry’s administrative machinery lost its prerogatives for intervention in residential construction, it was in fact an attempt to regulate the rise already underway of low-income home ownership from the top down, more specifically by setting standards in order to regulate what developers and private builders were putting on the market.

**Sending a Shockwave through the Private Construction Sector**

In November 1968, Chalandon issued a simple injunction to his advisors and division heads, charging them to find a way to drastically reduce the cost of single-family homes. This injunction was issued at a time when his cabinet was working on reforming the public housing loan (prêts HLM accession) scheme, which offered low-income households a means of financing home ownership. At the time, its maximum amount did not provide enough capital for these households to purchase homes. However, the task of reforming the terms of these loans fell to the Ministry of Finance, which was in no hurry to act. The minister’s cabinet therefore designed an alternative solution in order to make.

---

37. For instance, Jaillet stresses the “decisive role Chalandon played in establishing a policy on suburban development” that benefited builders of prefabricated homes, an argument that does not align with the lack of interest these builders had in the competition. See: Marie-Christine Jaillet, *Les Pavillonneurs* (Paris: CNRS, 1982). It would also be beneficial to say a few words on the way Bourdieu and Christin interpreted government support for the single-family home sector in the early 1970s (see Bourdieu, *Les structures sociales*, 115). By presenting the single-family home scheme as a sign of the government’s willingness to “withdraw from the sector and to align it with free market principles,” the authors echo the way in which Chalandon presented the scheme. However, they ignore the fact that the actual modalities of the scheme were more similar to the usual forms of intervention in the housing market by the Directorate of Construction, which aimed to regulate construction by allocating subsidies in a piecemeal fashion than to the stance taken by innovative senior civil servants, who supported ending piecemeal housing aid, a move that, as Bourdieu and Christin demonstrate, played a decisive role in the 1977 reform (see below).

38. CAC 20010298. Art. 43. Note by Yves Aubert in response to the minister’s requests for “suggestions on ways to build single-family homes at much lower costs,” December 9, 1968.

the financing the Directorate of Construction was tasked with allocating more efficient through lower costs rather than increases in loan amounts. For the ministry, the advantage of this mode of intervention was that it did not require approval from the Ministry of Finance since it gave priority to allocating existing funds to low-cost projects instead of seeking additional funds.

Two civil engineers with the Corps of Bridges and Roads, Yves Aubert, still head of the Directorate of Construction, and Raoul Rudeau, from the Directorate of Land and Urban Planning (Direction de l’Aménagement Foncier et de l’Urbanisme – DAFU), and three of the minister’s technical advisors, who were all professional architects or urban planners, formed a working group aiming to draw up proposals. The notion that lowering costs would require standardizing models and creating large clusters of homes seemed the only obvious solution. Citing technical reasons, Aubert advised combining the Villagexpo approach with a procedure involving “approved models,” a system for standardizing construction that encouraged public housing bodies (Habitation à Loyer Modéré – HLM) to mass-produce plans selected by the ministry, which would be applied to builders selected to mass produce low-cost model homes. This was to be achieved in two ways: by optimizing floor plans and thus reducing material and development costs (including limiting the length of piping, among other things), and by mass producing model homes in order to achieve economies of scale. The idea of launching a competitive project with the more ambitious goal of creating a “fully-fledged single-family home industry” came from Jacques-Henri Labourdette, technical advisor to the minister and an architect involved in several housing estate programs, including Sarcelles. 40 His views mirrored those expressed at the conclusion of Villagexpo, namely that the single-family home sector was too homespun given that France’s largest private builder, Phé-nix, “produced barely 2,000 homes each year” and needed to be transformed. Labourdette stated the need for building companies able to provide land planning, development, construction, and marketing for subdivisions. His objective, which was stated in the official rules of the competitive scheme, was to reverse the ratio of the dispersed sector to the clustered sector by raising the proportion of single-family homes built by the latter from 20% to 80%. His approach expanded on that of Aubert, envisaging several groups of developers and companies being selected, each of which would build seven or eight subdivisions consisting of approximately 1,000 homes built according to a few standard models for a total of at least 25,000 new homes. The working group endorsed the idea of sending a “shockwave” through the single-family home market, arguing that,

We need to bring the total cost of building four-room homes down to 60,000 francs in the Paris region and to 50,000 francs elsewhere. This will

require combined operations and creating a mass-production market in which
one company can produce 2,000 to 3,000 homes yearly. Currently, the leading
company, Phénix, sells 2,000 homes per year at 80,000 francs. We need to move
beyond the status quo and reduce prices. A new professional sector must be
created. The competition should send a shockwave.\(^{41}\)

The competitive rules reflected the usual methods of the Directorate of Con-
struction for fostering lower costs, which were to set caps and give the builders
who complied with them priority access to subsidized financing. All agreed that
a large-scale operation was needed to restructure the single-family home sector,
and this goal was clearly expressed by senior officials from the Directorates of
Construction and of Urban Development during the selection process. They
wanted to convince the evaluation panel, and especially members who were
architects and had doubts about the quality of some of the proposals, to select
as many winners as possible. As Rudeau, the head of DAFU, stated:

> We must open urban development to new players and flood the market with
low-cost single-family homes. It would be better to retain average proposals to
achieve a mass effect than to eliminate the average ones and fail to achieve this
effect.\(^{42}\)

The quantitative goal of the competitive scheme was raised to 60,000 homes
in the form of subdivisions of a minimum size of 500 units on undeveloped
land and 250 elsewhere. Lastly, to ensure maximum volume, the ministry set
laxer requirements for obtaining building permits. For instance, candidates
were allowed to make proposals in areas not zoned for building, such as rural
areas, in order free up low-cost land. While the competitive rules stipulated that
receiving approval from the local authorities in such areas was preferable, this
was not a requirement. Therefore, when the evaluators met in late 1969, they
did not take into account opposition from local officials in their decisions since
government representatives had stressed the need to force the issue among local
politicians so that enough proposals could be retained.\(^{43}\) At the same time, tech-
nical advisors tasked with drawing up a presentation of the ministry’s urban
development policy for a press conference described the competition as open-
ing a door to new urban development and, not surprisingly, used anti-housing
estate rhetoric to emphasize the benefits of clustered single-family homes,\(^{44}\)
arguing that

---

41. CAC 20010298. “Propositions pour le concours de maisons individuelles suivant la réunion du group
de travail, February 20, 1969.
42. CAC 19850492. Art. 15. Statements by Raoul Rudeau, director of DAFU, deliberations of the CIMI
evaluation panel.
The lack of combined operations and the narrowness of the market have prevented the technical or aesthetic progress in this area needed to radically alter the disastrous image of suburban housing estates … Single-family homes must be built according to careful planning. We must not recreate the poor suburbs that sprung up after World War I … On the contrary, I want single-family homes to be built according to an urban development strategy aimed at creating a new type of village comprised of clusters of single-family homes.45

Rather than offering indiscriminate support to the growing single-family homes sector, the officials working on the scheme intended to take this sector in a different direction. However, the rules of the competition, which reflected the usual methods for lowering the construction costs of low-income housing, with priority access to financing given to those complying with price caps, received only tepid support from private developers and builders. Despite claims that the ministry’s promotion of complicity between an “administrative technocracy” and “large public-sector bodies” would have negative impacts, the quantitative objectives of the competitive scheme could only be achieved via participation by low-income housing bodies and semi-public developers.

**Toward Public Housing Operations “Pure and Simple”**

The majority of winners were builders from the public and semi-public sectors, with over 70% of *chalandonnettes* financed by public housing loans for which only these companies were eligible.46 Though this is surprising in light of the goal of fostering American-style construction companies,47 it may be attributed to the characteristics of the participants. Few well-established private developers submitted proposals, whereas many prefabricated home builders, from which ministry officials expected a high participation,48 did. Yet their proposals did not meet the selection criteria since they refused to align them with the ministry’s recommendations. The first round of 21 selected proposals showed “adequate potential” to achieve the minimum number of homes set for each winner (7,500).49 The majority of proposals (11) that made it through the first round were from companies with ties to the public sector, namely

---

47. This was the phrasing Chalandon himself used in his speech announcing the launch of the competitive scheme.
48. Prior to setting the rules of the competition, the working group in charge of it contacted the Phénix and Balency companies—both builders of prefabricated homes—to ensure that they were ready to enter the competition. CAC 20010298. Art. 42. Note by Bruno Grange, technical advisor to the Minister of Public Works, on the meeting of the working group in charge of the competition on single-family homes, February 20, 1968.
low-income housing bodies, semi-public companies, subsidiaries of collectors of employers’ contributions, and the Deposits and Consignments Fund.

Companies aligned with the American model of builders such as Levitt-France or Kauffman and Broad opted not to participate despite the fact that meetings designed to attract them were held. Three large single-family home builders submitted proposals. The proposal from France’s leading low-cost home builder, Phénix, was controversial. Architects on the evaluation panel claimed that its proposed models were too similar to the ones it already had on the market and that it did not comply with the price caps since it had cut back on the services offered (a five-room house was in fact a four-room house). Concerned about selecting enough winners to achieve a mass effect, officials from the Directorates of Construction and Urban Development were hesitant about eliminating this company, arguing that “Phénix has appeal and good market positioning” and that “its approach aligns with the spirit of the competition and current policy.” However, in spite of attempts to keep it in the competition, Pux’s company refused to modify its models. When it was offered a second chance, Phénix only submitted a limited number of projects, bringing its total to just 183 homes. Since the company was experiencing solid growth in the early 1970s, it probably had limited interest in the Chalandon scheme. The evaluation panel unanimously deemed the proposals submitted by other pre-fabricated home builders to lack credibility on the grounds that in order to achieve the minimum of 7,500 homes, they proposed very large subdivisions (in some cases as many as four or five clusters with over 1,000 homes each) on undeveloped land without considering the necessary zoning operations, which was to draw criticism from local authorities. Nor did the proposals from private developers meet all of the criteria, particularly that on price caps. For its part, STIM Bouygues eliminated itself by refusing to replace construction sites that had been rejected for technical reasons between Phase One and Phase Two of the competition. As a result, the leading private developers were unable—or unwilling—to meet the criteria set beforehand and dropped out. At the end of deliberations, the evaluation panel selected seven winners, whose proposals would allow for the building over 60,000 homes over three years. Chalandon’s speech at the awards ceremony acknowledged the fact that

Most winners of this competition are from the public sector. In fact, of the seven winners, only one is a private company and one a semi-public company. I would like to congratulate the public sector companies that were motivated

50. This refers to a system (known as the 1% patronal) initially designed as a contribution by employers to the construction of affordable housing and corresponding to 1% of their total payroll. Payments were made either directly to employees or to companies authorized to collect these funds and mandated to support the housing effort. In 2009, the system was renamed Action Logement.

and driven to action by the competitive spirit I sought to introduce and that answered my call.  

Because it was of limited appeal to private builders and developers, the scheme drew most interest from low-income housing developers with ties to collectors of the employers’ contribution or to the cooperative sector, which since the late 1960s had taken an interest in clustered single-family homes. One company that benefited greatly from the scheme was GIE-CIMI, which was represented by the low-income housing subsidiary of a contribution collector based in France’s Nord region, which had spent the previous few years focusing on the production of densely clustered single-family homes at very low prices. As part of the competition, this company built over 20,000 homes all over France and became the country’s leading developer under the name of GMF-CARPI, with the slogan: “Buy with 600 francs down.” Another winner was the Cooperative Association (Société Coopérative d’Intérêt Collectif – SCIC) functioning as a subsidiary of the Deposits and Consignments Fund, which had built many housing estates and had been branching out into the single-family home sector since the mid-1960s. Intended to restructure the private building sector, the competitive scheme altered the way public housing loans were used, with 50 to 55% of residences intended for private ownership built by public bodies between 1970 and 1976 consisting of clustered single-family homes. In light of issues related to loan allocations due to the heavy presence of Chalandon-related operations with public housing status in his own local area and that diverted resources away from non-winners, the head of construction in the ministry’s local office in the Nord region (Direction Départementale de l’Équipement du Nord – DDE) questioned the end result of the competition, claiming that it led to “public housing operations pure and simple,” a far cry from the intended objective of stimulating American-style builders.

From the Chalandon Scheme to Chalandonnettes: Mechanisms for Discredit

The launch of the competitive scheme coincided with the growth of single-family home construction in France. However, this growth did not align with the format recommended by the Ministry of Public Works. After two decades of falling behind public housing projects, single-family home construction began...
accounting for a larger share of new building projects and was finally on par with public projects in 1975. However, this growth was driven by construction “without developers,” to use Topalov’s phrasing, on plots purchased by future home owners who were “having their own homes built.” Private developers had limited interest in the market for clustered single-family homes, preferring to focus on projects geared toward the urban and upscale market. In the single-family home sector, clustered homes accounted for only a quarter of building permits between 1968 and 1976 despite peaking at 30% in 1970–1971 under the temporary influence of the Chalandon scheme. As a result, although clustered single-family homes experienced growth (from 53,000 to 86,000 homes approved yearly between 1968 and 1976), the sector did not grow as rapidly as that for dispersed single-family homes, which in the late 1970s were still the preferred home ownership option among low-income families. However, the scheme did meet its quantitative goals. With a slight delay (construction took until 1976), the goal of 60,000 clustered single-family homes was met. Despite this quantitative success, over the years, some began airing increasingly critical views of the scheme’s outcome, even within the ministry. Gradually, the ministry withdrew its support for this approach, which it had failed to impose as a new model of low-income home ownership. This discrediting of homes built under the Chalandon scheme, which earned these homes the nickname of chalandonnettes, revealed a new power struggle taking shape within the ministry over the issue of housing policy reform. This struggle was fueled by criticism from cutting-edge reformers about the way the government had been regulating the housing market for the past two decades.

**Housing Estates, Horizontal Public Housing, or Real Single-Family Homes?**

Although the ministry’s early assessments of the Chalandon scheme were positive, with the earliest ones describing it as a commercial success, or simply as a “success,” these grew more negative over the years. The first round of criticism came between 1970 and 1974 when Robert Lion was named head of the Directorate of Construction. An ENA alumnus and inspector of finances who was just 35 years old when he accepted the position, this former associate of Pisani and Delouvrier did not have the usual background of the engineers in the Directorate of Construction, who had worked their way through local offices before obtaining senior positions in the ministry. Like the young innovators described by Bourdieu and Christin, he was among an elite class of civil

---


58. For a detailed analysis of changes in paths toward low-income home ownership in the 1970s, see: Topalov, *Le logement en France*, op. cit.


servants inclined to adopt a reformist stance that supported in-depth reform of the government’s modes of intervention in housing matters in the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{61} However, Lion was unique in that he defended his reformist positions in institutions whose usual interests and methods they went against, first as head of the Directorate of Construction and then as general delegate of the public housing (HLM) movement, and opted for compromise. On the subject of single-family housing policy, his position was also two-sided since after helping to make the competitive scheme a success, he then criticized its outcomes. Appointed by Chalandon, he unreservedly supported the idea of sending a shockwave through the low-cost housing market at the start of the competitive scheme, yet at the same time challenged the ministry’s technical policy, which he believed had been promoting assembly-line architecture and quantitative goals for the last two decades.\textsuperscript{62} In keeping with his desire to break from the practices of his predecessors, he brought quality architecture to the fore when in 1971, helping to found the \textit{Plan-Construction} program, which was created to fund architectural research and experimentation. This body promoted residences that were very different from those of the Chalandon scheme, which were criticized by architects on the evaluation panel for being banal. The initiatives of the \textit{Plan-Construction} program pertaining to individual homes focused on innovative forms of intermediary residences (semi-individual or semi-communal housing) and were geared more toward experimentation than mass production.\textsuperscript{63} By shifting the ministry’s technical policy on single-family housing toward experimental projects,\textsuperscript{64} Lion showed that he approved of the critical views of the outcome of the Chalandon scheme that were taking shape in the ministry’s research offices. Although he preferred clustered single-family homes to the chaotic growth of dispersed home construction, he was concerned that these “high-density new villages” were too similar to the “controversial housing estates.”\textsuperscript{65} At the time when construction of apartment buildings on housing estates was halted and they were being criticized for fostering segregation—a critical view Lion helped

\textsuperscript{61}. Lion’s background in the senior civil service has been amply analyzed. For more on his position at the time of the reform to housing aid, see: Bourdieu and Christin, “La construction du marché,” op. cit. For more on his contribution to creating urban policy, see: Sylvie Tissot, \textit{L’État et les quartiers} (Paris: Seuil, 2007).
\textsuperscript{62}. Here is Lion’s later assessment of his predecessor: “Things at Quai de Passy were in a gridlock when I arrived. The doors were closed to architectural innovation. In five years, my predecessor, Yves Aubert, only approved two innovative proposals despite the fact that he received requests every day from contractors eager to get off the beaten path.” Interview published in \textit{Urbanisme} 365 (2009).
\textsuperscript{64}. According to records on the ministry’s policy on single-family homes, the project that followed the Chalandon scheme was the Construction Game (\textit{Jeu de Construction}) launched in February 1972. It was sponsored by R. Lion and managed by the Plan-Construction program, and designed to produce modular single-family homes. This competitive scheme focused primarily on architectural research. According to a note by GRECOH, it attracted mainly “a wealthy population with high levels of education” but resulted in the construction of only 20 prototypes (CAC 19840592, Art. 1).
\textsuperscript{65}. CAC 19850389. Art. 74. Note by Robert Lion regarding the preparation of a documentary record intended to supplement a speech by the State Secretary for Housing on single-family homes, July 13, 1973.
to forge as co-founder of the think-tanks known as Residential and Social Life (Habitat et Vie Sociale), which laid the groundwork for France’s subsequent urban policy—this designation was hardly used in a positive light. This position was expressed in the works of GRECOH,66 a research unit of the ministry that in the early 1970s brought together young alumni of ENA and École Polytechnique, who were tasked with generating ideas for reforming housing policy.67 According to the briefing notes written by its sociology division, which was tasked with collecting data on the qualitative aspects of housing and conducting research on the links between “residences and lifestyles,”68 some suggested that Chalandon-style subdivisions had the same flaws as housing estates and that their occupants viewed them as properties with little value. Their authors cited a large-scale study of 24 Chalandon-style subdivisions funded by the Plan-Construction program and conducted by the CRESAL sociology research group, which provided a detailed account of the reasons for satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) among buyers of chalandonnettes, a label that figured in the study’s title. Although this study found that the competitive scheme did promote home ownership among low-income households (with most of those surveyed being skilled and specialized workers, many of whom felt that they had a good deal), it also found that buyers of these low-cost residences tended to view them as low quality:

People bought single-family homes but had to face the high density of housing estates and the problems of close proximity with other households, including noise and other aspects of communal living. Some claimed that they were merely “horizontal public housing units” . . .

These factors led to Chalandon-style single-family homes being viewed as inferior, or at least as inferior to the houses in subdivisions generally advertised by realtors and which the average French person dreamed of owning. In brief, they came to be viewed as houses for poor people.69

Although the conclusions of the study by CRESAL were not entirely one-sided, the briefing notes by GRECOH, which summarized its main points, emphasized the comparison with housing estates, as did a summary sent to the head of the Directorate of Construction in 1974, which stated that “most critiques [of Chalandon-style subdivisions] are the same as those commonly

66. A study and research group on construction and homes.
made of housing estates.”70 This finding reiterates an idea expressed from 1973 in a series of notes on single-family residences sent by GRECOH to the head of the Directorate of Construction, arguing that owning a clustered single-family home was not a real form of single-family home ownership.71 These overall conclusions were based on sociological work on housing, particularly research conducted on subdivided homes in the 1960s by the Institute of Urban Sociology (Institut de Sociologie Urbaine – ISU).72 Basing their arguments on Lefebvre’s notion of “appropriation” and the claim of authors of the Pavillonnaires that subdivisions were different from housing estates since they were amenable to being appropriated, the authors of these notes cast doubt on the benefits of clustered single-family homes and new villages, “which in many respects are too similar to public housing,” and thus deserved the demeaning label of “horizontal public housing units.” To provide a clearer definition of the characteristics of real single-family homes, GRECOH commissioned an “in-depth study in order to compare practices in communal and individual spaces,”73 the first of a series of such studies. In the second half of the 1970s, an increasing number of studies in the field of the sociology of housing, which were funded by research bodies in the Ministry of Public Works, addressed the specificities of single-family homes, particularly those located in subdivisions, along with the lifestyles associated with them.74 The earliest criticism of houses built under the Chalandon scheme appeared in studies that used terms such as “housing estates,” “horizontal HLMs,” or “horizontal public housing units” and that were funded by the research offices of the ministry and endorsed by Lion. This criticism reaffirmed that according to occupants of chalandonnettes, these properties did not constitute real single-family homes.

**The Future of Clustered Single-Family Homes in Light of Administrative Changes in the Directorate of Construction**

The criticism from experts in the ministry’s research division, which at that time consisted of intellectual trail blazers, aligned with the negative views of Lion, who wanted his offices to emphasize quality and architectural innovation. However, officials in the Directorate of Construction with more technical backgrounds still believed that clustered homes were the best way to regulate

---

70. CA 19840592. Art. 1. “Note sur les réactions des habitants des lotissements de maisons individuelles.” GRECOH: Bureau des Études Sociologiques, in which the above quote is underscored.
74. See the records of the Directorate of Construction on studies and reports on housing (CAC 20110125), particularly the section on the sociology of housing (Articles 57 to 100), as well as Articles 131 and 140 on single-family housing dealing exclusively with studies conducted between 1969 and 1984.
the growth of single-family homes. Following the election in 1974 to the presidency of Giscard d’Estaing, who made single-family homes and home ownership priorities of his term of office, the question of continuing the competitive scheme was raised. From 1974 to 1976, the Directorate of Construction worked on designing a new policy on clustered single-family homes that would replace the Chalandon initiatives. However, these talks remained confined to the Ministry of Public Works even as a broader debate was taking shape involving all actors with a stake in housing policy in light of the reform to public housing aid. One important element in this debate was the meeting of the Barre Commission in 1975. Lion left the Directorate of Construction in 1974 to take the reins of the HLM public housing movement, where he helped to write a white paper outlining the views of social agencies on this issue. Therefore, the increase in the number of meetings between DDE representatives and ministry officials on the continuation of the ministry’s policy on single-family homes took place under the auspices of a new head of the Directorate of Construction, Pierre Hervio, a civil engineer with the Corps of Bridges and Roads and former DDE director, whose background was more technical and less wide ranging than that of his predecessor. As a result, a new consensus emerged to continue with the competitive scheme but to change its rules. The DDE representatives wanted to change the land aspects of the scheme because the existing rules placed no restrictions on the plots bidders could propose but forced them instead to enter into complex negotiations with local communities and to rush to schedule zoning operations. Instead, they proposed that the directors of local offices should play greater roles upstream by selecting land already undergoing development. In addition, the effect of the comparison between clustered single-family homes and housing estates was clear as all agreed on setting a maximum instead of a minimum number of homes, the maximum being 200 houses per builder. However, participants disagreed on whether the ministry should continue with its “interventionist” policy by entering into contracts at the national level with developers likely to carry out operations all over the country in order to support developers who stood up to the test of the first competitive scheme, or whether DDEs should be allowed to enter into contracts with local developers depending on the availability of land in each region. This was the solution that was adopted despite its being called “lax” by the head of the technical office of the Directorate of Construction, who argued that it meant that the ministry was giving up on supporting the growth of national builders, 

---

76. CAC 19850389. Meeting of September 10, 1974, between DDE representatives and the central administration regarding the future of the Chalandon scheme.
77. CAC 19850389. Circular from the Ministry of Public Works sent to regional prefects and the ministry’s regional offices, August 29, 1975.
which he claimed would prevent “qualitative and quantitative improvements” to home construction. The centralized approach to planning used as part of the competitive scheme was subject to increasing criticism. Pierre Mayet, the new DAFU director and member of the modernizing “young cohort” at the Corps of Bridges and Roads that supported decentralizing urban policies, argued that local officials should be closely involved in selecting plots and that operations should be scaled back as much as possible (to between 20 and 200 homes). These regional competitive schemes were launched in 1976 and were managed by regional offices of the Ministry of Public Works, which were tasked with collaborating with local officials in finding suitable land. Meanwhile, the central offices of the ministry withdrew from the coordination of these schemes, which were slow in getting underway, and referred public housing bodies that wanted to participate but could not acquire the planning documents to regional offices, which were solely responsible for launching the active consultation phase. These (CRUGMIG) only ended up building 2,300 to 2,500 houses, a number that was much lower than that of the Chalandon scheme. The withdrawal of the ministry’s Directorate of Construction from these projects was finalized when Hervio was replaced by Jean-François Bloch-Lainé, an ENA alumnus and inspector of finances from the French Treasury, who took over the leadership of the Directorate of Construction with a view to implementing the controversial reform to housing aid adopted in 1977. A specialist in public finances, Bloch-Lainé took little interest in the technical policy on clustered homes. The only exception was in 1976–1977, when the Directorate of Construction and the Central Secretariat for New Cities (Secrétariat Central des Villes Nouvelles) defined the framework for subdivisions in order to shift the construction of new cities in the Paris region toward single-family residences. Thus government intervention to regulate individual residences affected only in the typical scope of urban planning. Within the restricted administrative space that constituted the Directorate of Construction, the new disagreements and power relations described by Bourdieu and Christin regarding plans for implementing the reform to housing aid were tangible. With the growing presence in its research and leadership divisions of a reformist elite supporting new forms of government intervention in housing, more qualitative for Lion and more

82. Actualités HLM 111, February 27, 1976.
83. See Jean-Michel Bloch-Lainé, “Un espace pour la vie: Réflexion publique sur l’habitat en France,” 1977 report commissioned by the French president in which the head of the Directorate of Construction mocked the “seasonal fascination with clustered single-family homes, homes in rows, or solar homes.”
decentralized for Mayet, and following the reform of 1977 aiming at facilitating access to home loans, with personalized housing aid being extended to home buyers, the central offices of the ministry stopped playing a direct role in defining forms of low-income housing, thereby opening the door for the growth of dispersed housing, despite having been strongly opposed to it in the late 1960s.

From the Discrediting of Chalandonnettes to the Loss of Legitimacy of Government Intervention in Private Construction

Whereas the move away from the policy on clustered single-family homes stemmed from changes within the Directorate of Construction, an emerging scandal surrounding the chalandonnettes scheme in turn eroded the legitimacy of its interventions in the private construction sector as issues pertaining to the partially faulty construction of some clusters of chalandonnettes became increasingly widely publicized. Starting in 1975 when the Directorate of Construction was working on regional competitive schemes, many of its officials expressed concerns over the negative perception the public had of these government-sponsored schemes. As a report stated, “The public can view government-sponsored competitions as a factor for innovation or as a factor that sacrifices quality, as was the case with the CIMI.”

Leading up to the regional competitive schemes, the Directorate of Construction recommended replacing the term “competition” (concours) with “promotion” (promotion) to prevent these schemes from being associated with the Chalandon scheme. However, the directorate also stated that faulty construction was not very widespread among homes built under that scheme. Responding to “repeated accusations by the media that many Chalandon-style homes had serious defects,” the office conducted an assessment of the scheme in 1977, which found that only 4,077 of the 60,000 homes were defective. Although this assessment acknowledged that the quality-control mechanisms the DDEs were tasked with implementing were inadequate, it also deplored the fact that the public image of the scheme was so heavily influenced by only 7% to 8% of all homes built under it. Starting in 1977, the fate of buyers claiming to have suffered from the faulty construction of Chalandon-style homes became the object of questions parliamentarians sent to the central government, in which they requested financial aid for buyers who had purchased such homes in their districts and were struggling. Although the Directorate of Construction claimed that the government was not responsible, it recommended offer-
ing assistance to these buyers in order to “protect the image of the scheme and all government-sponsored competitions.” However, this image was definitively tarnished when the National Assembly passed a bill on construction insurance and parliamentarians voiced lengthy criticisms of the *chalandonnettes scheme* as part of a more general critique of the segregation fostered by prior housing policies. Communist parliamentarians decried the “rubble” they claimed was caused by the Chalandon scheme and by a policy that encouraged home ownership. They were even joined by pro-government parliamentarians as well as Eugène Claudius-Petit, former Minister of Reconstruction and Urban Planning, who criticized the “myth of low-cost homes.”

The argument of the Directorate of Construction and the State Secretary for Housing whereby these construction defects were matters for the civil courts no longer seemed credible, and the ministry created a service dedicated to studying claims of faulty construction, which it found to exist in 12.8% of homes built under the Chalandon scheme. As a result, the scheme came to a close amidst allegations that government intervention in the construction sector had had disastrous consequences. For many years, the term *chalandonnettes* remained a synonym for low-quality housing. The idea of holding government-sponsored competitions in order to lower construction costs, which had received various labels since the 1950s and had reached a new magnitude in the single-family home sector thanks to the Chalandon scheme, was relegated to the back burner for years to come.

The creation of numerous standards for what low-income ownership is (or should be) are the result of these unsuccessful attempts by the Ministry of Public Works to regulate the growth of single-family homes in the early 1970s. Some of these attempts, including the rejection of unregulated suburban development (yet to be called “suburban sprawl”) were agreed upon by the political and administrative elites of the time and were frequently cited by ministers, senior civil servants, architects, and urban planners. They were also expressed in more technical language when the aim was to propose a counter-model to this stigmatized form of suburban development and to propose a positive definition of rationalized single-family homes, which became known as clustered single-family residences. However, this definition was strongly opposed by private actors, particularly by builders of prefabricated single-family homes whose interests hardly aligned with the central government’s wish to restructure their modes of production and who spread a discourse of the need for “real” single-family homes, complete with clearly defined private spaces symbolized by enclosures. Surveys by experts of the preferences and aspirations of French people as well as sociological studies of lifestyles in various types of

89. CAC 19840592. Art. 248. “Dossiers de contentieux: Enquêtes sur les opérations présentant des malfaçons graves.” CIMI.
single-family residences lent credence to both of these positions. In the 1970s, the administrative, political, industrial, and intellectual elites all seemed to have views about low-income home ownership, related issues of changes in the private and public construction sectors, and the nature of government intervention in private construction. Thus rather than treating this decade as the decade that witnessed the emergence of a new policy promoting the growth of low-cost single-family homes, this paper argues that it witnessed instead several approaches to government involvement in this sector competing against each other at the national level. The symbolic devaluation of the *chalandonnettes* illustrates how the legitimacy of direct government intervention in the low-cost home sector was eroded, making way for a new type of government support for low-income home ownership, namely measures designed to facilitate buyers’ access to home loans, most of which were introduced in the reform to housing aid in 1977.

**Hélène Steinmetz** is a professor and researcher in sociology at École Normale Supérieure. She is completing a dissertation in sociology entitled “*Produire des petits propriétaires? Les HLM et l’accession à la propriété*” at the Centre Max Weber (MEPS team). At the crossroads of economic sociology and the sociology of institutions, her research focuses on social home ownership as a type of public action, the institutionalization of the low-income housing sector, and the production of social housing. She also studies the legal processes involved in divorce at ANR Ruptures.

helene.steinmetz@ens.fr