From Levittowns to Levittvilles: An American mass builder in the Paris suburbs, 1965-1980.

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The contribution of Levitt & Sons to the history of suburbia is not limited to the mega-Levittowns of the 1940s and 1950s. In 1960, to follow the evolution of the domestic market, this mass builder embarked on new strategies. In the United States, it focused on smaller subdivisions of larger, more expensive homes. Bill Levitt also decided to export his homebuilding methods to Europe. His first operation opened in 1965 in a small village in the vicinity of Versailles, followed by several successful ventures in the Parisian suburbs, including the 1,600-unit *quartier Levitt*, which opened in 1971 in Mennecy near Evry. Launched in the early 1970s, a Spanish subsidiary built subdivisions in a higher price range. Using historical documents (advertising, official correspondence, in-house journals …), previous studies of the *espace péri-urbain* and *nouveaux villages*, as well as current field work and interviews, this paper examines the historical relevance of the Levittvilles and compares them to Levitt's US communities of the same time period. Their catalytic role in creating new residential patterns in France is certain. They helped ownership of a small home in a verdant environment to develop into a full fledged middle class cultural system, with both regional, national and global characteristics. This important example of a conflation between New World suburbia and Old World exurbia sheds new light on transatlantic differences and commonalties in the fields of suburban planning and culture. Levitt's work near Paris represents a particularly compelling example of how planning history is shaped by the interaction between socio-economic and political forces and individual initiatives. This dynamic will be considered through its "actors": the U.S. builder, his managerial clientele, and, between them, representatives of the *pouvoirs publics*, either elected officials or civil servants. Despite the overall satisfaction of parties directly involved, the negative response of journalists and design professionals to Levitt France and its followers have prevailed: planned subdivisions of small homes in the Paris Region are deemed anti-French, banal-looking and paragons of conformity. I contend that, visually, the Levittvilles achieved a successful balance between site development and preservation and showcase major assets, especially in terms of the provision of common green space and recreational amenities and that American ideas were readily adopted and adapted because they had cultural and physical antecedents in France and matched new societal needs and behaviors.

"I had no idea that Levitt built in France." Such is, overwhelmingly, the candid reaction to my ongoing research on the communities America's most famous mass builder erected in the Paris suburbs from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. Additional responses to my presentations vary: Americans are generally amused by the ethnographic "exoticism" of the Levittvilles, but also positively impressed by their landscaping, while Frenchmen stumble on issues of regulations and social control.[1] Helping each audience gain a more realistic understanding of contextual issues in the opposite country is one of my goals. Levitt's European adventure may be a footnote in 20th century planning history, but its catalytic role in creating new residential patterns in France is certain. Meeting existing demands, it allowed ownership of a small home in a verdant environment to develop into a full fledged middle class cultural system, with both regional, national and global characteristics. This important example of a conflation between American suburbia and European exurbia sheds new light on transatlantic differences and commonalties in the fields of suburban planning and culture.

Story line

While the social and physical impact of the Levittowns is well documented, the "post-GI Bill" work of Levitt and Sons in the United States and in France is little known. In 1960, when Levitt and Sons went public, the market called for the erection of smaller projects of bigger, more upscale houses. Moving to the Baltimore- Washington region and to Puerto Rico proved quite successful. By 1962, Levitt's public relations machine had spread the word that large tracts were being purchased around Paris, as a first step in an ambitious European strategy.

Business Week, Time and Newsweek, and the real estate section of the New York Times took notice of the opening, in October 1965, of Les Résidences du Chateau. Named after an 18th century castle, which had become the town hall, Levitt's first European subdivision was located in Le Mesnil Saint-Denis, a bourgade adjacent to the new town of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, in the orbit of Versailles. Completing a pre-war subdivision, Levitt built 510 houses on lots averaging 6,500 square feet. Two thirds were free-standing, the rest were duplexes, all with attached garages and perpendicular driveways. Advertized in the bourgeois daily Le Figaro and in local gazettes, the so-called "model hamlet" was visited by thousands of curious onlookers. Homes sold briskly, as they were relative bargains in a very tight market for single-family residences. Covenants, which are still closely monitored by the homeowners association, prohibited high enclosures, tall grass, garden sheds and any exterior addition to houses.

In 1967, while William Levitt sold his company to ITT, his French subsidiary opened in Lésigny, south-east of Paris, a more upscale and Americanized subdivision in a zone assigned to low density housing by the official PADOG master plan. Devised as an enclave with only two access roads, it offered a private pool and tennis "leisure center," as well as a centrally located elementary school and a outlying shopping center. The commercial success of this project was a clear indication that, amidst student demonstrations and worker's strikes, a new middle-class suburban culture was also coming of age around Paris. To attract the aristocratie ouvrière, Levitt built in the Elancourt district of Saint-Quentin en Yvelines the same kind of townhouses as in the US. Open fields outside Mennecy, close to the new town of Evry, were transformed into the quartier Levitt, as it is officially known, with two communities of 450 townhouses and 1,150 detached homes of varying sizes connected by a shopping center and a relai paroissial (church antenna). Thanks to improved financing, single-family houses at Mennecy were within reach of many (for instance, a middle manager married to a school teacher).

The time seemed ripe to conquer other European markets. In 1973, a Spanish subsidiary,

Levitt-Bosch Aymerich, S.A., opened near Madrid, "Monteclaro," a 667-unit subdivision, "located in Pozuelo de Alarcón and Majadahonda," for which I have found a brochure "cloning" that prepared for Mennecy (renderings diverged only in the type of vegetation and the presence of a lady in a bikini on a terrace!). In fact, house models were nearly identical, with the exception of a service wing complete with a maid's room, because full time help was easier and cheaper to secure in Spain than in France. In 1976, a second 459-unit community, "Montegolf" was opened "in the Medium Collocality" followed by a project of similar size in 1981, called "Montellano." To my knowledge, the Madrid venture, targeted for a more upscale clientele than that around Paris, was not promoted in the US media.[2]

In fact, 1973, when the first oil crisis hit, marked the beginning of the end for Bill Levitt .At home, he was side tracked by ITT, which replaced his old staff of home building professionals with accountants. Around Paris, others reaped the fruit of his labor, in particular the California-based builder Kaufman & Broad, which opened its first nouveau village in Saint-Quentin-2n-Yvelines in 1969 and has become a power house in and around Paris.[3]

Levitt's idea to commercialize its best-selling model, in order to take advantage of the rapid growth of the French catalogue business along American technical and commercial lines, was apparently fruitless. So was that of building in West Germany. Levitt France was sold by ITT to Parisian financiers who, due to the disappearance of large tracts of land near Paris and the rising cost of land, launched a few small operations in upmarket suburban hot beds such as Chevry II and Saint-Nom-la Bretèche, where the preservation of the open landscape has been much harder to achieve. Houses, now offered with optional full basements, remained good buys but they could not be differentiated from those of competitors (a fate Levitt also encountered in the United States). Levitt France declared bankruptcy in 1981. In fifteen years, it did not even build 5,000 units (as opposed to 125,000 in the US). Figures, however, do not account for Levitt's catalytic role in changing housing patterns across France, where single-family dwellings are presently built in greater number than apartment units. This change is even perceptible in the many French movies where action takes place in middle class tract houses, as opposed to apartments.

As Levitt's foray in other French regions (such as near Marseille, where it had trouble completing a 300-townhouse project), yielded little success and as its Madrid venture took on a rather different character, it seems preferable to focus our analysis on the Paris Region. The suburbanization of the grande couronne, the far sururbs of the French capital, certainly reflected some typically Gallic characteristics, but it also pertained to the supra-national demographic, economic and cultural conditions of a "proto-world city." Indeed, during the Levitt years, a singular Francilian identity was faceted by planning policies and the media.

Actors: builder, buyer and bureaucrats

Levitt's work near Paris represents a particularly compelling example of how planning history is shaped by the interaction between cultural, social and economic forces and individual initiatives. This dynamic will be considered through its "actors": the builder, his typical client and, between them, representatives of the pouvoirs publics, either elected officials or civil servants.

It took someone with the enthusiasm, financial leverage and bigger than life personality of William J. Levitt to materialize what of both the Francilian middle class and policy makers had in mind: planned communities of single-family homes, affordable but comfortable, in a restful, green environment. What pushed the man who called himself the "Henry Ford of

Construction," and whom House and Home referred to as the "De Gaulle of homebuilding"? Many explanations, which I have not tried to prioritize, come to mind:

- a quasi-pathological urge to try every possible avenue in home building;
- the ambition to emulate the financial success and brand recognition which consumption goods like Coca-Cola and Gillette razors had achieved in Western Europe;
- a personal attraction towards France, and his marriage to a French woman in 1969;
- an enormous appetite for money and adventure which led him to envision large and hardly realistic projects in Iran, Nigeria and Venezuela even after his foray into Europe did not prove fulfilling;
- the need, as suggested by the Wall Street Journal in 1963, to divert US public attention from domestic troubles, in particular the anti-discrimination demonstrations and lawsuits targeting his Bowie project, which attracted much negative media attention;
- the awareness that a Parisian adventure, with good copy provided by his public relations office, would cater to the complex mix of envy and disdain the U.S. media and public demonstrated toward the French and their culture;
- an eagerness to demonstrate he could achieve the excellence in community planning and landscaping which many critics denied him;
- a desire to project the image of a developer going beyond his professional duty to ensure the welfare of his buyers and local officials.

Even more so, Bill Levitt believed in the excellence and adaptability of his home building formula. At a press conference in Paris, he declared: "I find in France all the difficulties I met, twenty years ago, to push the building activity into the industrial era." Indeed, who could claim at the time greater mastery in the art of mass marketing suburbia anywhere in the world ? For a few years, his package deal was unique in the Paris region: in the price range of his models at Le Mesnil-Saint-Denis, local builders offered attached homes with smaller floor space and acreage, and many less amenities.

Overall, Levitt succeeded in imposing to his Francilian operations the efficient and collegial team organization for the staff (while keeping trade unions at bay), the emphasis on scheduling, wholesale purchasing, marketing and salesmanship and the tight supervision of sub contractors he was known for in the United States. From the outset, Levitt understood he would have to play the card of construction traditionnelle, an expression much used in its promotional literature. Wood framing, judged flimsy and socially degrading by the French, was replaced by cinder blocks, clapboards by brick veneer or stucco, asphalt shingles by ceramic tiles. Some cost cost-cutting measures, especially nailed roof framing, became common practice in France, while others, especially slab on grade construction, were judged problematic from a technical standpoint.

Levitt also knew he had a captive audience among young families headed by a salaried executive. This growing segment of France's population was the major beneficiary of the extraordinary leap toward modernization and prosperity this country experienced during the Trente Glorieuses, the three decades following World War II. Francilian middle class home buyers responded to conditions (such as the baby and mass media booms and the growth of service industries) and aspirations (such as conspicuous consumption and physical well being), which were analogous to those affecting American suburbanites. The related automobile/leisure component deserves emphasis. By 1965, the French had more cars than other Europeans and Franciliens could already shop in suburban hypermarchés. Large companies moved away from downtown Paris, often to park-like compounds in the Western suburbs. At Le Mesnil Saint Denis, Levitt was not particularly penalized by rather poor mass transit, since buyers were

willing to drive to work by way of the parkway-like Autoroute de l'Ouest. In addition, some clients, tired of horrendous week-end traffic, were willing to follow the American lead and consolidate their primary and secondary residences in a single home at a reasonable distance from their workplace.

Both in France and in the United States, affordability was the main reason to purchase a home by Levitt, like any consumption good. Just as they began buying prêt-à-porter clothing, the young bourgeois, as opposed to their parents, did not object to the notion of a standardized package, including kitchen appliances, bathroom cabinets and wall papers.[4] Buying a lot, selecting a design and a contractor was too expensive and time-consuming. In addition, middle class priorities were changing in France: Levitt's slab on grade houses did not offer wine cellars, but they had instant telephone hook-ups, something almost unheard of at the time. As wives entered the work force and household help became scarce, the promise of a private home as convenient as, and no more expensive than, an apartment, was indeed very enticing.

A third party presented a greater challenge to Bill Levitt, who soon learned that bureaucrats were not so easy to massage in France as in America. He had to address multiple (and sometimes competing) agenda and demands, at both the local and regional levels. Forming the elite of the villages or small towns targeted by Levitt, the mayors and councilmen were very attached to their prerogative of delivering and controlling building permits. Spared by industrialization, many towns in the Parisian grande couronne were in dire economic condition, but had preserved their historic charm and residential appeal. Local officials desired to increase their tax base and provide modern amenities, but they shunned high density, low-cost housing and refused incorporation in new town precincts. For them, the formula of the nouveau village offered by Levitt appeared least traumatic in the inescapable transition from rural to suburban economy and landscape.

Levitt and his staff met a particularly daunting challenge in Le Mesnil Saint-Denis, where the mayor was a close associate of Paul Delouvrier, the "boss" of the Paris region.[5] To comply with this gentleman's demands for a socially balanced growth, Levitt also built a dozen garden apartments, something he never did in his American communities. Another gesture of good will was to build two tennis courts in the park of the château (as opposed to his property), the embryo for today's large municipal club. Paradoxically, the density, mix of housing types and integration to the pre-existing fabric achieved at the Mesnil-Saint-Denis would not displease American proponents of smart growth and new urbanism.

Levitt, whose reputation as a home builder had already filtered through reports of the missions de productivité sponsored by the Marshall Plan, needed to attract the good graces of bureaucrats having the upper hand in housing finance and regional planning. These, in return, could only benefit from Levitt's success, as disciplining Paris' suburban growth with planned unit developments was a major agenda for General de Gaulle and his entourage. High political interests were at stake: although it enjoyed secure employment and had substantial savings, the Francilian middle class was victimized by an acute housing crisis resulting from decades of rent control policies. French officials were conscious that a majority of voters preferred houses to apartments and were eager to promote homeownership in the name of social harmony and control. In 1966, although they exceeded the price limit for homeownership subisidies, Levitt was allowed to showcase two houses at Villagexpo in Saint-Michel-sur-Orge, an influential demonstration project sponsored by the Ministry of Construction to promote planned communities of small industrialized homes. Levitt's greater emphasis on townhouse construction in his French operations also seems to relate to public policies to find a compromise between the ideal of the private home and the demand for medium density housing. Levitt adjusted to the Gallic/Francilian ball game of private-public partnership; indeed building in a new town, or

in a Zone d'Aménagement Concerté, as was the case in Mennecy, presented funding advantages with regards to sharing the cost of infrastructures and amenities.[6]

Addressing criticisms

Despite the overall satisfaction of parties directly involved in the Levitt story, the negative response of outside observers, who mostly belonged to the media and design professions and for whom any connection with the United States was de facto politically incorrect, have prevailed. Detractors do not single out Levitt villages (Kaufman and Broad is their major scape goat), although the director of My Life in Pink filmed (without blatant identification) his satire of bourgeois peer pressure in the single-family section of Mennecy. Nonetheless, criticisms dramatically concur: planned subdivisions of small homes in the Paris Region are anti-French, look banal and encourage conformity.

In all fairness, even the harshest critic never advanced the thesis of a pro-American conspiracy. Except for claiming to provide American-style comfort, Levitt France did not aggressively promote its transatlantic origins. Many home buyers, as well as the mayor of Le Mesnil Saint-Denis and some high-ranking planning bureaucrats, had traveled to the United States. Their visit had confirmed two positive stereotypes long ingrained in French minds: Americans loved and respected nature, and their small homes illustrated a democratic ideal of social equalization. Some home buyers worked for American companies or in the burgeoning computer industry. As it was within easy reach of Orly airport, the Lésigny complex attracted its flying personnel. But none of the points I just mentioned illustrate a deliberately anti-French attitude.

As rebukes appear more ideological than experiential, allow me to test them against visual evidence, taking as my starting point the major constituents of the Levitt formula: the comfortable but affordable "ready-to-live" house and the open landscape. As manufactured object, the tract house responds to an inherent logic, which Levitt did not initiate but helped refine and expand on either side of the Atlantic Ocean: that of casting add-ons on a basic parallelepiped, framed by "book-end" gables, topped by a two-slope roof. As cultural artifact, the home has itself two major constituents: its interior layout, l'espace de vie, and its public face, the street elevation.. A first impression comes to mind. The low, elongated profile of the houses, the unassuming, rather flat, facades, the absence of high fences are visually the opposite of the proletarian or petty bourgeois banlieue pavillonaire, which had mushroomed in the 1920s around Paris. But there is much more to pre-1965 Parisian suburbia than the landscape one can glimpse riding the train from Roissy airport to central Paris, as will be argued later in the text.

The U.S. media kept insisting on how Levitt had reused American plans, with a few minor cultural adaptations, in particular the inclusion of a small entry. But, in truth, there are only so many space-saving ways one could fit three bedrooms and two baths in a rectangular footprint, with no or few windows on each short side. It is however certain that Levitt and his followers helped alter French interiors along American lines in subtle ways, which nonetheless betray changing attitudes toward hygiene and domesticity. Among these changes are the addition of a sink in the W.C., the inclusion of the toilet in the bathroom, the replacement of tubs by showers, the creation of a master bath and suite. On the other hand, some decorative features were deemed too dear to the French bourgeois to let go of. In particular, parquet floors, a status symbol inherited from the Ancien Régime and the kind of extras which made Levitt's homes more expensive in France than in the US, were preferred to the plush, and quintessentially middle American, "wall-to-wall carpeting."

Undoubtedly, the banality reproach is most warranted for the facade fronting the public space. Although the proportions of his houses were pleasant and their absence of pretense was refreshing, Levitt's attempts at localism or Americanism lacked authenticity. The American builder took at face value the ideology of a composite, if not imaginary, "Ile de France style," a compromise between the rural vernacular and the traditional habitat of small towns, which was put forward by local authorities and shelter magazines. The Ile de France may have comprised regions with individual and very diverse design traditions, but alluding to unpretentious farm houses which Parisians were restoring as week-end escapes, was good marketing strategy. Levitt's "exotic" American add-ons remind us of Robert Venturi's culturalist interpretation of the Levittown house: in particular, colonnaded porches and shingled gables acted as residual symbols for two of France's favorite American fantasies: the New England colonial village and the Louisiana plantation.[7] The process of aesthetic hybridization, so evident in the American suburbs, was bound to happen: one French shelter magazine use the adjective "Américano-francilien" to qualify Evry, which is a slightly Frenchified version of one of Levitt's "rambler" models, and the term has stuck to this day.

I contend that Levitt's Francilian landscape achieves distinction, not so much in the individual lots, which are nicely planted but carry no outstanding features, as in the additional open space which subsequent developers would generally neglect to offer. Experienced French planners (advised by Levitt staffers) preserved or enhanced existing scenery or created landscape assets from scratch. L'Orée de Lésigny, which had the highest ratio of park and recreation acreage of all Levitt subdivisions erected before 1968, kept pastures, haies vives and earth paths bordered by grand trees;[8] houses at the end of the subdivision backed a small forest, as did those at Le Mesnil-Saint-Denis. In more barren landscapes, pathways and greenways were created. In Le Mesnil-Saint-Denis, these were small interior reserves in joint ownership; in Mennecy and Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, elongated greenways with tree clumps and berms, on which backyards were facing. In every subdivision, all utilities were placed underground, preventing unsightly telephone poles like those in traditional Parisian suburbs.

The word Levitt may bring to mind potato fields in Long Island, but the company did not adopt a tabula rasa approach in many of its later subdivisions, where it made commercial sense to spare historically significant features. In Bowie, between Washington and Annapolis, century-old trees were preserved and the Georgian mansion was given to the municipality to create a museum. In Mennecy, Levitt sold at low cost the magnificent park of the former château to the town.

When I took French colleagues to Mennecy last summer, they paid much more attention to the style of the houses than to the intrinsic qualities of the mature landscape. However, for Levitt, the quality and identity conferred by the landscape (and by the internal layout of the houses) mattered more than the character of the facades. This attitude pertains to a North American emphasis on nature over culture, and on landscape over architecture, which is related to the dominance of geography over history as civilizing forces; Europeans generally take the opposite approach. Planning icons such as Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, New York, Greenbelt near Washington, D.C., or Baldwin Hills Village in Los Angeles all were designed with intentionally neutral, "vernacular" facades; their modernity was conferred by nature; the community as an ensemble, its landscape infrastructure as much as its architectural superstructures, is taken as the unit of design, superceding the dwelling itself.[9] It is also worth noting tat Levitt's Parisian subdivision have smaller lots and narrower streets than their American counterparts, and this difference in scale - again, a common transatlantic occurrence - accentuates the visual impact of facades.

What escapes critics is that the landscape of the Levittvilles, although of predominantly Anglo-American character, was not unprecedented in France. In fact, peppered with châteaux,

parks, and hunting forests, the Paris suburbs may be the best example of pre-modern exurbia. After the French Revolution, subdividing aristocratic estates into large lots for retirement and secondary homes became the earliest tool of bourgeois suburbanization. Leaving strong marks on the Western suburbs, ambitious business ventures preserved natural assets while transferring their elite status to a new class. In particular, the Second Empire town of Le Vésinet, an early example of beneficial planning hybridity, as it was based on English precedents, combined leisure and exclusivity, boosterism and environmental regulation, picturesque homes with an open fluid landscape. The 19th century also bequeathed us an imagery, if not an ideology, of the single-family home surrounded on four sides by a seemingly endless lawn. Right before World War I, the château legacy, so much emphasized by Levitt in its first French subdivision, was democratized without losing its picturesque appeal at Draveil, a cooperative for white collar workers. In marked contrast with attached units in company towns, houses were surrounded by nature on four sides. They were variations on the theme of the suburban villa which had gained popularity as the ideal type of permanent residence for the bourgeoisie. All these early precedents has been scrutinized by scholars. The missing links with the Levitt communities of the 1960s are subdivisions dating back to the interwar period or early Trente Glorieuses, which were built around country clubs and golf courses (such as the Lys-Chantilly and Saint-Nom La Bretêche), resort subdivisions on the French Riviera, and the village de vacances for the middle class and garden apartment complexes in former suburban estates.

The conformity blame on the part of Parisian intellectuals was largely predicated on disdain for, of even denial of, any culture other than theirs. Again, history challenges this perspective, though. Since contemporaries of Jean-Jacques Rousseau built maisons de plaisance outside Paris, the bourgeois longing for a permanent single-family dwelling in a picturesque setting has been an important undercurrent in French culture. The examples of Le Vésinet or many cités-jardins prove that de-emphasizing boundaries between homes was acceptable to a broad spectrum of Frenchmen even before World War II. Suburban life styles pre-dated the arrival of Levitt but, as happened in the United States, they evolved into a full fledged cultural model, with limited reliance on urban precedents. Pre-conditions existed when Levitt moved to France: most of its buyers already lived outside of Paris intra muros (where cramped and overpriced apartments were far from attractive anyhow) and they already had assumed their identity of homo automobilus.

The strict covenants preserving the architecture and landscape of the Levittvilles has been scorned and deemed un-French. Again, the issue is not that simple, as planning and design regulations have been part of French life since the reign of Henri IV and have been understood as factors of long-term beautification as much as social control. Historically, in suburbs as far apart in the social spectrum as Le Vésinet and Daumont, strict rules regulated outlook and behavior. The population of the Quartier Levitt in Mennecy was surveyed in a sociological inquiry (another US import, by the way), which the Government published in 1978. Although it did not endorse it, this study had to admit that, with the exception of those of proletarian origin, Mennecy's Levittowners generally enjoyed the collectivized life style imposed by regulations and the seasonal sociability which one experiences in American suburbs. For instance, prohibitions of vegetable gardening, open air laundry drying, R.V. parking did not represent major impositions.

Concluding remarks

Although my research is far from complete, it is possible to identify roles which the Levittville played at the local, regional and international levels. In terms of international planning history, Levitt's largest communities around Paris shed new light on an important phenomenon taking place in the 1960s and early 1970s: the cross fertilization between European and North American residential policies, planning theories and design features. The Levitt case study pertains to several key elements of these exchanges: the fashioning of more inclusive homeownership policies; the promotion of lighter and more flexible construction methods; the search for a balance between site development and preservation; the implementation of community planning ideals; and the landscaping of open space (related to the notions of clustering).

In the Levitt example, American ideas were adopted and adapted because they both had prior roots in France's culture and matched new societal needs. A reverse example of this cross fertilization, which proved less fruitful because it had no historical roots, was Operation Breakthrough, where U.S. housing officials encourage the import of French methods of heavy prefabrication as potential solutions to the crisis of low-cost and high density housing in large US cities. If this facet of our story seems to essentially belong to the recent past, many of its lessons are still applicable to 21st century suburbs.

At the local level, the impact of the largest Levittville, at Mennecy, has been analyzed by its inhabitants.[10] When they first moved, their income and education level was far superior to that of the existing population, but this dichotomy is less sensible today, as the vie associative, once the domain of the Levittowners, affects all of Mennecy. At a time when the extreme right is trying to woo French bourgeois, it is reassuring to see that inhabitants of the Quartier Levitt have held elected office, at the local and regional levels, under the Socialist banner. While they identify very much with the unaltered and well maintained exterior of the model in which they live, most homeowners have taken advantage of the flimsiness of plasterboard partitions to drastically remodel and personalize their interiors, some even digging space to add a tubular wine cellar. One of their present concern is to preserve the landscape integrity of their community, as the ZAC regulations have just expired.

The Levittvilles accelerated a major change in French society, as identity switched from political and religious affiliation to life style preferences. Residential patterns came to determine social consciousness as much as class and income. This change is particularly significant in and around Paris. In the residential mosaic of the Capital Region, the Levittvilles are particularly suitable to those who prefer living in a house surrounded by a garden. This diversity is, in my humble opinion, rather desirable, and planning deficiencies (dating themselves to the 1960s and 1970s) affect essentially interstitial spaces devoted to transit and economic activities. But this last discussion is yet another "Americano-Francilian" topic. Longue vie aux Levittvilles!

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N.B: Additional research will be undertaken before July 2004, allowing for the paper to evolve and become more substantial. My intention is not to read the paper but to speak to a series of slides.

1 The same reaction, much amplified, followed the opening of EuroDisney in Marne-la-Vallée in 1992.
2 Information found on the Levitt-Bosch Aymerich website at www.levitt.es. Owned and managed by Spanish citizens, the company is still in existence. built near Madrid Levitt Park 1 and 2 and Grove Park 1 and 2 ad also worked in Barcelona in the early 1980s, on Avinguda Diagonal and built the press compound for the Olympic Games. Recent developments are the Gardens of Valdemarin, Levitt Gardens, Majorca Apartments, Gardens Of The Prague, Old Orchard, Mount Alina, Green Park, Streams Of Moratalaz, Villa Adriana and Stops Of The Moral .
3 Isabelle Gournay, "From villages à l'américaine to immeubles de prestige: the ascent and Frenchification of Kaufman & Broad," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, Denver, 2003.
4 A common dislike among Levitt homebuyers in the US and France were the metal louvered doors used for cloth closets.
5 For additional information on discussions between the mayor and Levitt, see Gournay, 2001.
6 In the late 1960s, Levitt also built houses in the new town of Columbia, MD, at a time when its private developer, James Rouse, was running short in cash and had to sell large lots to mass builders.
7 See Isabelle Gournay "From Mount Vernon to tract houses: the American neo-colonial home in XXth century France," in Kenny Marotta (ed.), Recreating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming, 2004.
8 "Land utilization for amenities, commercial and industrial for single family projects," chart prepared by the Engineering Department Levitt and Sons, February 2, Clarence Moore personal archives, Kensington, New Hampshire. A close contender was Willingboro, NJ, with 29 % but the ration for Levittown, Pennsylvania was 14% and for Puerto Rico 12%.
9 This idea is discussed by Wright 1994, p.32.
10 See Roussel 1987 (the author lived in the quartier Levitt) and Mennecy et son Histoire