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## **Support for entrepreneurship in “priority neighbourhoods”, a public policy for spatial justice?**

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### **Abstract**

As French politicians promote access to resources for business start-ups by residents of deprived areas in order to improve their socioeconomic conditions, this paper examines the distributional nature of business support as a spatial justice policy. It is based on a qualitative field study of three business support structures located in deprived areas in France. It is a contribution to the debate in urban research on the production of inequalities in territorial policy.

**Keywords:** business support, urban policy, spatial justice, equality

### **Résumé**

Alors que les acteurs politiques nationaux promeuvent l'accès aux ressources pour la création d'entreprise dans les quartiers afin que leurs habitants « entreprennent » et améliorent leurs conditions de vie, l'article interroge la logique distributive de la politique de soutien à l'entrepreneuriat comme outil de justice spatiale. Il s'appuie sur une enquête de terrain qualitative menée auprès de trois structures d'accompagnement localisées dans des quartiers prioritaires. Il s'inscrit ainsi en continuité des travaux de recherche urbaine qui étudient le rôle des politiques publiques territoriales dans la production des inégalités.

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**Mots-clés :** entrepreneuriat, accompagnement, quartier prioritaire, justice, égalité

## Introduction

### *Urban policy for fair equality of opportunity*

France's *politique de la ville* (urban policy) is a territorial policy intended to reduce the social, economic and urban divide between France's 1,514 poorest areas and their surrounding areas. At a meeting of the interministerial municipalities committee, the Minister for Cohésion des territoires et des relations avec les collectivités territoriales (Territorial Cohesion and Local Authority Relations) spoke of an "imperative of social and territorial justice" targeting "*quartiers prioritaires*" (QP; priority areas) (gouvernement, 2021, p. 4). She linked the notion of justice with equality of opportunity, arguing that it should become "a reality for the 5.5 million inhabitants of these areas" as a path to emancipation (ibid.). Much emphasised by politicians since the late 2000s, "equality of opportunity" refers to the possibility for everyone to achieve a decent position in society on the principle of meritocracy (Dubet, 2010). In its struggle against spatial inequalities in the pursuit of "equal opportunities for all", the state applies a policy of territorial fairness<sup>1</sup> by granting funds and specific instruments to the QPs, to be implemented by the joint intermunicipal authorities. Since the urban policy reform of 2014, this strategy has included measures to support entrepreneurship. Their intent is to help individuals to set up and develop a business by providing skills, funding, and professional networks.

The government's position thus reveals a certain conception of justice in urban policy, that is, equality of opportunity as a means to individual emancipation. It takes the form of spatially targeted measures, such as the support for business creation in deprived areas.

### *Exploring equality in the implementation of support for business creation in QP.*

This article explores the government's "egalitarian" discourse with an examination of spatial justice in the support for entrepreneurship in QP. It draws on the geography of inequalities, a field that studies the role of territorial public action in the

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1. The *politique de la ville* (urban policy) relates to the concept of "maximin" developed by John Rawls (2009). Following reparative principles, the poorest areas receive more in order to iron out disparities and give everyone, wherever they live, a satisfactory quality of life.

production of inequalities. In fact, urban research studies show that the territorialisation of urban policy has mixed outcomes in reducing social and spatial inequalities (Tissot and Poupeau, 2005). Indeed, in some cases territorialisation exacerbates discrimination for residents of deprived areas by assigning them a devalued territorial identity (Kirszbaum, 2016). The aim of the article, therefore, is to examine the impact of support measures for entrepreneurship designed to reduce inequalities. More specifically, it analyses the access that QP residents have to support structures and the resources they offer. In studying the question of access, it goes beyond the approach based on spatial distribution espoused in urban planning policies founded on distributive justice. It considers the way individual, social, and territorial factors influence the capacity of people to use the resources offered (Fol and Gallez, 2013). This dual entry point recalls the definition of spatial justice given by Edward Soja: “the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them” (2009, p. 3).

Access to resources for business creation in QPs is a subject that has received little scholarly attention. Because of the recency of the 2014 reform and disciplinary silos, both urban policy studies on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship studies on priority neighbourhoods have been limited. Geographers and sociologists specialising in urban policy primarily study urban renovation and housing, with a focus on issues of social mixing and cohesion, or processes of participation and politicisation. In these analyses, the economic aspect plays a minor part, largely restricted to questions of job mobility and zoning policies (L'Horty and Morin, 2016). Nevertheless, there is one urban planning thesis on the presence of economic activities in QPs (Hercule, 2022) and two management science studies that examine entrepreneurship support targeting young people (Trindade-Chadeau, 2019), as well as a system of support for women's social entrepreneurship in QPs (Notais and Tixier, 2018).

On the other hand, political and media content indicate high levels of enthusiasm about entrepreneurship as a tool of equality in deprived areas. In a short 2018 speech entitled “Une chance pour chacun” (An opportunity for everyone), President Emmanuel Macron called for a “policy of emancipation” through “economic success”. A year earlier, in Tourcoing, he had already spoken of a “right to economic policy” for “people in deprived areas” in a speech on “national mobilisation for cities and neighbourhoods”. This enthusiasm is embedded in a broader institutional context, notably represented by the European Social Fund and the World Bank, which believe that providing access to entrepreneurship for poor populations would reduce unemployment and improve their development and living conditions (Narayan, 2005).

The article questions these public claims that business creation represents a means of upward social mobility for vulnerable populations and feeds into scientific debate on the subject. The liberal view is that entrepreneurship reinforces the capacity for action of individuals (Narayan, 2005), whereas the critical approach shows conversely that it perpetuates structural inequalities by placing the burden of responsibility for them on individuals (Abdelnour, 2017).

### *A field study using qualitative methods*

Access to entrepreneurial resources in QPs raises the question of where and how the structures support to business creation, and who benefits. The answers provided in this article draw on two 18-month field studies. The first investigates a nonprofit organisation located in Saint-Denis (93) called the “Maison de l’initiative économique locale” (Miel)—the centre for local economic initiative. It supports anyone interested in setting up or developing a business located in Plaine Commune. The Miel consists of five advisers, one of whom manages the Pépinière, a support structure dedicated to business projects with high development potential. The second field study looks at a structure called “Osez entreprendre”, which supports business creators in the 15 QPs located within the Nantes urban area. This entity consists of four structures that support and/or provide funding for any individual located in a QP in setting up and growing their business (figure 1).

<b>Name of structure</b>	<b>the Miel</b>	<b>Osez entreprendre</b>
<b>Place of operations</b>	Plaine Commune intermunicipal authority, where 70% of the area and its inhabitants are in QPs	The QPs of the Nantes Métropole intermunicipal authority
<b>Status</b>	Nonprofit organisation	Group of nonprofit organisations
<b>Set-up date</b>	1998	2013
<b>Initiators</b>	Local intermunicipal elected officials	Nantes Métropole
<b>Objectives</b>	To support local initiatives in favour of endogenous economic growth	To support socioprofessional integration
<b>Sources of funding</b>	Mainly public institutions (intermunicipal authority, European Union, region, département, Caisse des dépôts et consignations and Central government)	Mainly the BPI, the intermunicipal authority, Central Government and Caisse des dépôts et consignations
<b>Operation</b>	Five advisers conduct individual interviews with entrepreneurs Group training sessions (often led by outside instructors)	The job centres steer entrepreneurs towards two support structures and two funding structures which offer individual appointments and group training sessions
<b>Number of people supported per year</b>	173 project initiators and 56 entrepreneurs (2018)	110 project initiators and 97 entrepreneurs (2019)

Figure 1: Presentation of the structures studied in the survey  
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The study employs three methods (observations, interviews, grey literature). I conducted some 40 observations of different kinds: technical events such as a meeting of the steering committee of the Nantes structure, entrepreneurship awareness-raising events, leafleting campaigns on a market, group training sessions, networking events, etc. The events observed were organised by the structures themselves, their partners, their competitors, or national actors to provide context. The aim of these observations was to analyse the entrepreneurship sites and the profiles of the participants. In addition, I conducted more than a hundred interviews with two types of subjects: around 60 with institutions involved in supporting entrepreneurship or urban policy, or both, at different levels,<sup>2</sup> and some 50 with entrepreneurs who were clients of the support structures. The interviews with the institutional actors were semistructured, designed to collect factual and discursive information, whereas I focused on life narratives with the entrepreneurs to give them the opportunity to talk about the subjects that were important to them and to understand the biographical trajectory in

2. Institutional actors encompass a range of profiles, such as the politicians who direct the support strategies, the administrators who implement them, and the civil society organisations and businesses that apply them.

which their activity is rooted. Each interview was divided into three components: the profile of the respondents and their business, their partnership and territorial attachments, their conceptions of entrepreneurship.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the observations and interviews, I combed through the grey literature: protocols for the application of entrepreneurship support in QPs, activity reports of the support structures, advertising brochures, etc. These documents, emanating from the survey subjects, provide factual information and multiple representations of entrepreneurship in QPs.

This article reveals inequalities of access to the support structures and proposes a new vision of the relationship between justice and entrepreneurial support, guided by procedural rather than distributive principles (Young, 1990). Before that, it examines how the public actors make the connection between spatial justice and entrepreneurial support in deprived areas.

## **Spatial distribution of entrepreneurship support: pursuing equality of opportunity for individuals**

### *Equality of opportunity by meritocratic entrepreneurship*

In supporting business creation in QPs, the government's aim is to promote equality of opportunity. At the time of the introduction of the self-employment regime in 2009, Secretary of State Hervé Novelli took the view that the state should establish an "enterprise licence for all" so that "everyone [has] the power to pursue upward social mobility for themselves" (Abdelnour, 2017, p. 152): "what better social elevator is there than business? But freelance working can do even more: requiring neither money, nor qualifications, nor connections, it puts a youngster from a housing estate and a pensioner from a smart neighbourhood on an equal footing. What counts is the idea and the 'get-up-and-go' that it takes to turn the project into a success. Everyone has the same opportunity" (ibid., p. 74). In his speech in Tourcoing 10 years later, Emmanuel Macron doubled down on the ideology of meritocracy through entrepreneurship. He wanted to overturn "this society of status where success is for an economic aristocracy". In the "Une chance pour chacun" speech, he notably argues for a "policy of emancipation" by entrepreneurship, in which "everyone is able to pursue their

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3. They are recorded and manually transcribed with the agreement of the respondents.

aspirations, and people are no longer confined to their place, whether social or territorial”.

Here, Hervé Novelli and Emmanuel Macron promote the idea that business success depends on individual merit. According to the sociologist Sarah Abdelnour, in so doing they attribute responsibility to the working classes for their socioprofessional situation. She considers that small businesses “encourage economically vulnerable populations to stand on their own feet” by creating their own jobs (2017, p. 32). Her analysis is in line with critical views on the ideology and effects of neoliberal rationality (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2011; Brown, 2004). This ideology extends market values to all spheres of society and encourages individuals to develop the spirit of enterprise in order to avoid being left out. It is each person’s responsibility to succeed by demonstrating personal initiative in order to remain competitive and employable. If self-enterprise increases the capacity for action, it also makes the individual feel solely responsible in the event of failure. By promoting individual drive as a neutral criterion of success, politicians mask the influence of structural inequalities on living conditions. In so doing, they depoliticise the effects of their entrepreneurial strategy.

### *Facilitating support for business creation in QPs for greater justice*

While success is down to the individual, spatial access to support structures is the task of government. Since the postwar era, French territorial public action has associated social equality with spatial equality (Estèbe, 2015). According to this theoretical position, equality of opportunity comes through equal access to resources. Distribution of those resources in the QPs is intended to “guarantee residents of deprived areas real equality of access” (Ministère de l’Égalité des territoires et du logement, 2014, article 1). The actors involved in supporting entrepreneurship emphasise merit, but also espouse the traditional conception of fighting inequality through the spatial distribution of the resources for entrepreneurship. Support for business creation is considered to be a service to which QP residents need to have access in order to improve their lives, given that business establishments generally avoid these areas (CGET and CDC, 2016).<sup>4</sup>

QPs are areas characterised by an accumulation of multiple discriminations of gender, social class, nationality, and race.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, the Agence nationale pour la

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4. That is, places dedicated to business activities.

5. I use the term “race” as a social category and a key to the analysis of inequalities, not as reflecting any biological data.

cohésion sociale et l'égalité des chances (National Agency for Social Cohesion and Equality of Opportunity) established territorial plans for the prevention of discrimination in these areas. Discrimination undoubtedly limits residents' capacity for action. Sociological studies have shown, for example, that people who suffer social, racial, or gender discriminations experience restricted access to education systems and the job market (Beauchemin, Hamel and Simon, 2015). Moreover, a large proportion of QP residents are working-class or of foreign origin, or both,<sup>6</sup> which increases their socioprofessional vulnerability as revealed by high rates of economic inactivity and unemployment. In 2019, the share of working-age population in QPs was 58.5%, with 22.5% of this population aged 15 to 64 being unemployed, compared with respectively 72.7% and 8.4% in the benchmark urban units (Observatoire national de la politique de la ville, 2021). Precarity reduces their economic and social resources and therefore their capacity to create a business. The support structures studied here work with many individuals who experience social discrimination because they are female, of foreign origin, or lack qualifications, or a combination of these factors (figure 2). Their business projects tend to be modest, often registered as micro-enterprises.

<b>Data</b>	<b>Clients of the structures</b>	<b>Sample of the 27 entrepreneurs interviewed</b>
Average age	40	38
Proportion of women	53%	67%
Proportion of foreigners	Not available	41%
Proportion below baccalaureate level	35% to 50%	40%

Figure 2: Profiles of clients of the support structures investigated  
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### *Introduction of a long-standing national policy into QPs*

In 2013, President François Hollande launched the Entrepreneurs des quartiers plan, which marked a turning point in the territorialisation of support for business creation in QPs. His aim was to combat urban inequality of opportunity for business creation by increasing the activity of support structures in QPs by 50%. Until the planning law for the city and urban cohesion of 21 February 2014, economic issues were not a priority in urban policy. At the time of the emergence of urban policy in the late 1970s, the initial priorities were social cohesion and urban renewal. Interest in

6. According to the Insee data for 2019, in France, foreigners account for 21.2% of QP populations, as compared with 7.1% in other areas.



economic development primarily dates back to the 1990s. The government established urban free zones to encourage companies to move into and hire personnel in QPs in exchange for tax breaks. The creation of the *Établissement public national d'aménagement et de restructuration des espaces commerciaux et artisanaux* (Epareca; national public establishment for the development and restructuring of commercial and small business areas) also helped to stimulate the economy of the QPs, as did measures to boost employment among residents. In 2014, economic development and employment became an integral component of urban policy action. Various measures were introduced to encourage business creation, including the spatialisation of support for the creation and development of economic activity in the QPs. The *Banque publique d'investissement* (BPI; Public Investment Bank) manages the national Entrepreneurship for All programme targeting these areas.<sup>7</sup>

The entrepreneurship support policy in QPs has its roots in national policy. Since the post-Fordist industrial reorganisation of the 1970s, governments have introduced more and more measures to promote business creation in order to stimulate economic growth. In a climate marked by wage insecurity and unemployment, support for entrepreneurship became a national policy for jobs (Aucouturier, 1996). In the 2010s, the establishment of micro-enterprises reinforced the link between business creation and self-employment. In the view of Sarah Abdelnour, it can even be equated with a social policy targeted primarily at people who are excluded from the job market.

By encouraging business creation support structures to operate in the QPs, the state is seeking to enhance equality of opportunity for the people living there. Despite the role it attributes to personal merit, this territorial policy reflects a distributional vision of justice. The task here is to examine how it is reflected on the ground, by observing whether areas or populations, or both, benefit more than others from the resources provided by the support structures.

## **Spatial and social inequalities in access to entrepreneurship**

### *Spatial disparities between the QPs in an intermunicipal area in Nantes*

The support structures are not available to all, because they are unequally distributed between the QPs in a joint intermunicipal area. Indeed, the survey reveals

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7. The BPI is the entity responsible for the financing and development of companies in France. Since 2019, it has run entrepreneurship support policy in QPs, which was previously the task of the France Entrepreneur Agency.

an imbalance in their location, which creates inequalities of access between people in areas where mobility is often restricted. The map of the distribution of support activities in Nantes illustrates this reality (figure 3). Constructed from observations, interviews, and document analyses, it shows the geography of the activities of the support structure by situating its main partners. The business support and incubator premises are primarily located west of Nantes city centre. Moreover, the structure's 2019 activity report reveals unequal across different QPs. The Bellevue or the Dervallières municipalities contain the majority of the projects supported, to the detriment of Sillon or Rezé. This disproportion is explained by disparities between the QPs in terms of demographics, accessibility, economic dynamism, and the presence of pre-existing institutional actors. For example, Bellevue, where a third of QP residents live, is accessible by public transport, is home to a significant number of businesses, and is the site of urban renewal and commercial regeneration projects headed by Nantes Métropole. The latter is seeking to reinforce economic activity there, although the area is already home to more entrepreneurs than elsewhere. Pragmatically, the advisers in the Osez entreprendre structure operate in the QPs where there are premises and partners who can host their activities. For example, they hold a weekly workshop in Bellevue in premises lent to them as part of the urban renewal process. Finally, the location of the entrepreneurship support network reinforces the socioeconomic specialisation of the QPs in Nantes. These urban inequalities of access are visible in other spheres of public action such as the breast cancer screening centres located in QPs (Vaillant et al., 2020). However, the unequal distribution of resources between QPs for the creation and development of businesses is partially counterbalanced by an intermunicipal network of employment and neighbourhood centres that host events and provide local service in all neighbourhoods.

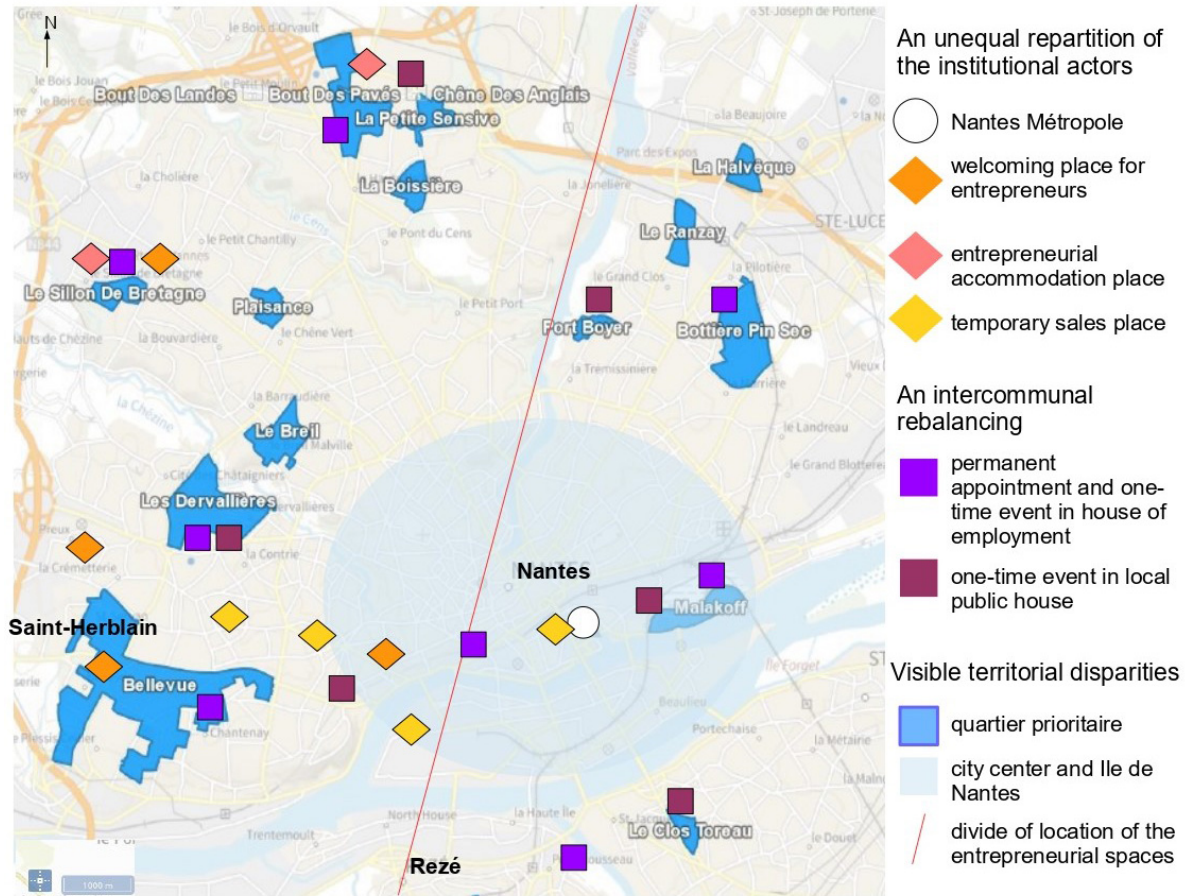


Figure 3: The unequal spatial distribution of Osez entrepreneur agency sites in Nantes

Source: map produced by Loréna Clément from the website [Système d'information géographique de la politique de la ville](#) Located in Seine-Saint-Denis, the Miel's operations are also distributed unequally across the intermunicipal area. The figure 4 shows how its events predominantly take place in the town centre and close to Paris. It is less active in the QPs in Épinay-sur-Seine, Villetaneuse or Stains. While the head of the Miel justifies the location of these sites by emphasising their accessibility from different parts of the intermunicipal zone, the activity reports show differences in support for entrepreneurs depending on their place of residence. In 2019, the Miel supported few entrepreneurs from La Courneuve, Villetaneuse or Pierrefitte-sur-Seine relative to their demographic weight in the intermunicipal area. For example, La Courneuve accounts for 10% of the population of Plaine Commune, but only 5% of the entrepreneurs supported. Their overall proportion has declined since 2016, whereas the number of entrepreneurs from Miel's resources benefit inhabitants of the closest or best served municipalities, especially given that the advisers do not travel much around the

city's different QPs. Moreover, the municipalities with the most geographical advantages correspond to economically dynamic areas where support for entrepreneurship has political backing. In Saint-Denis, where one of the elected officials is head of the Miel, the municipality makes its own managed premises available to entrepreneurs.

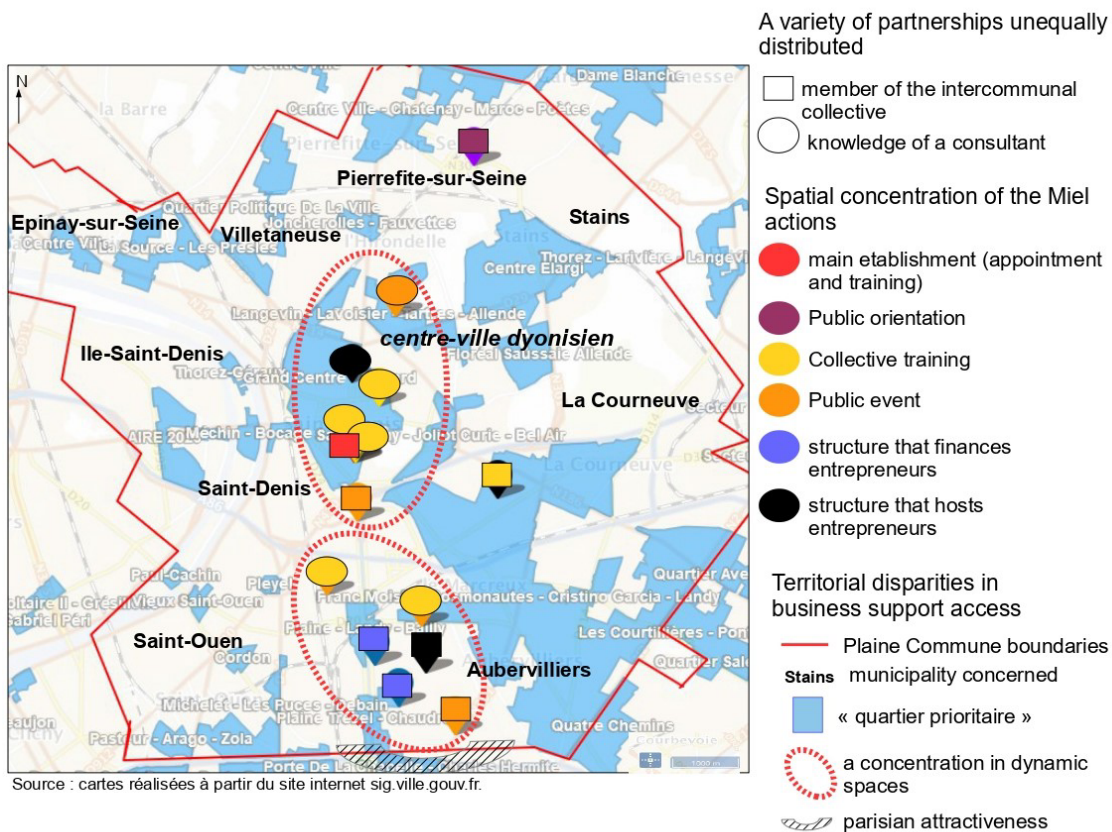


Figure 4: The unequal spatial distribution of the Miel's operations  
 Source: map produced by Loréna Clément from the website [Système d'information géographique de la politique de la ville](https://www.sig.ville.gouv.fr/)

The consequence of the uneven intermunicipal distribution of the support structures' premises and activities is that the access that people have to entrepreneurship resources depends on the QP they live in. This observation accords with the view of the Bordeaux public urbanism agency, which has shown how the uneven coverage of the entrepreneurship support structures between QPs on the right and left banks of the Garonne results in inequality in access to this support among local people (A'Urba, 2021). Aware of these issues, advisers for the Osez entreprendre agency conduct open-air awareness-raising events in the QPs where they have no

premises. In 2019, for example, they set up a stall every month on Rezé market to provide information to passers-by. On two occasions during the year, they travelled for two days with an awareness-raising bus, stopping in four different QPs.

### *Social disparities between the structures located in QPs*

In addition to geographical differences in access to support, access to the structures varies between different types of entrepreneurial projects. In Plaine Commune, the intermunicipal authority has two goals in providing political support for entrepreneurship: socioprofessional integration for local people and the economic development of the area. This twofold objective leads it to support two types of support structure: those targeted at individuals trading in a small way who would like to upgrade their skills, and those targeting businesses with significant development potential. At the Miel, a large proportion of the projects supported are micro-enterprises operating in traditional sectors such as reselling, human services, catering, taxicab services, or else construction and public works, which require little investment. Things are different at the Pépinière, which is run by a Miel adviser (figure 5). This business incubator was set up by officials in the intermunicipal authority to promote local development. It is located on a housing estate in La Courneuve. The businesses it supports are primarily digital projects with potential for growth: telemarketing, online trading, videogame design, computer software, or electronic music software. In fact, three companies have been awarded the “French Tech Diversité” label.



Structure name	the Miel	the Pépinière
<b>Structure</b>	Business creation support organisation	Business incubator managed under a public service contract by Miel
<b>Set-up date</b>	1998	2005
<b>Initiators</b>	Plaine Commune intermunicipal authority	Plaine Commune intermunicipal authority
<b>Objectives</b>	Socioprofessional integration and local development	Entrepreneurial and local development
<b>Place of residence of client entrepreneurs</b>	Plaine Commune intermunicipal area	Across France (particularly Plaine Commune and Paris)
<b>Source of funds</b>	Mainly public institutions	Mainly public institutions
<b>Operation and resources provided</b>	Individual interviews and group training sessions on entrepreneurial skills and practices Networking	Provision of premises Advice on business development Networking
<b>Profile of target entrepreneurs</b>	Individuals with small businesses seeking professional development	Initiators of projects with significant development potential
<b>Number of people supported in 2018</b>	173 project initiators and 56 entrepreneurs	24 entrepreneurs hosted

Figure 5: The Miel and the Pépinière, two types of support for entrepreneurship  
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Requiring more financial, educational and social resources than those covered by the Miel, the businesses supported by the Pépinière are also different in their social characteristics. At the Miel, there are roughly equal numbers of men and women, with an average age of around 40, and 41% of them have a level of education at or below the baccalaureate. At the Pépinière, 80% of the 24 entrepreneurs supported are men, aged 25 to 35, with at least a university degree. Hoping to maximise their growth potential, the Pépinière offers more possibilities than the Miel to the entrepreneurs it supports. While both structures provide individual mentoring and group training, the former has offices and workshops, co-working and relaxation areas, and a refectory. In contrast, the Miel does not provide any co-working premises for its entrepreneurs. Yet researchers have shown that organised co-location fosters socialisation and enhances economic opportunities (Burret, 2013). Moreover, access to a workspace legitimises the professional standing of the entrepreneurs by giving them a credible institutional platform (Fabbri, 2015). As a result, the individuals engaged in small projects supported by the Miel, who tend to be older, female, and less qualified than the entrepreneurs supported by the Pépinière, have fewer opportunities for development. People we interviewed complained about the lack of networking opportunities and the difficulty in storing their products. The limited nature of their entrepreneurial support reveals

disparities in access to resources for entrepreneurship that reproduce inequalities of gender, age, and qualifications in business creation.

As the operator of the P epini ere, which is located less than 2 km from its premises, the Miel is nonetheless trying to open its structure to its less qualified entrepreneurs by running training courses there. It also invites the users of both structures to its social events. However, these efforts are not sufficient to offset entrepreneurial and social segmentation. Indeed, the manager of the P epini ere acknowledges that his local development strategy relies more on attracting promising projects from outside the area than on local entrepreneurship (interview at the P epini ere, April 2018). Half the people supported live in Paris. One female entrepreneur at the Miel who lived next to the P epini ere reported that they "stick out like a sore thumb". "Wearing suits," "they don't have the same style" as the local population. This difference in dress tells the locals that "there's something going on" (entrepreneur at the Miel, interview in Saint-Denis, June 2019). This observation brings to mind studies on the geographical embeddedness of co-working spaces which show that they constitute "detached" enclaves disconnected from local urban conditions (Ferchaud, 2018, p. 530).

The implementation of entrepreneurship support in QPs demonstrates inequality in the opportunities for enterprise because of socially differentiated spatial access to the structures and their resources. This suggests the need for looking at other ways to achieve equality in the support for entrepreneurship in deprived areas.

## **Recognising entrepreneurial plurality in a context of structural inequalities**

### *Taking account of inegalitarian social structures*

The aim of the support structures is to reinforce the skills of entrepreneurs in order to augment their capacity for action, but they forget the impact of the inegalitarian structures in which they are embedded. The advisers give them information on business creation, an address book, and rules of practice to help them develop their projects. However, not all entrepreneurs are capable of converting these inputs into opportunities, because they possess poor economic, educational, or social resources, or all three. These resources are founded on, and contribute to, multiple inequalities. This situation of mompreneurs, for example, reveals the impact of gender inequalities in access to resources. Of the sixteen mothers who responded to the

survey, five spontaneously mentioned the spatial constraints their business activity, because of their need to remain close to their children's school. Four said that childcare prevented them from attending evening events. In reference to her distribution area, one producer of Senegalese pancakes explained: "I prefer working in northern Nantes, which is close to where I live, my children are at school nearby [...] When you have children, you have to stay closer to their school as otherwise it's a long round trip if there's an emergency" (telephone interview, October 2018). Conversely, none of the men we interviewed mentioned the effects of parenthood on the development of their projects. So while the support structures provide resources to any entrepreneur who wants them, the capacity to use those resources varies according to the social positions of the users. Several female entrepreneurs reported their difficulty in joining the entrepreneurs group in one of the Osez entrepreneur retraining structures, which consisted of individuals of French nationality all with a master's degree. Often of foreign origin, female, less qualified, they did not feel legitimate in this group. Born in Morocco, but raised in France since the age of 11, one 47-year-old female entrepreneur, who sells Moroccan craft objects, left school at 16 without qualifications. Tired of doing low-status jobs and no longer needing to care for her grown-up children, she decided to set up and develop a business. Despite her determination, she rarely takes part in her support structure's group training sessions, because she still has to work in order to meet family needs. Moreover, she doesn't feel "comfortable" there, despite the "big family" atmosphere:

"It's true that they were way more advanced with computers, with all that kind of thing. I felt out of place. But they said: 'No, your place is definitely with us.' I felt there was... I don't know, just something. They had background, one step ahead of me [...] While I haven't got much to offer." (Female entrepreneur, phone interview, September 2018)

The social gap is too wide for this woman, a foreigner with few educational and social resources. Nevertheless, she jumps at the opportunity when her adviser offers her a temporary sales outlet in the centre of Nantes. But it all goes wrong: sales don't cover the cost of travel and the shop rent. Her lack of experience in business management and communication limits sales. With a big blow to her self-confidence, she gives up her project.

Ultimately, the support structures give everyone the resources to start a business without taking into account the social factors that prevent them being converted into opportunities, for example being female, working-class, of foreign origin, or of a certain age. As a result, they unwittingly perpetuate inequalities in the social positions of their clients.



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### *Recognising entrepreneurial diversities*

The support structures are rooted in an universalist conception of equality. They aim to provide everyone with the entrepreneurial resources that meet the requirements of the economic institutions and allow equal integration into the market. Critical researchers in the field of management science have shown how these requirements are built on a mythified image of the entrepreneur as a white, western, educated male (Ahl, 2006; Ogbor, 2000). They take the view that this dominant archetype maintains inegalitarian social relations of gender, class, and race by constituting his entrepreneurial practices and representations as correct, whereas entrepreneurial diversity is masked, devalued, and delegitimised (Pailot, 2015). On this view, women, people of foreign or working-class origin who want to set up businesses are subject to a form of cultural imperialism (Young, 1990) in that their values and actions are not perceived as entrepreneurship. In our case, the majority of the people surveyed fitted this description and fell outside the archetypal figure of the entrepreneur. The assumption in the support structures is that they need to adapt to the conventions of business creation. For example, the advisers organise relaxed social events specifically for female entrepreneurs where they can enjoy mutual reassurance and support. They give the women an opportunity to talk about their day-to-day difficulties in running a business, and to realise that these difficulties are gendered and shared, for example, the complex problem of combining domestic and business duties. However, these dedicated events legitimise male entrepreneurial codes. At one women's evening organised by the Miel, the female speakers encouraged the participants to "think like a man" in order to develop their businesses (observation at Saint-Denis, November 2018). They were encouraged to think about making money and to have the self-belief to act quickly. Most of the women we spoke felt like imposters in their role as entrepreneurs, and in consequence tended to underestimate the price of their products relative to their quality. Informal entrepreneurship is also undergoing a process of normalisation.<sup>8</sup> Local authorities encourage the support entities to legalise existing business activities in order to promote economic and social inclusion. These activities are primarily conducted by people who have little familiarity with France's administrative culture, either because they are foreign, or lack education, or both. For example, the conseil général de la Seine-Saint-Denis (General Council) funds structures that help to legalise the business projects of informal traders who are recipients of the *revenue de solidarité active* (active solidarity revenue) benefits. For its part, Saint-Denis

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8. The informal economy encompasses "all initiatives and activities [...] that create value and community bonds, which are external to state regulation and national accounting, form part of no regulatory framework and, for this reason, offer no social protection for the individuals concerned" (Conseil national des villes, 2019, p. 5).

municipality has launched the Cuisines de rue (street kitchens) project to formalise the informal selling of street food. The municipality wants to resolve the conflicts of use that they generate in public space by bringing them into line with the socioeconomic norms that structure urban space. It also hopes to improve the vulnerable situation of the women who run the street kitchens, by enhancing their capacity for action and their social rights. To do this, it has appointed a local organisation with experience in formalising projects conducted by vulnerable populations. The organisation has designed a delivery tricycle which the street cooks can use to store their meals and transport them between neighbourhoods. In return, these women agreed to do their cooking in regulated premises and undertake appropriate business and social training. They learn French, the legal rules, hygiene regulations, and business management.

By professionalising them, the Cuisines de rue project legitimises commercial, culinary, and cultural practices that differ from the dominant entrepreneurial framework. They maintain and bring into the open a form of working-class street entrepreneurship by giving it access to urban public space. This outcome raises questions about the role of otherness in relation to equality in the support for business creation in QPs. The philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990) calls for the recognition of differences as one of the objectives of justice. On this perspective, the aim would be less to integrate entrepreneurs with the market by bringing them into line with dominant norms, than to recognise their status as equal partners in economic, social, and urban production. The National Council of Municipalities called for the informal economy to be recognised as a form of local development for priority areas (QPs) and of emancipation for the people living in them (2019). More than a practice that needs to change, they saw it as a resource to be exploited. Nothing much changed, but this view was partially taken up in 2021 by the Agence nationale de la rénovation urbaine (ANRU; national urban renovation agency) with respect to economic development in urban renewal areas. ANRU's ambiguous stance reveals an incomplete recognition of the informal economy: while it acknowledges the competences and culture of the inhabitants of these areas, the agency recommends the gradual legalisation of their entrepreneurial activities in order to reduce the urban problems and enhance the image of the QPs. Recognising the informal economy is just one step on the way to its integration into the formal economic and urban system. While integration gives individuals legal and social protection, it is not redefined to take account of the multiple forms of entrepreneurship. Informal entrepreneurs are still considered more as beneficiaries than as partners.

In addition, the structures do not adjust to all the profiles they support. Although they focus on women, they neglect the influence of foreign origin on entrepreneurial projects. Yet people of foreign origin represent a large proportion of the population concerned. Several of the people surveyed regretted the lack of training on foreign partnerships when they want to develop their business in Africa. The transnational dimension lies outside the skill set of the advisers, whereas the entrepreneurs often draw on their personal contacts abroad and their hybrid cultural knowledge in setting up their projects (Portes, 1999). Sixteen of the twenty-seven entrepreneurs of foreign origin were working internationally or thinking of doing so. Thirteen of them sell so-called ethnic products such as cosmetics for dark skin, wax clothing, sub-Saharan food, or craft objects. A 29-year-old organiser of “multi-ethnic marriages”, of Angolan origin, holder of a qualification in communication, devised her business idea from the experience of her own mixed couple which “had different ideas” about marriage (interview in Châtillon, October 2018). A 35-year-old entrepreneur with a master’s degree in business negotiation, who had come to France from Benin at the age of 16, produces haircare products for people of African descent (interview in Saint-Denis, February 2019). Several sociological studies have observed that the spatial approach to the struggle for equality can result in a failure to identify ethnoracial differences and inequalities (Doytcheva, 2016; Kirszbaum, 2016). Urban policy acts on the territorial dimension of social inequalities without having to specify them. The reform of 2014 opposes a mishmash of “inequalities of all kinds, concentrations of poverty and economic, social, digital, and territorial divides”, “discriminations experienced by the inhabitants of deprived neighbourhoods” on the basis of their “place of residence and [...] real or supposed origin” and promotes “equality between women and men” (Ministère de l’Égalité des territoires et du logement, 2014, articles 1 and 10). In the context of this muddled legislative attempt to (re)establish equality, action based on spatial distribution continues to dominate the recognition of socio-entrepreneurial multiplicities.

## Conclusion

The article shows the multiplicity of forms that the support for entrepreneurship in QPs can adopt, according to territorial conditions, objectives, and the populations targeted. It also exposes the limitations of this would-be egalitarian territorial public policy. The justice sought through the siting of entrepreneurial resources in QPs is undermined by spatial and social inequalities in access to these resources. The

presence of support for business creation in QPs does not counterbalance the inegalitarian social relations that influence the capacity of individuals to make use of the resources offered by the advisers. Moreover, the mismatch between the archetypal image of the entrepreneur and the profiles of the survey subjects often leads to symbolic violence. The absence of consideration for their entrepreneurial specificities in the support provided, as well as the transnational nature of their activity, sometimes reinforces this violence. In order to achieve greater justice, there is a need to adopt a procedural dimension founded on the recognition and participation of all the actors in the decision-making process. With the legitimisation of entrepreneurial diversity, these actors would be considered as partners in economic and urban production rather than individuals to be integrated. However, QPs and their inhabitants are defined by their divergence from the norm, and the objective of policy is to reduce this divergence (Epstein and Kirzbaum, 2019). Reparatory thinking continues to dominate.

However, in economic geography researchers put forward the concept of diverse economies in order to cast light on the ordinary practices of local people and to conceive of a new economic order based on these practices (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Following their ideas, further research could examine how the day-to-day experiences of entrepreneurs in QPs contribute to the making of the city. Our study reveals that they draw on their close acquaintanceship groups in order to undertake their projects, and in so doing organise and stimulate the local territory. Research along these lines would notably complement the findings of the Rosa Bonheur collective (2019), which analyses the work and production of public space in Roubaix.

### To quote this article

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