

## THE PRINCIPLE OF ACTIVE SUBSIDIARITY

### Reconciling unity and diversity

*By Pierre Calame*

#### 1. Summary

Active subsidiarity is a philosophy and a method of governing that arises from an essential need in the modern world: the need to reconcile unity and diversity.

The world we live in is both strongly independent and infinitely diverse. We are united by this interdependence. The internationalisation of the exchange of goods, of services, of information, and of money reinforces this a little more every day. Man has left his mark on the biosphere and the consequent risk of imbalance calls for a united approach to managing affairs for the common good of all, a balance which becomes more delicate by the day. We are however enriched by the infinite diversity in our ecological, cultural, and social environment. As the world shrinks into a global village, technology becomes more abstract, the economy becomes more international, and states and "cultures" that are able to operate cohesively, to show initiative, to form partnerships, to introduce innovations, to mobilise, to adapt to new conditions, and to take on responsibilities, are widely considered to be more important.

Very large companies, the only players today at the international level, have had to come up with management methods that respect the dual need for unity and diversity. They have done so in thousands of ways, by centralising strategy and decentralising operational responsibilities, by disseminating experience and knowledge through the movement of staff, by creating autonomous areas within their organisations, by breaking down large systems into manageable teams, by unifying through control procedures and rules rather than standardising ways of doing things, etc. Their problem is however easier to solve than the one facing public authorities.

The reconciliation of unity and diversity presents radically new problems. Viable solutions to major problems are never found in a single context: in the future, the division of skills will be the exception and the maximisation of skills the rule.

Political scientists and administrative bodies have remained silent in the face of this new situation. Traditionally they have proposed these alternatives for organising responsibility on different levels: Jacobinism or subsidiarity.

For the Jacobin, unity is paramount. The nation, an indivisible whole, is the only legitimate political body. It expresses the sovereignty of the people. Equality is the rule. It finds its practical expression in the uniformity of public administration throughout the country. But because of this, public administration is in essence standardised, compartmentalised and aimed at individuals seen in isolation

either as citizens, subjects, beneficiaries or users of public services. The loyal civil servant is (on principle) a "transparent" public functionary applying laws to citizens that have been passed by the citizens' representatives in parliament.

These rules are in essence a commitment to competence rather than a commitment to achievement. How, under these circumstances, should diversity be taken into account? By decentralising, by transferring skills en bloc (so to speak) to different levels, which amounts to the fragmentation of national responsibility. Public administration is the concentration and superimposition on the land of competence performed at different levels. Cooperation amongst these levels is often achieved through hybrid joint-funding bodies that are necessary but complex, through which the convergence of the two systems can be verified.

For the supporters of subsidiarity, it is diversity that is paramount, along with the free association of small groups linked by common ideals and interest. Power of the state, its intrusion into the private lives of individuals and groups, is seen as a necessary evil but an evil that must be reduced as much as possible, whose encroachment must be constantly guarded against. This sovereignty, that legally belongs to the people, is delegated to a community that gets wider and wider as the need for inter-dependence becomes greater.

On a European level, the alternative approaches of Jacobinism and subsidiarity manifest themselves in the clash between the supporters of inter-governmental rule and of federalism. For the former, supranationality is wrong and seen as the negation of the sacred and indivisible nature of the nation. In their view, the only solution is negotiation, pacts, and treaties amongst sovereign states. For the latter, supranationality is the pragmatic consequence of the obvious scale of inter-dependency in the world today which requires that a coherent strategy be defined on a regional level, the national level being decidedly too remote.

Both systems have the common idea that skills must be shared, and see this as the only means of legitimating, the theoretical condition for the citizens sanction by vote. Unfortunately, reality refuses more and more to reflect these theoretical structures and one day or another we shall have to accept, as a basic given, a mode of governing the complex modern world which is based on a combination of environments and networks, none of which is closed.

It is significant that disillusion with the world of politics is expressed in similar terms in different European cities: too much bureaucracy, too much elaboration of procedures and not enough coherence or enough collective projects. It is this challenge that the notion of active subsidiarity claims to meet, both in theory and in practice.

Subsidiarity because it is firmly maintained that public authority only finds its legitimacy at the base, with a globally shared fear of a reality that is itself global and systematic and indivisible. Because it is firmly maintained that it is through the practice of shared projects that dynamic cultures and non-atomistic societies may be achieved.

But why active subsidiarity? Active because we recognise that in an inter-dependent world, the specification of different levels is the rule, and we also recognise that, far from maintaining blocks of skills, the requirements for formulating strategies are varied and different from the standards of daily management.

Active as well, because we do not believe that the requirements essential to the higher levels of administration can be contained in a system of legal liability or legal rules but are formulated at a grassroots level through continual negotiation between parties. Active because the expression of interests at the centre is guaranteed, not through uniform rules applied to isolated individuals, but by a

general commitment to achievement.

This commitment is aimed at the community of alliances - central and local civil servants, private economic parties and associations. These alliances are practical and create a sense of aspiration for relevancy and common sense: policies are no longer evaluated in reference to their appearance but to the way they have been formulated and applied and introduced locally, with simultaneous reference to their final impact, which is, to a certain extent, determined by regional or national courts, and measured according to the realities prevailing in each context.

We have referred to interests guaranteed by higher levels of administration. This superiority must only be seen in terms of geography - a more elevated scale - nor is it limited to the greater interest of the nation. There is thus no "greater knowledge" that transcends the local; no matter how impeccable its logic or its origins, there is no higher knowledge that can define a commitment to achievement in the abstract. No. Such a commitment is made in the light of experience, through the pooling of local experiences.

Active subsidiarity entails a collective and continued effort to define this commitment to achievement. Collective Definition because the general philosophy behind it will grow out of the participation and confrontation between people in decisions on the ground. Continued Definition because this philosophy is continually being revised in the light of experience. In such a dynamic situation, state administration does not derive its legitimacy from hierarchical authority, which it expresses by issuing general norms, but from its ability to animate a network involving a wide variety of parties.

Revolutions in our way of thinking and in our way of doing things cannot be separately defined. In France they are part and parcel of the effort to reform the State.

The following account explains, though a very personal and chronological view, how I came to the conclusion that the concept of active subsidiarity was both necessary in theory and feasible in practice.

## **2 Active Subsidiarity: the birth of ideas**

### **Europe, social disadvantage and the exchange of experiences**

I used the term active subsidiarity for the first time in May 1993 when preparing for the Copenhagen European Seminar on social disadvantage. I have been working on European assignments since 1989 with the organisation of the first meeting of the European Council of Ministers for Housing to discuss housing for the under-privileged. The housing issue in Europe is extremely interesting. Nobody denies the close link that exists between housing and social disadvantage. The idea of a real right to housing, including for the very poor, seems to be infiltrating Europe. However, at the same time, housing does not fall within the competence of the European Commission, and, furthermore, the allocation of responsibility for housing at various national levels differs widely from one country to the next. Sometimes it is central government, sometimes the regions, and sometimes the local authorities at the bottom of the pile who play a major role, but the final result is that the condition of accommodation, particularly for the very poor, is always determined by a combination of funding schemes on various levels. What then is the real significance of a right to housing on a European level? There are no norms or directives, binding on member states, which will lead to such a result being achieved. Should we then give up the idea of Europe, as a humane community, aspiring to the right to housing? We do not think so. In order to avail ourselves of the diversity that Europe has to offer, we drew up the *European Charter for the Right to Housing and the Struggle against exclusion*, in collaboration with the various teams. From the outset, the work of the latter was based on the exchange of experiences. This taught us that there were lessons to be learnt from the experiences of others even though the context of each was quite different, and the solution found in one country was not necessarily transferable to another. It is the questions that are transferable and not the answers - it is the identification of common difficulties when they are confronted - this identification enables us to define what we have called the European Housing Policy Objectives.

### **A third way between Jacobinism and subsidiarity**

At the Copenhagen European Seminar on Social Exclusion, I was commissioned to compile a report for the working committee on the extension of rights for the most disadvantaged social groups. There arose a heated debate on the idea of economic and social rights between experts from Mediterranean countries and their counterparts from Germany and the United Kingdom. For Germans in particular, the framing of social rights in constitutional terms, at a European or national level, was an abuse of language. The conditions necessary for the realisation of these economic and social rights were within the domain of the regions or the towns and consequently we were enshrining forth a hollow right, without a real recourse to the claimed benefits of these rights with regard to third parties. I saw here the Jacobin and Germanic views of the State in conflict. Subsidiarity was at the heart of this confrontation. It then became clear to me that the alternation between Jacobinism and subsidiarity no longer corresponded to the realities of our times, precisely because in the domain of social disadvantage, the reality and the policy are necessarily a combination of actions and initiatives on all levels, from the disadvantaged members of the community themselves to the broad European community, through associations, local authorities, the regions, etc. It then appeared to me that this application of inappropriate concepts by lawyers who dominate the European stage was the source of many of the obstacles in Europe. In fact, I saw the emergence of a paradoxical anti-European movement. Paradoxical because it united two criticisms that appeared to contradict each other: too much Europe on the one side, too many directives, a restrictive device that complicated and fenced in all activities and initiatives, and on the other, not enough Europe, too few European projects, lack of European competence with regard to cultural, social, and political issues which alone would enable Europe to use its real economic power to some enlightening effect. If it were possible to express these

two contradictory criticisms in one breath, was it not because the nature of the connections between Europe and its national authorities at a lower level did not measure up to the problems? Why not take inspiration from developments in other large organisations in order to come up with some combination of unity and diversity? It is largely along these lines that the proposal of the solemn declaration on Europe was formulated in 1993 which I submitted to Jacques Delors.

### **The parallel between the situation in Europe and the situation in French cities**

I was even more sensitive to this European paradox as it reminded me in every detail of the obstacles which I faced in urbanism and town planning in France from 1968 to 1983. In France, land developments with economic, technical, social and cultural impact are organised along the lines of general urban policy, and in rural areas, on a national level. All French towns of a certain size are multi-communal. The Paris urban area alone includes more than 600 communes. In most towns, for historical reasons, the central commune is the biggest and the most densely populated, but since the 1960s and 1970s, the central commune, with a few exceptions like Marseilles and Toulouse, has not contained the major part of the population. With urbanisation, and the development of the main residence in the country, the main growth area is found on the outskirts, further and further away.

All countries in Europe, from after the war to the 1970s, devoted a great deal of time to the discussion of urban development. It had become clear that transport networks, real estate markets, and housing markets could no longer be organised at a national level as was done in the days of the pre-industrialised town, before the development of the motor car. In some countries these issues were resolved after the Second World War by the merging of communes. This movement that seemed to be irresistible in the 1960s met with strong resistance in France, where the focus of the commune appeared in the minds of all to be that of local democracy itself. 36 000 communes represent 500 000 municipal councillors, for the most part volunteers, whose activities represent one of the pillars of citizen and associational activity in France. In fact, in the course of French history, only authoritarian regimes, particularly the Second Empire and the Vichy regime, succeeded in merging communes, with the notable creation by the Second Empire of the Paris we know today. Discussion, therefore, on the organisation of urban areas seems like a drop in the ocean compared to discussions on a European level. The institutional problem that we are faced with in the modern world seems to me to be a problem of fragmentation: the coherent arrangement of national structures presents identical problems at both extremes of the scale - from the suburb to the whole world. This is why it is important that the fragmentation of these structures be based on concepts that are suited to the problems to be solved, which is not the case. This has been discussed in France on an on-going basis for decades. Many systems have been used and there is no government that has not placed inter-communal cooperation and the reform of local tax systems on the agenda, only to pass it on like a hot potato - as the Latin-Americans say - to the next government, without having solved the problem. The fact is that we have locked ourselves into a contradiction that is itself shot through with contradictions: locked into a vision of the sharing of responsibility, we are unable, both on a European and on an urban level, to conceive of the combination of action on various levels with shared sovereignty, because we are under the delusion that this will undermine local management as something which has been determined by voters. Which is a ridiculous idea when one thinks that electoral campaigns on both a local and national level now spend all of their energy blaming others - internationalisation, Europe, the State - when things go wrong - while taking credit when things go right.

### **The difficulty that uniform processes have in adapting to the diversity of realities.**

Looking back, I realise that very early on in my professional career I had started thinking about the ideas that led to the notion of active subsidiarity. From 1970 I was in fact employed by the Ministry of Urban Development, first as head of projects and later as sector engineer in Valenciennes in the north of France. My first job involved drawing up what at the time were called *programmation de modernisation et d'équipement* (PME), (modernisation and installation projects) i.e. determining the municipal installations necessary to accompany urban development. This activity was itself linked to the *Schéma Directeur d'Amenagement et d'Urbanisme* (SDAU) (Urban Development Management Scheme). There were national procedures in both cases. They had been drawn up during the course of the previous decade in order to deal with the rapid urban development for which traditional institutions, particularly communes, were unprepared. The Department of Urban Development was responsible for the introduction of these procedures. Valenciennes was however not a typical case. The problem there was not to facilitate rapid urban growth but to prepare for dealing with a violent industrial crisis. The prosperity of the sector rested on three economic pillars - the coal mines, the steel industry and the large scale heavy metal works. Each of these pillars had had its time. We were thus face with a challenge: to adapt procedures that had not been designed for the purpose in order to prepare for a reconversion that was sure to be painful. This challenge did not only face the procedures but the administrative practices as well. We were forced to reconsider the relationship between sectorial administrations. In fact, when a region enjoys dynamic growth that is almost entirely due to outside influences, independent of the riches offered by the local environment, the State and the local municipalities can facilitate this growth with collective installation. The compartmentalisation of administration and departments, regrettable certainly, remains tolerable: we provide additional roads, schools, parks, and housing and this results in something mediocre but more or less coherent as coherence comes from the growth itself, which brings with it the necessary hardware. In a situation of crisis it is exactly the opposite. State and local authorities ought themselves to meet the crisis. At the time we had a slogan that summed up the idea in two words: the SDAU could not content itself with being a project, it had to be a projection for the future of the region. In these conditions, we as civil servants could not claim that we were merely applying national procedures without being guilty of hypocrisy. We had, in the name of the state, to play our part and execute our mandate through the funds we controlled, through our acknowledged competence or our legal and regulatory power, in the service of a common project. We had, in a word, to move from commitment to competence to commitment to achievement.

### **The pursuit of common sense and the importance of local case history**

During the 1970s, my job was to grant building consent in Valenciennes - this was before decentralisation. I loved this job. It usually has a bad reputation in an Urban Development Department. The inspectors responsible for granting building consent are often seen as bureaucrats who apply the regulations in a virtually automatic manner. I realised very soon that their job was a difficult one. In fact, the code for urbanisation, in an effort to preserve the uniformity of the landscape and the equality of citizens before the law, defines the rules on a national level. Always the principle of uniformity. But as the territories are infinitely diverse, the occupation of each of the parties has to be taken into account. This is the role of the *Plans d'Occupation des Sols* (POS) which defines rules according to zone. From here on, all appears to be in order. The national urbanisation rules plus the POS rules seem to be sufficient to determine unequivocally what is allowed and what is not. This is true 80% of the time. But local regulations, even very specific ones, are not able to cover the infinite diversity of all situations, particularly because the quality aspect of assessments also has to be made, such as a projects suitability to a site. A zone regulation, as specific as it may be, simply regulates the manner in which the building is done while the development of attractive urban areas seeks to achieve the finished goal. I noted, along with the members of the planning authority that as soon as they began to get excited about the final result, they were frequently faced with a dilemma: should they grant planning permission or not? The regulations gave us these two options. By 1976, thanks to the

establishment of local case law, we had made progress. This idea had come to me when reading letters from people protesting when we had refused to grant planning permission or from neighbours who were shocked by what we did authorise. The main thrust of most of these letters was the inequality of citizens before the law. I was very moved by this. For the most part, people are prepared to accept that the public authorities oppose their projects in the interests of common good, but they cannot accept the feeling of injustice and the inequality of treatment. A major challenge facing the Administration is to reconcile the infinite diversity of situations (in the strict sense of the term: no plot of land is the same as another) and the need to treat all citizens equally. The only way of achieving a satisfactory solution is not to deny diversity so that equality prevails, nor to allow arbitrary development in the interests of diversity, but to encourage a public case-history. This history has been established through the confrontation of our own ways of dealing with diverse situations. Every Friday morning I held a meeting with all of the people involved in issuing planning permission in the various zones in the sector and together we examined the difficult cases, 10 or so per week. Together we worked through the decision to be made, taking care to note the various cases so that we should be sure of making the same decision if a similar case arose. During the course of the first year I got the impression that we never came across the same situation twice. But progressively a typology of situations emerged and some consistency could be achieved in our approach to problems. Our job as agents of the State, charged with achieving certain goals for the people, was to transform the equality of citizens before the law from a uniform commitment to competence to a commitment to rigour and equity, and this was something we considered to be a major step.

This progression changes the attitude of civil servants: they had to strive, not to enforce the letter of the law but to make decisions based on common sense. But for the power with which they were invested to be exercised democratically, steps taken must be public.

### **1982: the peak of decentralisation**

In 1980 I returned to Paris and was made Deputy Director of the Department of Finance and Land. Inspired by what we had done in the north of France, I felt the full force of the shock of decentralisation. I saw it as my vocation, for the reasons I have given above: it seemed to me essential in France to construct and consolidate local initiatives faced with a future that seemed a good deal less promising than it had been in previous decades. In order to construct this local power two conditions seem to me to be important: there must be, at a fiscal level, a sense of solidarity in areas where inter-dependence was essential, i.e. on the level of housing zone or country; and the areas of strategy definition had to be separated from daily management.

I had been able to observe on the ground how the absence of fiscal solidarity was detrimental to all efforts to achieve an inter-dependence in the area and how it was essential to define long term strategies at an urban level without becoming embroiled in daily administration with questions of merging communes or urban community. But in the French system of decentralisation, in the name of democracy, we did not wish to impose the level of the urban area.

The first mistake was our failure to reform the local tax system. We thus still have a system where, through a certain sleight of hand, supermarkets in towns bring in money for local authorities while the poor are a drain on social spending. How can anyone be surprised that local authorities want to attract the former and get rid of the latter? And it is a vicious circle. We see, in the Paris region for example, the creation of zones that are financially well-off, like Paris and the Hauts de Seine. Because they are prosperous, they attract companies for three reasons: taxes are low; they are close to other companies with whom they can work; the area attains a social value (a head office address in the Hauts de Seine is much smarter than in Seine Saint Denis).

The second mistake was our inability to reconcile unity and diversity, our failure to realise that there were areas in which we would formulate long-term strategies and areas where we could govern closer to the ground. In the law prevailing in 1982, the definition of blocks of competence was obsessively confining. Responsibilities had to be clarified and the whole debate centred around the redistribution of skills amongst the various areas. There had to be an end to the "belt and braces" philosophy, with files relating to the department, the commune and the region at the same time. In order to be clear, we had to face a major challenge: we had to recognise the need for joint strategies and, at the same time, give full value to local initiatives. Our failure to take on board the relationship between global and local, the correspondence between strategic vision and daily tactics, meant that in France during the 1980s, we introduced decentralisation that was feudal and rural where we should have introduced decentralisation that would prepare the country for entry into the 21st century.

### **Dialogue between companies and territory and the parallel between the private and state sectors**

In 1987, the MP Loïc Bouvard and I were assigned a mission by Pierre Méhaignerie, then Minister of Urban and Environmental Development, concerning the new challenges of territorial improvement. The Minister felt that the efforts made to decentralise economic activities in France during the 1960s were being progressively eroded by the reverse movement of the reconcentration of decision-making powers in Paris. This inquiry provided us with a valuable opportunity to meet more than 60 business leaders, in Paris and in the major provincial cities, and to attempt to understand the transformations underway within companies and what these transformations meant for a territorial improvement policy. I learnt two major lessons from these exchanges.

The first is that the progressive dematerialisation of techniques, the lowering of transport costs, and the internationalisation of markets leads us, paradoxically, to make a major re-evaluation of the importance of the territory. At first sight, the development of exchange links on a European and international level seems to render irrelevant any of the advantages of physical proximity which are the foundation of a territory, but in reality, its importance is not diminished but transformed. We no longer live in the age when proximity to raw materials is decisive, determining industrial establishment. The modern economy is, on the contrary, a complex economy. For a company to succeed it does not need to manage all of the complex aspects of business itself. Even the biggest companies do not have the means to do so and that is why after the trend for mergers at the beginning of the century, creating huge companies - both upstream and downstream - there has been a gradual shift in the opposite direction, with each company concentrating its efforts on the main part of its operation. This effort at reconcentration does not mean that dependencies with regard to other sectors of activity have disappeared. On the contrary. Every company, every operation is thus extremely dependent on environmental conditions, in particular on everything that contributes to the quality of the physical, social, economic, and institutional environment of the company. This is why the quality of the local lieu, its dynamic nature, the wealth of associations that can be forged, and the services that can be found there have become so important. This is the reason why, in particular, there is a visible modern movement, throughout the world, of metropolitanisation where twenty years ago the end of towns was being predicted based on the belief that the development of transport and long distance communication would bring a definite end to the economies of scale that had justified the towns of yesterday.

The second lesson that I learnt is the importance, for large companies as well, of managing interdependence and diversity simultaneously. Any large organisation has to respect this double need. Companies came to this style of management in the 1980s, in a relatively homogenous manner, by concentrating their strategic efforts - long-term management, management of financial and human resources within managerial staff - and by giving more and more autonomy to "small units" on a human scale which according to the time-honoured expression, is the only scale on which the mobilisation of

men and adaptation to diverse and changing contexts is possible.

The idea of active subsidiarity and the methods used to put it into practice came to me during a meeting with the general manager of an international company specialising in major projects. A major engineering project is typically a situation where all depends on the ability to combine a number of technical ideas in cultural, economic, technical, and political contexts that are different on each occasion. One only has one crack at a whip in a project. There is no room for error. A major project incompetently undertaken may be a catastrophe for a company. How does one maximise the chance of success? The general manager explained the radical changes introduced in order to answer this question. Up to then, the company had responded by compiling procedures: in order to protect themselves against the risks of failure, they had defined competence specifications on how to behave in various situations for project leaders. But how were such specifications meant to deal with the diversity of situations? They were content to remove autonomy from the project manager and gradually turn him into a participant without any responsibility, just when they should have been giving him more responsibility leading to the enrichment of the company's experience as a whole. This is why the general manager set up a small working group that met on a regular basis for a week every month over a period of two years to look into the personal experiences of each of the group members, all of them qualified professionals. Little by little, through exchanging and comparing experiences, they saw unfolding, not recipes for success, but broad conditions that must be met in order to succeed, that went beyond the difference in detail of various situations. The consistency must not thus be sought in the means to be introduced but in the problems to be solved and the identification of problems can only come through the exchange and comparison of experiences.

### **The Caracas Declaration: discovering structural constants through the exchange of experience**

From 1988, I worked full-time for the *Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme* (Foundation for Human Progress), an independent Swiss registered foundation which had set itself the general goal of increasing know-how to meet the major challenges of the future. This dedication led us to ask ourselves what type of practical knowledge was needed. We were struck by the gap that existed between the formidable accumulation of scientific and technical know-how (more than 90% of research undertaken since the dawn of man has been undertaken since the Second World War) and the fact that in the field, faced with the essential problems of humanity - peace, social disadvantage, environmental protection, establishment of relationships between State and society - those involved did not, or appeared not to have the knowledge that they would find useful. We rapidly reached the simple conclusion that practical know-how came from the operation itself. I had in fact already experimented with this on several occasions during my professional life: this is information that comes from people who are in similar situations to ours and who seemed to us to be the most trustworthy and the most hands-on. We thus started developing networks and methods for the exchange of experiences. One of the methods encouraged was meetings: not conferences where everybody does his little round and then goes away, but real meetings, where practitioners are able to develop a dialogue of their own experiences with the experience of others. One cannot make anything of experience in isolation.

One of the meetings that really stands out, and which to a certain extent was at the very foundation of the idea of active subsidiarity, was the Caracas meeting organised in 1991 with the cooperation of the Venezuelan government. We were able to get about twenty people from all of the continents together all of whom had government-level political or administrative responsibilities in the field of rehabilitation of poor areas or the transformation of Third World urban settlements. Just getting these people from such diverse backgrounds together was a feat in itself. The contexts of working-class areas differ widely from country to country: what do an African township, an Indonesian kampung, a Venezuelan or Mexican barrio, a Brazilian favela or a council estate in the Paris region have in

common? The hope of drawing common conclusions seemed even more impossible. But this is what happened thanks to the dynamics of the meeting itself. We had asked the delegates, each in turn, to explain, according to their experience, what the most difficult thing to achieve was, what the basic obstacles they were confronted with were. Very soon it became obvious that the obstacles were the same everywhere. In other words, despite the differences in context, the relationship between state action and situations of poverty and precariousness contained the same structural elements and the exchange of experiences enabled us to identify them. This discovery led us to draw up, at the end of the meeting, the Caracas Declaration, which identified six basic issues or basic principles for state action in populous areas. The challenge to the authorities in these conditions is not to apply a uniform procedure in all of these areas but to put itself in the position of being able to apply the six principles and of finding solutions that are best suited to the specific nature of the context and the people involved on each occasion.

We were also able to show, and this was later verified in other areas, that it is possible to formulate a commitment to achievement and not just a commitment to competence for state action and we introduced a simple and democratic way of expressing this commitment to achievement: far from being principles that were parachuted from above, they are the fruit of grassroots development, based on a system of exchange of experience, and constant structural elements in situations we came up against.

Active subsidiarity thus proposes a yo-yo system as a principle. We start with grassroots experience, these experiences are compared, and the basic principles that should govern the action are extracted. These principles constitute the commitment to achievement and are matched afresh to practice. But this required a major cultural change in the administration, the shift from a hierarchical system to a network system. A huge programme. Today the psychology that governs relationships between central administration and local authorities in France is as follows: local innovations are inspired or more often they are identified. These innovations are then transformed into models and we attempt to generalise them through the distribution of these models. There is always the same confusion: because the practice is one that occurs in a hierarchical system, we are unable to imagine that the role of central administration can be to animate a network, to assist in the continued introduction of innovations, the exchange of experiences, and in the joint expression of the commitment to achievement.

### **Evaluation of state policies and the commitment to achieve**

In 1992, I initiated the so-called participatory process of evaluating the rehabilitation of housing. Loyal to my method, I was firmly opposed to the scientific vision of evaluation, which means that an evaluation had to be made with external reference to the totality of people who took an active part. This scientific vision reflected, in my view, a mythical idea of state policy: the decision-makers establish a policy; the delegates of public power then set this in motion; a scientific evaluation is then made which is given back to the decision-makers; then based on this evaluation, the decision-makers modify the policy; then the delegates execute it again, and so on. Against this mechanical idea, inspired by artillery dynamics (aim, fire, observe the impact, correct the shot), I oppose a constructionist vision. A central element of the quality of public policy is indeed the quest for common sense by delegates who enforce it. And it is because I am convinced of this quest for common sense that I believe in the practical possibility of setting in motion in France a commitment to achievement rather than a commitment to competence.

In order to evaluate the rehabilitation policy, we have set up ten local groups, from the urban areas and the departments, made up of co-opted members of various institutions, who were locally involved in the rehabilitation of social housing. For a year, these local groups worked according to a common methodology that led to the establishment of an all encompassing "programme for local rehabilitation", arrived at when a large number of examples of rehabilitation were set against each other. We then compared these local programmes and managed without much difficulty and by consensus, to establish a national programme of rehabilitation. Which broadly means that if we rely on the common sense of delegates of state authorities and if we introduce suitable programmes for exchanging experiences, we are able to draw up specifications for effective rehabilitation with relative ease, and in this way influence those involved to change their way of operating as the conclusions drawn and set out by them are directly appropriated.

### **From the notion of hierarchy to networks through continual learning process.**

All of the examples reveal that active subsidiarity leads to a series of simultaneous new departures:

- \* thinking in terms of articulating geographical scales and no longer in terms of the distribution of skills;
- \* thinking in terms of the systematic organisation of an environment and the combination of actions of the state authorities in this environment and not in terms of the juxtaposition of separate and standardised actions of the various departments within a Ministry;
- \* thinking in terms of a commitment to achievement and not in terms of a commitment to competence;
- \* thinking in terms of network and not in terms of a hierarchical system;
- \* thinking in terms of a continual learning process and of the management of collective memory and intelligence and not in terms of a fragmented decision making processes and the means of introduction, evaluation, and rectification of state policy.

It means permanently moving from a mechanical notion of state action to a notion that is much closer to the organisation of living systems.