

# Les gardiens d'immeubles : le présent conjugué au passé

*Building caretakers: the present viewed in terms of the past*

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In

1

what measure do the building wardens of  
social housing

2

do they rely daily on their  
lived to make sense of their function and determine  
outlines and boundaries? The question is  
all the more interesting that understand how  
which these field agents

3

actually build  
their professional identity is to understand the  
complexity of their social relations (with tenants  
and administrative staff in particular)  
but also the reasons they react  
so-and-so in the face of new missions  
entrusted to them. Indeed, some decision makers  
politicians view guards as a  
remedy for the problems encountered in some  
suburbs wishing to see mainstreaming mediation into  
their tasks

4

. As for the managing bodies of

1

The article is based on a collective research conducted within the

LASTES (Laboratory of Labor and Environmental Sociology social) under the direction of Jean-Marc Stéb , professor of sociology at Nancy2 University. It was funded by the National Federation social enterprises for housing.

The following book presents a summary of all of this research: Sudant P., St b  J.-M. (2002),

The guardians of buildings

In the city center. Figures, metamorphoses and representations

,  
From Boeck University, Brussels, 301 pages.

Finally, it is possible to consult the doctoral thesis of the author on the Internet: Marchal H. (2004),

The construction of identity

social and professional role of custodian-concierges in the sector HLM,

Thesis for the doctorate of sociology, under dir. from J.-M.

St b , University Nancy 2, <http://cyberdoc.univ-nancy2.fr/>

THESE /, 514 pages.

2

In France, there are more than four million social housing, sheltering more than twelve million people.

3

We also use the terminology "field agent"

in order to clearly specify the singular position of the guards by report to the administrative staff of the "offices".

4 See the decree of M.-N. Lieneman of 28 December 2001 imposing

setting up security in buildings or groups

buildings with more than 100 dwellings in urban areas

sensitive or in municipalities exceeding 25 000 inhabitants.

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work and the social environment (LASTES-Nancy 2). His fields of research relate to urban life, "Small" professions of the city and the phenomenon of identity. He has recently published: Marchal H. (2006), "The young people of quoted "by custodian concierges",

in

Deviance and society

, flight. 45, No. 1, pp. 161-171. Marchal H. (2006), The little world of guardians-concierges. A job at heart of the HLM life

,

Harmattan, Paris, 230 p. Marchal H. (2006),

The identity in question

, Ellipses, Paris, 145 p.

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social housing, they consider this old job, not only as a solution to maintain social order, but also as a means of fighting against unpaid rent and delegate a certain number of administrative tasks traditionally reserved for "office" staff (management rental, inventory of fixtures).

4

The question asked is even more acute when we is aware that despite the efforts of policy makers social housing to enhance the profession, guardians of buildings are still little recognized even within housing management organizations (Marchal, 2004). This is particularly

the fact that unlike the agents  
housing organizations at low rent (HLM),  
responsible for the rental management studied by  
P. Warin, the guards are not physically integrated  
and socially within their institution  
membership

5

. Also they are not concerned by  
this "  
pressure at the inference  
»Invoked by the author  
to account for the existence of a "  
field of  
representations

Common to all staff  
belonging to this or that organization of HLM  
(Warin, 1993, pp. 54-55). In other words, the  
keepers are away from social and cultural logics  
conveyed by the administrative staff.

In this sense, it is important to emphasize, as  
we have already done so (Marchal,  
op. cit

.) as well as

other researchers (Maury, 2001), the extent to which  
relationships of these field agents with the staff  
"offices" translate the most  
often on a daily basis with very little support. This  
situation generates tensions between the guards and  
hierarchical superiors, especially since  
the various instructions received from the administrative services  
different often intersect, when  
they do not contradict each other. So, all the slope

form of the profession tends to be put at a distance by the

most guards. So here we must get rid of

presupposed a strong homology between identities

prescribed by the institute

ion HLM and identities

real guards; the latter, though located at

bottom of the social hierarchy, are not '

drawn

"

by their function (Bourdieu, 1990: 94).

Because of their distance from the

world of "offices", one would expect, in a

interactionist perspective (Strauss, 1992), that

the guards rely on other identity supports

6

than those of institutional origin

7

for

invent and negotiate legitimacy for their function and

their ways of working. The historical imagination

associated with the profession represents a horizon of meaning

sufficiently legitimate to claim it?

Certainly not, as far as he stages

the figure of the parisian concierge of yesteryear, articulated

around unimportant traits such as curiosity,

predisposition to gossip or the lack

modesty for privacy. The story related to the job

therefore represents to the guards a source of

discredit (Marchal, 2005a). Are tenants

can play this role of meaning support? Sometimes

guards identify with some of them; however,

most renters, original (very)

modest, imagine the HLM world as a distant universe organized by bureaucratic logics impersonal. This situation generates tensions that guards have to face (Marchal, 2005b, 2006b, 2006c). So is it difficult for these to invent with the inhabitants a acceptable course of action, ie which does not pose no problems everyday.

Guards therefore have little identity support legitimate to define exactly how their job and more specifically their role.

In other words, the negotiation processes or from «

identity transaction

(Dubar, 1997) are here,

otherwise blocked, at least upset. This is true

both biographically (

ibid

., pp. 121-122)

in the sense that it is difficult for the guards to

build, during their trajectory, an image

positive in themselves, only in relation

4

5

The guards are over 83% to stay in the neighborhood where they

work, hence their isolation, if not social, at least spatial, by

report to the head offices of HLM organizations,

nearly

always located in the city center. But the integration of the guards

remains very problematic even within

neighborhood (Marchal,

ibid

., p. 320-351).

6

A "sociology of identity supports", as we have opportunity to develop it (Marchal, 2006a, chapter II), consists of to avoid both the trap of objectivism (to believe that the individual reduced to external identities without being able to negotiate them) and that of subjectivism (to believe that the individual constructs his identity from itself and only from itself).

7

We think in particular of the references of the profession produced and diffused by the HLM organizations, mobilized punctually by the guardians when it is necessary to justify to the tenants for example.

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(

ibid

., p. 122), since it is difficult for these field agents to have identities recognized related to knowledge and skills. These latter also remain unofficial: only 10% guardians have the guardian diploma of buildings approved by the National Education in 1994. In addition, if 75% of the guards vocational training, these last only a few days and take place once or twice a year. The article postulates that the guards will determine in part their professional role from their past staff. These field agents would, in wherever possible, to give a personal sense to this that they do - " biographical transaction

»(

ibid

.) - and

to have their skills and know-how recognized -

"

relational transaction

- by mobilizing

way or another their own experiences.

However, the guards are not always in

able to negotiate

their experience to adapt it

the

present. Indeed, as they do not find enough

identity resources in their daily lives,

these field agents sometimes seem forced to

to rely fairly faithfully on their past to

to define. They can even update, without too much

think about it, ways of thinking, feeling and acting

outside their profession; everything happens then as

if the identity cracks of today were spontaneously

clogged by identity crafts

yesterday. In these circumstances, it is necessary to

a sociological view too inclined to see negotiation

identity where there are not always:

sometimes the guards are engaged in a report

reflexive

to themselves, their past and their job,

sometimes in a more practical report - this

last term suggesting here in accordance with his

Bourdieu meaning,

a relationship of self to oneself or

of self to his job "



without going through the speech and  
by the conscience

"(Bourdieu 1980, 124).

To answer our questioning, we must question  
both the speeches and the practices of the agents  
ground. It is first necessary to show how much  
guards structure their relationship to the profession by referring  
many dimensions of their past: values  
personal, academic achievements, decisive breaks and  
social origin. Then we have more  
insisted on their professional experiences in  
focusing on two characteristic examples:  
guards from industry and shipping

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. We

will report on situations that involve tower  
in turn these different dimensions. Finally, we will come back  
on the questions posed by such a situation,  
especially as regards the expectations of the political decision-makers  
and social housing organizations towards this staff  
ground.

A PAST PLUS

OR LESS REPRESENTED

Internalized values, learning achievements,  
biographical breaks and social origin have a  
impact on the report that guards maintain  
with their profession and their own image.

Differentiate from "assisted"

and "office staff"

Housekeepers often have autonomy  
a central value of their existence. Those who  
insist most on this aspect have a trajectory of

life marked by the concern to preserve a certain freedom of action. They have held jobs where they were their "little boss". So is there a former pastry chef, of several former craftsmen, small traders who went bankrupt, old boatmen, etc. These guards present their entry in the craft as a chance as far as the latter allows, in fact, not to have a leader behind you during working hours: "I have principles is that I do not like having people in charge on my back. I like doing my job, I am conscientious in what I do, but I like not be obliged to do so on such day, at such time, in such a place. I like doing it my way, and there the caretaker's job is what I liked. Not responsible, I do my job whenever I want, but hey, he's done what, that's what was the main thing for me

. (Guardian near Evry, 26 years old, four months of seniority) This desire to remain autonomous

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The job is not a vocation, far from it: 95% of guardians of the ESHs had another job before being service of the tenants of HLM. A number are old industrial workers and former boatmen.

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gives meaning to his entry into the profession which nevertheless very often results from a choice under constraint, financial in particular.

The commitment to autonomy will condition the

ways to see each other at work. The guards claim,  
for example, a practical spirit that differentiates them  
administrative staff from the "offices".

To distinguish oneself from those who  
stay seated

day

"(Guardian at Belfort, 48, eight years old  
seniority) and who remain under the control  
supervisors are recurrent in  
field agents. Here we find a way  
typical to these to assert their specificity by

Box 1

Methodological device

The empirical work that we rely on was done between 1999 and 2003. It consisted of  
first in a national quantitative survey, funded by the National Federation of Enterprises  
social housing (ESH) (1). This was conducted with guards in 157 ESH. the

During this first step, we sent 5,600 questionnaires, 2,106 were  
returned, ie 38% (see Stébé, Bronner, 2000, Bronner, Stébé, 2001).

Then, the qualitative research took place in two phases. At first, we  
focused solely on ESH, their home federation being also the origin of the  
financing of this first qualitative survey. We conducted 80 semi-structured interviews with  
guards randomly selected from low-rent housing organizations (HLM)  
spread over five regions (where there are the most guards): Lorraine, Ile-de-France, Nord-Pas-de-France  
Calais, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur and Rhône-Alpes. The interviews lasted on average between 1h30 and  
2 hours (2). With few exceptions, all took place in the respondents' workplace: either  
at the lodge, or at the housing of function. The others took place at the Neighborhood Agency (for three  
surveyed) or at the place of residence outside the workplace (for two respondents). Finally, 5 observations  
participants were also conducted with caretakers practicing in the same regions as  
those selected for interviews. The monographs lasted an average of two weeks.

We conducted ethnographic interviews, that is to say during the observati  
participating,

with the field agents who accepted our presence by their side. These interviews took place

over several hours and allowed us to access the depths of their life stories (cf.

Stébé, 2002).

In a second step, other investigations, not foreseen in the context of research funded by the federation of ESHs, concerned a public office for planning and construction (OPAC) and on a Public Office of HLM (OP HLM). In each of the two organizations, we conducted 5 interviews semi-directive with guards and led a participant observation in Lorraine and Franche-Comté.

The interviews were the subject of a thematic analysis. If they allowed us to access the "say", that is tell the reflexive report of the guards to their past and their job, the participant observations in particular made visible the "doing", that is to say the concrete practices of the guards sometimes informed

by ways of behaving little negotiated, or even incorporated - a practical relationship to oneself and one's own

and thus escaping to a greater or lesser extent from their reading of "reality" (3).

(1) We would like to thank P. Sudant and D. Poussou, our correspondents at the national federation of ESH.

(2) Several interviews are retranscribed in the book Guardians of buildings in sight (2002).

(3) Contrary to the approach developed by C. Dubar and D. Demazière (1997), this will not be a question here of making language the "medium"

"essential" to understand how the actors, in this case the guardians of buildings, forge their professional identity.

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report to

cravateux

". These would be furthermore

deprived of room for maneuver since

by not

not moving from their chair

(Guardian in Calais,

33 years, one year of seniority) they would be unable to

circumvent the rules and be adaptable.

Formulas will clearly express this

way to stand out from agency staff

neighborhood and headquarters: "

must be

helpful

»,«

do not be stupid and mean

"

"

it is not necessary

not be someone who automatically applies

the rule

. The guards possess

often a room in which they keep pretty much

all that can still be used. They thus have

of a real Ali Baba cave that turns out to be

daily an inexhaustible source of tips and tricks

tips to help the tenants. Number of agents

have occupied manual posts, so that they

have the "right strings" to troubleshoot

tenants, without always informing their superiors.

All guards are not concerned by these

observations. Those whose lodge is close to a

neighborhood agency

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sometimes develop complicities

with the administrative staff, that we do not

let's not find more isolated guards

physically and hence socially. Must therefore

count here with "

neighborhood effects

"(Authier,

2001). Indeed, not all guards have the

same opportunities to build regular relationships

with administrative staff. Otherwise,  
some guards, become stewards, must  
no longer do housework and housekeeping  
technical aspects, but monitoring,  
administrative management and even management. In  
indeed, they sometimes have under their responsibility  
building employees with the least duties  
noble in the scale of social prestige (interview  
including household). These guardians stewards,  
holders of the building custodian diploma,  
feel close to the "offices": they see themselves more  
"White-collar workers" only in "blue-collar workers".  
Guards accustomed to a certain autonomy  
often put forward their ability to  
to control their life, to get out of delicate situations  
(unemployment, divorce). This way of insisting on the idea  
to owe anything to anyone plays a role in the  
relationships with tenants. It is more particularly  
true with "social cases" or "assisted ones".  
By highlighting their ability to self-manage,  
guards intend indeed to stand out from these locals  
often thought to be unable to cope alone with  
difficulties. Field workers demonstrate their  
not belonging to this category of tenants, both  
in their daily practices (reluctance to  
to render service, refusal to establish friendly relations)  
that in their words: "  
No, I do not feel  
like them  
[the assisted]  
, not at all  
[...]

. But I

know very well that I do not have the same mentality  
that they, not at all, I do not have the same mentality  
they.

(Guardian at Melun, 38, four years old  
seniority) Responsibilities, also minimal  
they are, are often presented by the guards  
as essential features of their function.

The goal is to have your abilities recognized  
initiative. It is also about affirming a certain p  
restige  
position and to recall that "

we

", the

guards, are able to help

"

them

", the "

misfits

".

A difficult report to writing

We have identified elsewhere the multiple reasons  
for which the guards do not pass faithfully  
in the field the requirements relating to  
social mediation tasks (Marchal, Stébé,  
2003a)

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; however, it is possible to observe  
how the school past of fieldworkers participates  
this attitude of rejection that may appear,  
in many ways, as an obstacle to their professionalization  
and therefore to their recognition within

of the HLM world. First, the guards refuse to play the role of mediator - covering here multiple facets such as conciliation, education and monitoring -, to the extent that they do not want to sacrifice oneself and take risks for a society who imposed them, through the institution schooling, rules, knowledge and standards they have not internalized easily. Note that less

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The objective of such decentralized structures is to ensure part of rental management and to bring staff closer administrative officers.

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Indeed, the guards refuse to play the role of mediator in to the extent that, among other things, they do not wish to resemble concierges of the past and to get into trouble with little tenants inclined to listen to them.

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10% of ESH custodians have a bachelor's degree.

In a word, they do not want to sacrifice themselves for the society today, a society that does not always have wanted from them and who now asks them indirectly to exercise control over a place of life gathering several hundred people

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, whose

some are at the margins of global society, especially in financial terms. Then the agents of land do not feel legitimate enough because of their low educational level, to tell renters how to behave. The image they have of them



the same is not positive enough for their  
allow to be part of a normative process,  
even moralizing. Finally, they do not consider themselves  
sufficiently qualified to improvise mediator.

Such judgment is reinforced during moments of  
solitude and isolation. Field agents are  
so earned by the feeling that other professionals  
better trained than them (educators, islanders,  
among others) would be better able to achieve  
mediation missions.

Remembering a difficult report at the School can also  
to be at the origin of reluctance, even reactions  
frankly negative guards against  
administrative tasks which are more and more  
assigned. This is the case of Pascal (keeper in Corbeil-  
Essonnes, 32 years old, one year of seniority) who defines himself  
like a "

handyman

", a "

touch all

". This

field officer keeps a very bad memory of his  
schooling. Staying behind a desk is too close to  
the school universe to be appreciated. And then, he is  
not easy to see yourself in  
bureaucrat

When

gaps prevent the control of the means of  
communication. Indeed, real difficulties in  
spelling and grammar contradict their report  
administrative tasks. Write the least  
message for information, order

household products or even meet various solicitations from the head office ... as many tasks that assume a familiarity to writing that all the guards do not talk.

The states of the place are more and more guards. And there, more than elsewhere, a certain control writing is necessary. It is indeed necessary to note everything carefully on cards provided for this purpose. The written comments about the condition of the apartment must be clear and concise: they will be sent to service managers and a copy is intended to tenants. Writing in the presence of these the last one increases the difficulty of the exercise. Writing takes place in public at the time of the housing visit to minimize litigation. So, for the guards least comfortable with writing, the inventory is experienced as a delicate moment and some even refuse to lend themselves to this type of exercise.

The "weight" of the school past explains why field agents refuse new administrative tasks while one could expect a contrary reaction from them; these tasks are indeed synonymous with greater recognition not only within the world of "Offices" but also among the tenants.

A job that can lead at a dead end

If personal values like autonomy justify the exercise of the profession, if a difficult academic past can decide reactions to certain yet rewarding instructions, the biographical breaks also intervene in the way

to apprehend his function.

When these gardie

do not manage to feel

well within their neighborhood, their relationship to the profession is

reveals in difficulties to leave a job that

offers accommodation and avoids travel

daily. Solution of ease first, the fact

to have a staff housing can be transformed

in real impasse then. "

I would

to leave, but it's not possible. I talked about it

again to my son just now. It's not possible,

because it already conditions, there is housing

[...].

If I want to leave the profession, I am obliged

to leave the apartment, so I need a housing

and a job is impossible

[...]

I do not have a husband,

I do not have a husband anymore. It's a vicious circle, we do not

do not go out

(Guardian in Trappes, 42, eighteen years old)

old). The impossibility of getting out of this

spiral can be very badly experienced, especially by those

and those who have not always lived in housing. It is

the case of the respondent quoted previously who left

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Guardians practicing in ESH run on average

120 dwellings.

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his suburban neighborhood and his job as a laboratory assistant to follow her military husband. However, marital problems and a divorce will force him to find a job quickly. The impossibility of leaving his neighborhood compromises the distinction by report to the tenants, also "captives" of the city and that remind him of his own inability to offer better living conditions for his child. prisoner of such a situation, which muzzles this dimension fundamental of social life which is the narcissism

small differences

(Freud, 1979: 68) - more

we are socially close to others, the more we tend to distinguish themselves by exaggerating the slightest differences,

- the respondent sees her future shrinking. The

HLM as a whole are despised. Tenants

are excluded from privacy, as well as those

intended to leave the neighborhood than those forced to leave

stay, since all return an image

negative: physical proximity does not always mean

with social proximity, far from it, in neighborhoods

of social housing that are characterized by heterogeneity

residential trajectories of those who

live (Chamborédon, Lemaire, 1970). The job,

compared to a trap, a source of tension with both

other than with oneself, becomes a chore, a labor, a

work, which must be accepted or not. We

we met guards, divorced or widowed,

for whom the profession of caretaker of buildings, in

offering both employment and housing, represents

a real lifeline, especially

when they do not have a driver's license.

Their job is a way of reinventing, if not substitute family, at least a moral comfort shaken following affective breaks often painful. Even though their neighborhood constitutes a "big ensemble" where the layers social networks are concentrated, there are always doors that open to discuss and feel supported by other women who sometimes have a similar life story. When these babysitters receive affection and attention on the part of some tenants, they are trying to to give back what has been given to them. A respondent will hold the following words:

I can take time

with them

[tenants]

, it's normal. All beings

humans need to talk

[...]

And then, you

know, I too know what it is to be alone,

as I lost my husband

. "(Babysitter in Lyon, 55

years, fifteen years of seniority) She will also define herself

like a nurse who "

heals both

buildings that people

". These words show,

in a logic similar to that developed by the

caregivers observed by A.-M. Arborio (Arborio,

2001), how much social knowledge acquired from

tenants can become central in approaching his  
function and in the description of oneself. This knowledge  
empirical world of tenants, inaccessible  
"offices", makes you feel useful and  
to act on a world known from the inside. Nothing  
astonishing, therefore, that this guardian was  
until refusing to leave  
his  
neighborhood at the moment  
where she was offered a job as a workshop manager  
in the seam, his "  
real job

" However :

"

To tell the truth, I did not have the courage to give up  
all those years where I lived here and leave as  
it. And then the tenants were very disappointed that I  
leave, so I stayed.

»Why take the risk

to leave a tame place of life gathering the essentials  
of his friendly relations? The idea of reliving  
moments of loneliness, while she lives surrounded by  
tenants close enough, the deterrent to leave.

We find similar trajectories in  
guardians of foreign origin

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. The neighborhood appears  
first as a way to be integrated into the  
host society. He p  
ermet, while working, of  
build relationships with tenants But confronted  
lack of support from superiors,

drug problems that may affect  
their own children, with difficulties in finding a  
other job and another housing, the guards  
of foreign origin sometimes feel caught in a  
dead end. The business is then the subject of an investment  
minimal waiting for an opportunity  
risky professional.

Who is similar socially  
understand each other

More and more guards are involved in the  
fight against unpaid rent. The organisms  
of HLMs want to ensure their financial equilibrium,  
whereas, as undertakings serving the

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Just under 7% of ESH guards do not have citizenship  
French.

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social (Marchal, 2004)

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. Most guards  
are reluctant to knock on doors and  
endure tensions and insults. They refuse to have to  
play the wrong role while the staff  
administrators protect themselves from tenants by avoiding  
such situations. This refusal also results from  
type of neighborhood in which the field agents  
exercise: the more difficult the district is, the more  
against unpaid rent seems risky to them.

But these are not the only explanations. The  
interviews show that the most  
able to understand everyday problems

disadvantaged tenants are those who come from modest social environments, that is to say the great majority of them: 50% of the guards are from of the working class; only 4.3% have or had executive parents or intermediate profession. This social (and spatial) proximity to tenants partly explains the guards' refusal to comply with an institutional injunction to fight against unpaid rent. The most reluctant are indeed those who have known, and still know

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, for purposes of difficult months. Many field agents tell us will put themselves in the place of tenants in difficulty and try to help them rather than " put them the knife under the throat ". The feeling of not being safe from possible financial problems leads the field agents to insist on the reasons for which some tenants are unable to pay, reasons often independent of their will: unemployment, loss of a loved one, accident of car, sickness, etc. The guards adopt an attitude comprehensive to better emphasize contingency of life, the very one that led them into a "porter's lodge", located most often in a peripheral neighborhood away from the dynamic cultural downtown. With the feeling of share a similar social destiny and little value, the tensions experienced elsewhere with this category tenants seem to be fading momentarily.



The personal past thus represents an element of important understanding. It helps to better understand the guards' reactions both to tasks that are more and more entrusted to them (mediation, state of places, unpaid rent) only to certain categories of tenants. But if we have focused on multiple dimensions relating to the personal past, what about the impact of professional experiences on the daily life of these field agents? We let's focus on two types of experience professional: that of industrial worker and boatman. These are characteristic of the profession of caretaker who has indeed welcomed number of employees from these two sectors in crisis during the 80s.

#### PROFESSIONAL LIVES

#### RICH AS SUPPORTS

#### PRESENT

The pride of the "northerners"

We met more than a dozen couples guards from northern France, working today in the Paris region. they have been forced to retrain following layoffs in the iron and steel industry, mining or textile. Living initially, for the most of them, in individual houses and maintaining community-sounding relationships, the adaptation to the HLM life proves difficult.

For those affected in inhabited cities by disadvantaged social categories, change life is sometimes brutal. In these conditions, colleagues also coming from the North play a

supportive role and become friends. Often, friendly relationships are woven during reconversion organized in the region of origin and continue after the moves in the Paris region. Some refuse to sell their house they maintain and pay for more than fifteen years. Many are not able to cut emotional ties that connect them to their native North. They live their coming in Ile-de-France as a parenthesis until retirement. Waiting to definitely return at home, these Uprooted couples do not hesitate not to go back and forth between their region of origin and their city HLM. In many cases,

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Some ESHs are financially interested in keeping their guardians down unpaid rent through bonuses distributed at the end of the year.

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The average annual salary of ESH guards is around 12,500 euros, against a minimum wage of about 10,500 euros.

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Train to energize the territories from Friday evening, the lodge and the function housing are deserted. The neighborhood is not considered as their place of life, but simply as a space working. Weekends away from the universe HLM are dedicated to the maintenance of the house family and visiting long-time friends. If the neighborhood is easily neglected the time of a weekend or on the occasion of annual leave, these reconvert do not neglect their work.

On the contrary, the fear of being sacked  
second time inclines them to invest fully. The  
superiors are not criticized  
from this type of staff. They are rather  
perceived as deserving people "  
having  
agreed to hire former workers who were not interested  
more people  
(Guardian at Taverny, 53,  
twelve years of seniority). The caretaker's profession  
of buildings is lived as a bargain, especially  
when schooling was dropped to fourteen or  
sixteen, without a diploma. In addition, the autonomy  
these former workers can now enjoy  
daily life was often unexpected in their  
old function.

These "northerners" are keen to defend their reputation  
from «  
hard workers  
". "

We, they know that work  
do not scare us  
(babysitter in Paris, 55 years old,  
twenty five years of seniority). The words of this  
guardian, whose former miner's husband is also  
guardian, are indicative of a collective state of mind.  
She starts her work one hour before her  
formally scheduled schedules and opens his lodge a  
much of the day. Compared to colleagues  
who are not from the North and to the staff of  
"Offices", there is a way of demonstrating and  
claim a specific identity. In addition to

not count their hours, these field agents  
rely on their experience as a manual worker  
and their turn to solicit the least often  
possible outside help. This proud identity of  
handyman is anchored in their past as a worker who represents  
often, from their point of view, a more  
noble than that of guardian of buildings. The identity  
current professional is then in competition with  
by that resulting from a personal past that is more rewarding.  
And especially since in everyday life, it turns out  
often necessary to overcome the shortcomings of  
professional training, particularly on the  
technical maintenance (faucets, electricity,  
painting...). The desire to rehabilitate its origin  
social system then gains in intensity and decides in part  
relationship to the profession. The "  
identity supports

Biographical

"(Marchal, 2006a) structure the  
daily reality and make it possible to  
moments of serenity about his ways of thinking,  
to act and feel. Personal experiences allow  
moments of identity rest in the cases  
where they provide a sense consistent with the activity  
professional, so that the uncertainty of  
present is as if erased by the certainty of the past.  
The desire to make a difference, to claim  
and assume the identity of a worker "  
hard to evil  
"

is recurrent in these field workers. Many  
tell us that they have set themselves the goal of

raise

"

their neighborhood. The challenge then arises as a way to save face and show, that in spite of the breaks endured, the resignation and the discouragement did not prevail. From a certain way, it remains for these "northerners" only to to cling to that identity of worker for keep the head up. So they invest in their neighborhood in order to stay in tune with their past and with the image they have of themselves. The function of guardian is thus deeply embedded in the singularity of life stories. Its declination practice is understandable only once reported to dynamic personal and collective identities. In the same sense, the habits of maintaining Community-type relationships are not forgotten. overnight. They can even encourage these keepers to get closer to some tenants. It is as well as a babysitter, working with her husband, Befriended a Malagasy tenant. Even though the couple has since been moved to a neighborhood quieter, that does not prevent them from receiving, still today, this former tenant. A another couple met does not understand, meanwhile, why the former guardian had not used his tenants to enter the lodge. He thus holds chang er the tenants' habits so that they ring at the box and do not hesitate to enter, do not to come and talk. Professional identity current is intertwined inextricably

with cultural traits all the more

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heavily internalized and poorly negotiated they are  
claimed with pride.

From the houseboat to the neighborhood:

a similar investment

Among the members of former trades forced to  
reconverted into that of caretaker of buildings, we  
also find boatmen forced to  
to separate from their houseboat.

A couple of respondents, installed for ten years in a  
neighborhood of the western suburbs of Paris, admits now  
belong to

people of the earth

". decision

to sell the boat was taken after consultation  
with other family members (sisters, brothers  
and brothers-in-law), who also became caretakers.

The rupture was all the stronger as their  
grandparents were already boatmen. A whole tradition  
family broke up for lack of money  
sufficient to pay for the insurance and to provide  
family needs.

Fallback on the caretaker's profession  
reports

here evidence

: "

The only job was a sailor,  
keeper or lock keeper. Anyway, as a diploma,  
we have nothing. And anyway, it bothered me  
to be locked up, here, we are as much inside as outside

[...]

. I think that the job of guardian, he is very good for us. I would be a cashier, I do not could not sit

. (Couple of guards at Rueil-Malmaison, F. 51 years, H. 58 years, ten years of seniority) Just as the houseboat was their unique center of attention, so the neighborhood constitutes an exclusive investment object. The two interviewees specify, while insisting, that they do not want to leave their neighborhood, even at the end of week. Watch, wake up at night, help to tenants is part of their daily lives. "

It is

stronger than us

They say repeatedly.

The green spaces are maintained by their care and flowers are planted there. Housekeeping parties is seen as important in the extent that it allows them to maintain in a good state

their

new place of life. Without a doubt,

even if the break was difficult at first, their life

is here, among the tenants to whom they are attached

for some people. When in the neighborhood, it becomes a landmark

former boatmen in which the cousins and

brothers-in-law also occupy

keeper. The break with life on the houseboat is

compensated by immersion in a familiar world

as much as possible. Children who are not

no guardian are tenants.

Continuing to practice as a couple, such as before, proves to be a fundamental element in the "Choice" of the caretaker's profession. The essential thing is to not to leave to work " everyone in his corner ". The important thing is to stay welded at a time crucial where you have to "go back". Together, the respondents hold the rudder no longer from their boat but of their neighborhood, on which they intend to exercise a influence, in particular by establishing links trust with the tenants and ensuring that the buildings remain clean. Their professional life and their marital life have always been closely nested one inside the other. From this point of view, the Guardian function allows to perpetuate a mode of singular life, not in conformity with the marital norms where the freedom of everyone prevails, even at couple (Singly de, 1996). Both are born in the houseboat of parents. They grew up in the family professional world, so that the absence gap between private and professional life is perceived as quite normal and does not take any the appearance of an imperative. The fact that the lodge directly connected to the housing of function does not poses no problem, on the contrary<sup>15</sup>: "I would like not a separate box. I like it better that, we get people and then we're here, I think it's good like this. By the way, the door of their lodge is constantly open, a basket with candy is lying on the desk and kids regularly take it. Many



services are provided to tenants, such as walking their dog while they went on vacation. The couple compares their business function to that that they assumed on their boat when they welcomed tourists to bring them place to another. As for the "people of the North ", the profession currently exercised is interpreted into function of the old frames of reference. The lodge is invested in the image of the cabin of the boat. During the marriage of their eldest daughter, they decorated her and had her

Nearly 80% of the guards have a lodge. In 47% of

In this case, it communicates directly with the housing unit.

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Train to energize the territories

invited tenants. The lodge still keeps the memories of this happy event: some photos are hung on the wall and a red paper garland hangs over the front door.

\* \*

\*

The examples presented here show how and why the guards determine, in a broad measure, meaning and limits of their function from of their experience.

On a practical (and political) level, this observation raises a number of questions regarding what is asked today from these field agents, both in the field of social mediation, combating unpaid rent or administrative management: is such a situation acceptable to decision-makers politicians and heads of organizations that want to make sure that their decisions are

actually passed on the ground? It is obvious that no. In these circumstances, the detention of degree of caretaker of buildings a guarantee for field agents to comply with what is expected of them? Somehow yes, because it seems that graduates, the "new" guards, be more able to claim their belonging to the HLM world because of their passage through training courses. Their socialization professionally stronger than that of the "Empiricists", they appear more bureaucratized because sensitized to management logic. But again, it must be remembered that "Certified" (graduates) also experience real difficulties in not getting away from the instructions formalities, insofar as the district represents a local scene demanding daily to cope with countless situations. That's why identity statute always appears to be competing with identities informally indexed to field contingencies. And why not seek to value skills informal, and especially relational, guardians rather than formalizing a profession that risk of losing the social knowledge necessary to his daily exercise?

The effectiveness of longer and more adapted formations leading to graduation seems therefore depend largely on recruited profiles. Who to recruit? Technicians or people likely to become real mediators, or even administrative agents?

The choice seems difficult because the job is based on

technical skills (maintenance of the built environment, control of electrical networks, elevators ...) necessary in view of the global aging of the HLM park. But it is equally necessary that, in the current context, the job becomes more and more relational: a job of the social.

Difficulties in answering all these questions seem to be due to the fact that the guards function lose its consistency to dissolve in a variety of tasks, synonymous with nonsense and confusion. Why see in agents low-skilled field, mostly from manual trades and social backgrounds (very) modest, a cure for the "suburban crisis", a means of combating unpaid rent and a resource for administrative management? Great gap between technical monitoring of buildings, management proximity and administrative responsibilities is simply insoluble. Here, as elsewhere, "five-legged sheep" do not exist. Can we, in these circumstances, recruit "novices", that is to say young people without experience professional and ready to assume a great variety of tasks? The problem is that the job brings together many functions (hygiene, monitoring, technical interview, mediation, management administrative system) and requires experienced people who have multiple skills. In addition, live and work in a neighborhood of social housing reveals, on a daily basis, a delicate exercise; it requires people strong enough to relativize and assume all the aleas. The responsables

HLM organizations are not mistaken in recruiting experienced candidates, since the guards have an average age of almost 45 years. Should we, in this case, remove the principle of the housing of function so that the guards can "blow" and relax?

We answer in the affirmative with regard to our own analyzes and believe some reviews specialized as News HLM or HLM

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today. But then, let's not wait for these agents anymore of land they know perfectly the tenants and that they are "key cogs" of social life (Marchal, Stbe, 2003b). But this is also what is request. Their superiors are waiting of them, among others, that they know enough tenants to convince them to pay regularly their rent. Policy makers, as for they rely on territorial anchoring and immersion of the guardians in the social life of neighborhoods for defuse conflicts and tensions, as well as limit delinquent acts. ■

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