

# MARSEILLE 3<sup>•</sup> BELLE DE MAI

Facing inequalities and democratic challenges through Co-production in Cities (Fairville) is a Urban Co-Production Research Project Horizon Europe.

Fairville uses knowledge co-production as strategy to address urban inequalities and democratic issues affecting seven urban areas in Europe, and two other mirror cases in Africa.



- ◆ Risk Inequalities
- ▲ Environmental Inequalities
- Planning and Housing Inequalities

Fairville experiments co-production with civil society actors, universities and local authorities to facilitate multi-engagement towards embracing entrenched urban and environmental inequalities with affected residents or community groups. Through coproduction of knowledge and actions-oriented programmes, it contributes to rethinking urban democracy.

Do you want to help? There are many ways to contribute to the project: would you like to participate in the co-production in our project tasks or go on the field in our Fairville Labs?

Contact us!

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## CONTEXT

**Marseille** faces significant inequalities, with some of the highest unemployment and poverty rates in France. The collapse of two buildings on November 5, 2018, which killed 8 people, highlighted the presence of 40,000 deteriorated dwellings, a result of decades of political mismanagement and speculative urban policies. Rising rents, the spread of Airbnb, and the destruction of social housing have worsened social segregation. In response, public institutions launched the Partnership Development Project (PPA) to combat unsuitable housing and improve living conditions. However, local groups fear that the specific situations of local residents will not be sufficiently taken into account, and that the renovation of the neighbourhood will affect both their housing tenure and the rental market.

The 3rd district of Marseille, especially Belle de Mai neighbourhood, has faced decades of neglect in public services, schools, transport, infrastructure, and housing. Many residents live in precarious conditions, including undignified and overcrowded housing under exploitative landlords.

## ACTORS INVOLVED

The FVLab Marseille is coordinated by APPUII (a national facilitator working with city-dwellers), the CNRS (UMR LAVUE), and Un Centre Ville Pour Tous (CVPT), a local partner with 20 years of experience in housing conditions and policies in Marseille.

The main local partner is the Collective of Organized Inhabitants in the 3rd district (CHO3), which has mobilized many residents over the last 5 years to strengthen solidarity and fight urban injustice. The FVLab collaborates with the Right to the City sub-group, focusing on housing, mobility, public space, and gardening. Other members of the Right to the City group include the Compagnons Bâtisseurs association (CSO) and the gardeners collective Hydre.

The FVLab is also associated with the Institute of Urban and Regional Planning (IUAR) for joint research. Our main public interlocutor is the Local Public Planning Society of National Interest (SPLAIN), responsible for the PPA.

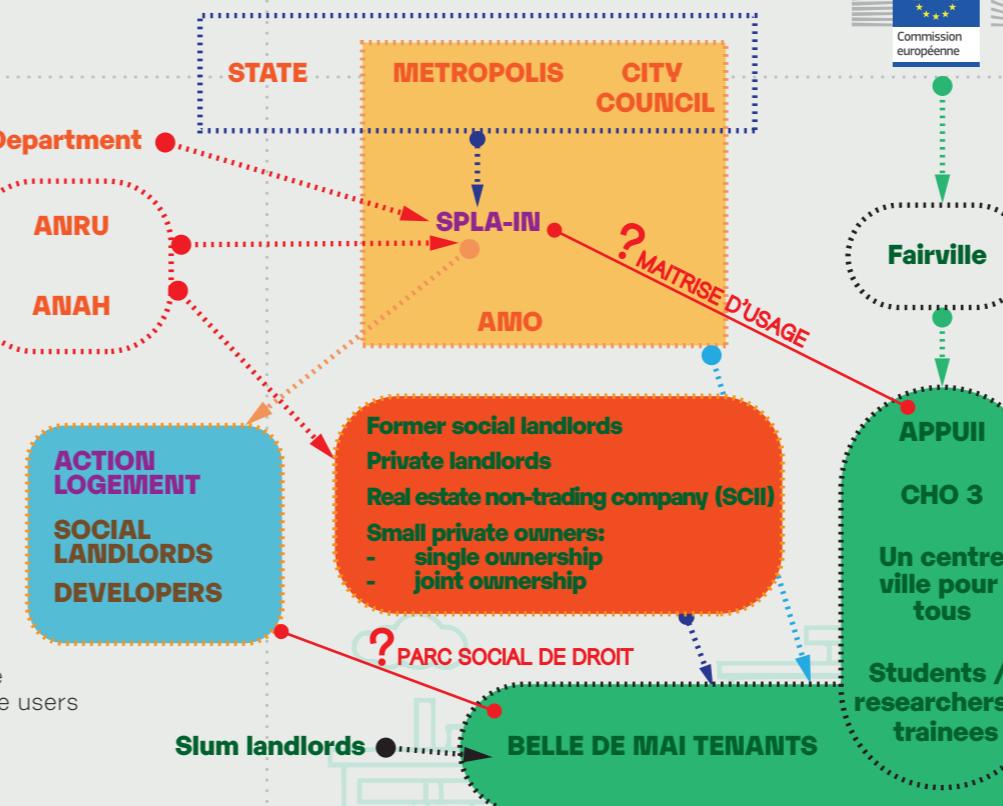


Figure 1: Schema "Cartography of principal actors" realized by students of urbanism, IMVT, in cooperation with the FVLab.  
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Web links:  
CHO3: <https://www.instagram.com/cho3marseille/>  
Compagnons bâtisseurs: <https://www.compagnonsbatiisseurs.eu/Provence>  
Collective l'hydre: <https://www.instagram.com/l'hydre/?hl=fr>  
IUAR: <http://iuar-lieu-amu.fr/>

## ACTIONS

The FVLab Marseille aims to foster urban change by promoting a local political culture characterized by transparency, democratic debates, and horizontal decision-making. It addresses the lack of local democracy and co-productive urban planning processes, and it seeks to improve understanding of inequalities and access to information.

In winter 2023/24, FV-team members engaged in meetings and working sessions with our partners using an "observant participation" approach. This helped clarify each partner's needs and goals. We then organized public urban planning workshops, enhancing our understanding of social inequality, urban planning, and local politics in Belle de Mai, consolidating trust between partners. We provided access to maps, articles, and urban studies, allowing participants to engage with present and historical data. Additionally, we organized three neighbourhood walks with groups of residents, which are available in sound, text, and image on Fairville's blog (<https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/story-maps-the-3rd-district-of-marseille>). A co-produced map brings together various isolated projects in the neighbourhood, highlighting how urban transformations are interconnected. Our next step is to diversify and enrich the map with more interactive and co-produced information, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the area's urban changes.

The objective of promoting a local political culture is linked to tackling urban inequality, particularly in housing and spatial segregation. We also aim to address social injustice, structural exclusion, and racism.

The FVLab in Marseille undertakes various activities, including:

- Fieldwork and research to understand and address socio-spatial fractures.
- Community engagement actions to mobilize local inhabitants, such as public gatherings, workshops, door-to-door surveys, and public space observations.
- Workshops and seminars to foster co-learning and counter-expertise.
- Regular coordination meetings and the creation of new partnerships.
- Public communication through flyers, posters, urban walking tours, public space ateliers, and conferences.

These activities aim to foster cooperation, mutual learning, and collective action to address urban inequality and promote social justice in Marseille.

# GOING FROM DOOR TO DOOR.

## Making visible the housing conditions in the district

The PPA inner-city renovation project in La Belle de Mai is mandated to rehabilitate housing and public spaces, addressing historical urban investment gaps. Public authorities will acquire 30 buildings and create 120 social housing apartments. Furthermore, private owners can get public support for refurbishing. However, public authorities are mainly in contact with house owners and have very little concrete information on local living conditions, such as the state of the properties and the social status of tenants. We fear a lack of consideration for these often-complex situations, marked by illegal renting practices and the lack of public controls and assistance. To address this, we have conducted in winter 2024 a door-to-door approach to engage with a diverse range of profiles and situations. A comprehensive questionnaire has been co-written with two main goals:

- Make the variety of housing and living situations visible and advocate for modest and vulnerable residents through a written report and public presentation.
- Inform residents about local associations that support housing rights, fostering collective organization and solidarity based on shared experiences and knowledge.



Figure 3: Door-to-door in La Belle de Mai with Hélène Froment (Ben Kerste, November 2024)

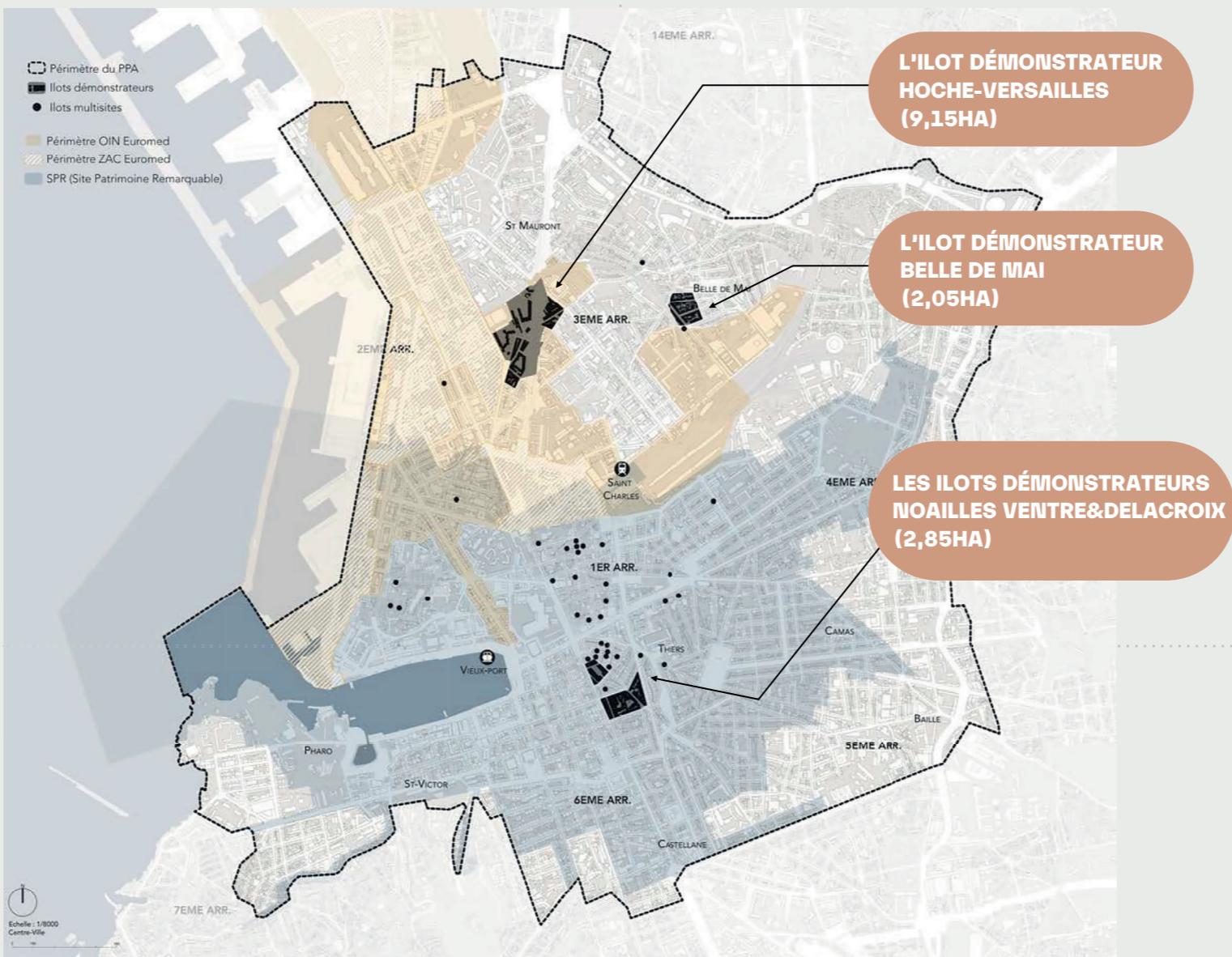


Figure 2: The “priority areas” of urban intervention (l’ilot démonstrateur - in black) of the project PPA within the wider city centre (source: SPLAIN 2024, p.5)

Door-to-door is carried out by CNRS researchers, members of Un Centre Ville Pour Tous with several CHO3 residents participating. Their presence facilitates trust and connection with occupants. During preparation, stakeholders share experiences and know-how, including tips for conducting door-to-door visits, designing the questionnaire, and presenting urban issues to uninitiated people. In cooperation with the FVLab, urban planning students conduct qualitative research with local institutions and associations, examining policies and instruments to guarantee housing rights and prevent social displacement.

### Results of the co-produced survey: deteriorating housing conditions

According to our research, rents are relatively affordable in the district. While some housing situations are acceptable, several cases raise serious concerns: deteriorated housing, over-occupation, slumlords, and dilapidated stairwells. Language barriers - especially the difficulty of speaking or understanding French - further intensifies the challenges of everyday life. Almost nobody is aware of the redevelopment projects within the PPA. Organizations working to support access to rights are largely unknown or seldom used by the residents we met.

80% among the 53 respondents are tenants or subtenants, compared to 54% in Marseille as a whole. 40% of the residents surveyed report being dissatisfied with their housing. One in four describes a very difficult relationship with their landlord. Nearly nine out of ten report problems with pests (mice, rats, cockroaches), and six out of ten suffer from humidity-related issues. Finally, two out of three visited dwellings are very small, ranging between 25 and 40 square meters, and are over-occupied. This raises the questions of speculative real estate dynamics and of living conditions in the neighborhood.

Added to this are issues of urban heat, with 60% of homes acting as internal boilers.

Following a series of meetings, workshops, and presentations with residents, grassroots groups, and local associations - gathered under the initiative “For a Rehabilitation of the Neighbourhood for All” - and as part of a collaborative effort to share knowledge and co-develop demands, we are now collectively putting forward a series of proposals to public authorities:

- **Right to Transparency/Information and to Support:** The need for a permanent help desk in the heart of the Belle de Mai district.
- **Zero eviction of residents in deteriorated housing:** by implementing the rehousing charter to ensure that no victims of poor housing conditions are left behind - regardless of their legal status.
- **Rehousing, Rent Control, Rental Permits:** Proposal to create a monitoring and vigilance collective to ensure that announced measures are implemented and that residents’ rights are respected.

The key goal for 2025–2026 for the Fairville Lab – 3rd District of Marseille is to strengthen collective dynamics around neighbourhood transformations by mobilizing residents, activists, students, researchers, artists, professionals, and institutional stakeholders.



Figure 4: A Working Group during a Fairville-Atelier (Gaia Pla, March 2025)