



FRÈRES DES HOMMES



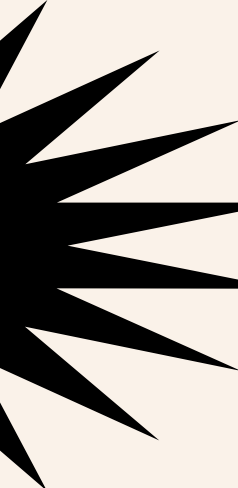
train to transform
CIVIL SOCIETY
FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

February 2022- June 2023

**Collective solidarity
action by bringing
together volunteers and
young newcomers in Paris**



Between June 2022 and September 2023, the Frères des Hommes organisation has been committed to the implementation of social transformation initiatives in France, drawing inspiration from methodologies shared within the Train for Transformer collective.



Using a logic of experimentation, (we try, we observe, we analyse!), three volunteer teams were supported throughout their reflective process in order to implement initiatives with vulnerable communities.

This summary presents the Paris initiative, which brought together volunteers from Frères des Hommes and young newcomers (refugees and asylum seekers who had been living in France for less than five years) who took on integration training at a Parisian social centre. The initiative was inspired by the Citizenship Training carried out by Concept, a Train to Transform member organisation, based in Senegal, by adapting it to the French context.

Through these initiatives, Frères des Hommes is gradually becoming an organisation that contributes to social transformation within the collective, through its practices.

BUILDING ACTION TOGETHER WITH YOUNG NEW ARRIVALS THROUGH TRAINING PROGRAMMES



WORKING WITH YOUNG REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS AT THE TORCY SOCIAL CENTER

The bridging class is a training programme at the language faculty of the Torcy social centre, in a working-class district of Paris. **This is a preparatory stage of professional training, intended for around twenty young newcomers, aged 18 to 25.** It includes an important linguistic basis (French lessons for young non-French speaking or illiterate people), based around professional development, and on the **development of self-confidence.**

The social centre runs two integration class groups, twice a year: from October to February, and from March to July. Young people do not necessarily have to live in the 18th arrondissement.

The head of the linguistic centre saw the benefit of placing the Frères des Hommes initiatives within a framework of promoting “self-esteem”, so that **young people could strengthen their perception of their own power to act and their involvement in community action and spaces within the neighbourhood.**

The personal situations of the young people varied greatly: some slept on the street, or in emergency accommodation which was constantly changing, while others lived in a stable apartment, sometimes with a family member.

THE VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED

An initial workshop in February 2023 brought together several volunteers from the Paris Frères des Hommes team, who were interested in experimenting with social transformation initiatives in France. However, the action that was planned, required high levels of commitment and availability: a day of preparation plus the joint running of six 3 hour workshops during the week, from March to June, as well as consultation time between the workshops. Two volunteers who were already part of the Paris team were able to take part in this process.

To strengthen the team, the community life branch of Frères des Hommes then supplied a designated volunteer offer to explain the planned initiative and the required availability . This allowed two new volunteers to join the team for this specific initiative. Finally, an intern and two Frères des Hommes employees took part in the preparation and joint running of the workshops, with the aim of teaching new skills to the volunteers involved.



PREPARING CITIZEN INITIATIVE WORKSHOPS

A day of collective preparation, bringing together the team of volunteers involved, an intern and two employees of Frères des Hommes was organised at the beginning of April 2023.

Several themes were discussed:

- the journeys of young newcomers
- the role of joint leadership and co-construction of participatory action
- the progress of the workshops: using the educational process used by Concept for its Citizenship Training and adapting it, we collectively put together a proposal for the running of the workshops with the participants, aiming to jointly create united, collective action.

Workshop 1 25 th April	Workshop 2 9 th May	Workshop 3 23 rd May	Workshop 4 6 th June	Workshop 5 20 th June	Workshop 6 27 th June
<p>Sharing knowledge</p> <p><u>What does it mean to be a citizen?</u></p> <p>Issues of citizenship at the global and local level</p> <p>Photo diary exploring the topics of social initiatives (education, local solidarity, intergenerational solidarity, preservation of the environment, communication, development of cultural heritage...)</p> <p>Inviting young people to reflect on the ideas around social initiatives</p>	<p>What issues push us to act? And what issues are we able to act on?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Forming groups</u> <p>What are the skills we'll need to launch a small initiative?</p> <p><u>One-to-one support of the small groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying what needs to be done • Handing out the tasks... 	<p>Role-playing around the presentation of your initiative, to be able to encourage other speakers.</p> <p><u>Follow-up of the one-to-one support of the small groups</u></p>	<p><u>One-to-one support of the small groups</u></p> <p>In particular: Logistic planning of the initiative, checking that everything is ready, buying materials, checking everybody is present on the day...</p>	<p><u>Carrying out the initiative itself</u> (depending on the project), or finalising and carrying it out another time (at the weekend, for example)</p>	<p>Debriefing and a review of the initiative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What worked well? - What were the challenges? - What did the participants learn from it?



PROGRESS OF THE WORKSHOPS

THE NEED FOR CONSTANT ADAPTATION

After the first workshop, it was clear to the team that the proposals put forward were too difficult to understand for the young people, some of whom had a very low level of French. The team had to adapt them, without losing sight of the aim of jointly conceiving participatory action in order to develop the power to act autonomously. As one volunteer recounts:

“We jointly created this action with strict educational procedures. Then came the first session. What I can say is that we learn as we do. Because even if we try to have a plan and objectives that evolve, things rarely happen exactly as we plan them. But that is precisely what discovery and joint planning are all about. We quickly understood their level of French and as a result a lot of things had to be revisited and adapted for this audience and context. To achieve that, we had a debriefing after each workshop to gauge the feeling in the room, listen to each other and adjust things for future sessions, which was very practical.”

A TRUST THAT IS BUILT STEP BY STEP

As always with this type of approach, it takes a little time to build trust, and for the group to take ownership of the approach. During the second workshop, the young people suggested three initiatives:

- **food distribution for the homeless**
- **an open football tournament to meet new people and play together**
- **a party for families and students attending the social centre, to create connections and speak French.**

“It was perhaps during the 2nd and 3rd session that it clicked for most of the young people; when they took ownership of the initiatives they wanted to carry out. So for us facilitators, it was very rewarding and satisfying, because we wanted to jointly design these initiatives, and at that point, it fell into place. At the beginning, we were a little reserved, we didn't know each other, everyone had their own preconceptions, but we ended up getting to know each other, and getting used to each other and finally they were just asking what it was going to achieve.”

CARRYING OUT THE INITIATIVES

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

CONNECTING WITH ANOTHER COLLECTIVE IN THE AREA

To prepare the food distribution, we had to choose the right target area, a place to cook and make the shopping list with the young people. The social centre put the group in touch with a collective of residents who run volunteer breakfast distribution programmes to homeless people living in the neighbourhood. Thanks to their personal knowledge of the neighbourhood and the local community, the members of the collective were able to help the group so that the young people were able to carry out their initiatives in the right way. This also allowed young people to meet the members of the collective, and to consider participating in their initiatives in the future, on a regular or occasional basis.

“For the food distribution group, the centre told us about a resident collective and so it was perfect. Because I think that my group ultimately did two volunteer activities: our food preparation and distribution initiative but also a morning with the collective to distribute breakfasts to undocumented/homeless people. In a way it was even better than I imagined.” (A volunteer)

On the day of the initiative, the six young people, a volunteer and an employee cooked Tieb (an African dish made from rice and chicken) for fifty people! With the support of a member of the collective and several FDH employees, they then went to distribute hot meals to the homeless, in a public park. This was a very emotional moment for the young people.

“I was super happy with our initiative, because we really worked together as a group and we really did a useful job, so it felt good. The young people too. We had a great group.”



CARRYING OUT THE INITIATIVES

THE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

AN INCLUSIVE MATCH

The idea of organising a football tournament came from the interests and passion of the young people. And as one volunteer recounts, at the beginning “I wondered to what extent a football match was a social initiative, or at least, how it could become one. But in the end, it evolved into one.”

Organising this initiative with a small group of young people ultimately meant it was possible to support them in opening up to others and in integrating into the neighbourhood. At the same time, the tournament made it possible to integrate guests, to meet new people and share an occasion together. During the preparation, volunteers and employees helped the young people find a place for a pitch, find the necessary equipment, and prepare for the event.

The young people were very strong at making suggestions: “one of the young people had this idea of offering a signed ball to their trainer, it was a great idea and it came from them”.

The young people “organised a match with everyone, with their friends, people from Frères des Hommes and people from the Torcy social centre. Above all, I learned that after the match, they played football every day with the local people. This was very satisfying”

On the day of the tournament, leaders from the municipal gymnasium next to the pitch even came to offer the young people the opportunity to participate in a neighbourhood tournament the following week: these little moments, these networking opportunities are important ingredients for collective action and community, social transformation.

Finally, when the ball, signed by all the young people, was handed over to the head of the language centre, it was a very moving moment for everyone.



CARRYING OUT THE INITIATIVES

THE FRENCH FESTIVAL

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH GAMES

As for the two other initiatives, the idea of a party to bring together different people by sharing the French language, came from young people. They were aware of their limited knowledge of the other people attending the social centre: the families and children who came to the toy library on Wednesdays, the students social workers and trainers...

The initiative was called “A celebration of French” in their proposal. The support focused on preparation, organisation, but also communication, and the identification of support to promote conversation with other people: board games. A few weeks before the party, the young people went with the volunteers to the social centre’s games library, where a support worker showed them different board games, so that they could choose the games and explain the rules. to the guests on the big day.

The afternoon celebration went very well, with a good attendance, young people who fulfilled their welcoming role very conscientiously , and a particularly touching moment during the thank you speech to the guests by one of the young people.

“On the big day I was very happy and surprised with how well the party went. Once again we saw young people in a new light, or other young people from different groups, who turned out to do certain things, or others, who we never would have imagined getting so involved. It was beautiful to see their progression during these three events, their ability to connect with new people. I have the impression that in general, from the first session to the completion of the initiative, their relationship has become more fluid. It was beautiful to see them welcome people, give speeches and succeed in the programmes they had planned.” (A volunteer)





FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE IN THE ROLES

Jointly designing collective action with young people in vulnerable situations requires a framework that leaves room for young people, but also great commitment to make things possible.

*“We were still in a position of **support and facilitation**, because we must remember that they are on a training course at the Torcy social centre and therefore when we talk, there is sometimes a “teacher-student” dynamic, which we immediately tried to mitigate by arranging the rooms horizontally and using icebreaker activities. It was really on the day of the initiatives that we really felt the commitment and empowerment of young people.” (A volunteer)*

*“I felt like a **point of support** for young people. It always consisted of **showing them that things are possible**, especially when we had to define the action, we encouraged them to free their imagination. And then it was just about being present to give them a **safety net** of sorts. Because they did things themselves once they had had a little push. It’s a bit like **the metaphor of taking the stabilisers off a bicycle for the first time: at first the person is safe to pedal then you push them to move off**” (Another volunteer)*

This supportive role sometimes presented the team with challenges, particularly when some of the ideas put forward went against inclusion of all. For example, some young people expressed the opinion that girls should not play football: the volunteers and employees led the reflection and discussion with them, in order to help them move towards a more open position that was more in line with the objectives of the initiative.

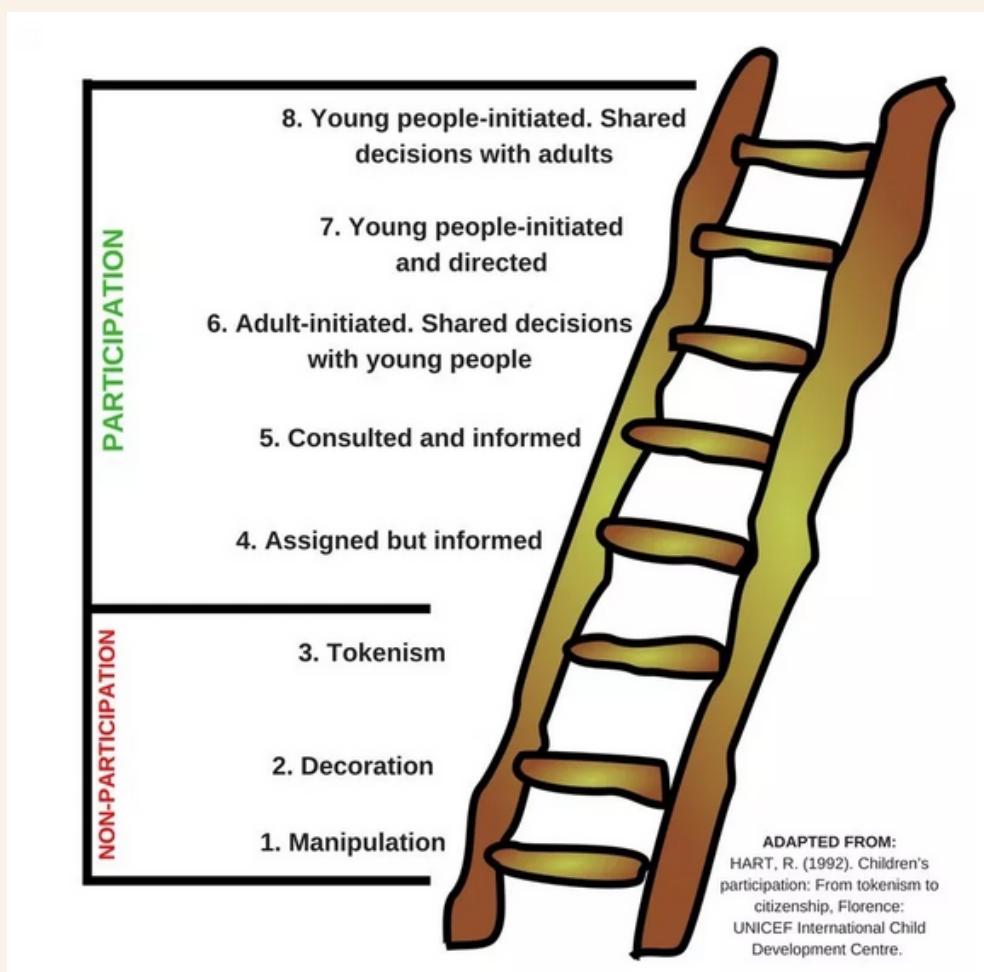
A LAISSER FAIRE APPROACH OR A SUPPORTING ROLE?

During a s workshop in September 2023, we reflected on Hart's scale of participation. This is a youth-specific adaptation of Sherry Arnstein's participation scale.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, “supporting” is considered on this these scale as a higher level of participation than “letting it happen in total autonomy”:

by working together, we give our individual power for the service of the group. In the context of forming an alliance with vulnerable communities, this is an essential element of the process of jointly designing participatory actions.

THE PARTICIPATION LADDER



AN INTENSE EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT... AND SOMETIMES AN UNCOMFORTABLE ONE!

All the people involved in the joint running of the workshops, (volunteers, trainees and employees), noted **moments of discomfort in the process**: a fear that the initiative would not be carried out as planned, that the obstacles would be insurmountable, there would be a lack of direction...

“Up to the last minute, we were always a little afraid that there would be problems or shortcomings, or even that the young people would be disappointed if the initiatives did not work. Because if the action does not work as desired, we are concerned that it will cancel out all the progress made up to that point. So that was mainly what worried me.” (A volunteer involved)

“Yes, there were moments of doubt, particularly in relation to carrying out the initiative, because there were a certain number of obstacles which seemed, for some of them, insurmountable. Like for example finding land. Thanks to the centre and thanks to Justine (employee of Frères des Hommes), this subject was quickly resolved. There was more concern about carrying out the action and its relevance. Afterwards, once it was decided on, we wondered if the guests were going to come.” (Another volunteer)

During the capitalisation workshop, in September 2023, we were able to share these feelings, and we realised that it was not simply a personal issue, but **a central element of the process of letting go in an approach to popular education and the joint running of initiatives. It's not easy not to control everything, while still getting involved!**

Since it is collective action, we do not control the entire process. It is not always easy to agree to trust the collective process. The action is not defined at the start. We are heading “towards the unknown”. We adjust as we go. There is no pre-written procedure. This “departure into the unknown” can be both exciting and distressing... it depends on individuals, and the experience they have of these processes.

The first time one experiences this approach of joint running of participatory action, in moments of doubt, it can be difficult to distinguish between one's feeling of inexperience, of illegitimacy, and what is part of the collective process itself.

Fortunately, the progress of the three initiatives removed any doubts!



AND WHERE IS THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN ALL OF THIS?

The assessment carried out with the young people shows that their feedback and learning was very positive. They say they learned to work in a group, to discuss and think collectively, to overcome their shyness (made worse by their poor French for some). They also mention the alliance that they were able to form with the volunteers and employees of FDH. This alliance worked thanks to the trust that was built little by little, and the positive emotions experienced together. The joint running and implementation of actions gave a majority of young people the desire to act collectively:

“These initiatives inspired me, I want to continue doing things.” “At first it’s difficult but now it’s easy.” “It made me happy, it made me think, I was very happy with what we did, I really liked it.” “It gave me hope.”

Collective action seems difficult at first, but eventually becomes accessible. This is how we can speak about social transformation, as the volunteers explain:

“I was pleased to learn that after the match, they played football every day with the locals. I don’t know how long it will last, but ultimately there was a dimension of social transformation in this initiative.” (A volunteer)

“It is thanks to initiatives like this that we can create changes in society, then move them from a status of “helped” to “helper”. It had a greater impact on them than we could have imagined in terms of how they feel. For me, it was more complex than “just” carrying out an initiative of solidarity . It helped young people feel included in something. And that’s already social change. It’s true that at the time of the initiatives, the young people were much more at ease, you could see that they had gained confidence in themselves.” (Another volunteer)

