



"Citizen engagement and contributory democracy"
Proceedings of the conference of May 26, 2021

This is an English translation of an article written jointly in French by Philippe Kourilsky and Dominique Thierry that was distributed the day after the conference on May 26 2021 and it is available in the original [here](#).

1. Opening by Hervé Serieyx (National Vice-president of France Bénévolat)

In a beautiful article that was requested by Juris Associations on the state of the art of volunteering, our Honorary President of France Bénévolat highlights how the voluntary commitment of young people, seniors and those of middle age is evolving at full speed. This article is still under embargo until its publication, which does not prevent many of us from being aware of it.

This fascinating article highlights how a desire for associativity is multiplying, in increasingly diverse forms - in particular thanks to young people - enabling citizens to take charge, individually and together, of the resolution of social, cultural and educational problems that arise locally.

This complex and evolving mix which, in a given territory, increasingly combines the commitment of volunteers, associations, protean groups, local and territorial authorities, established companies, the SSE, cultural and educational players, and decentralised administrations, all contribute to constantly strengthening the dynamic in the same catchment area, provided that all these players have the will to combine their efforts of solidarity. A real democratic power. What Dominique Thierry and I, in our various books, have called Contributory Democracy.

This is gaining strength in our country at a time when the other three components of democracy - each absolutely necessary - are experiencing a real slump. Representative democracy, sometimes, does not truly represent us any more. Everyone knows that according to the chosen electoral system, we can end up with different majorities; participative democracy which aims at associating the citizens to the preparation or the validation of the laws (via the EESC which is supposed to represent the organised civil society, groups of proposal like the Climate Convention, the famous Referendums of popular initiatives or the Swiss votes), today seems to satisfy nobody; Social democracy, as everyone knows, is particularly weakened in France due to the scattering of unions and the low rate of unionisation of those who work. All this makes the role of contributory democracy increasingly decisive, even if the public authorities are not always aware of it.

At a time when this is becoming stronger in a growing number of areas, it was normal for France Bénévolat to be at the heart of this dynamic, due to its social role being precisely to encourage the creation of links between actors via its intermediation and interface function in order to create more solidarity locally for the benefit of those who need it most.

Thank you to Dominique and France Bénévolat Ile de France for having taken the initiative for this seminar; thank you to all those who contributed to its conception and particularly to Michel Bernard and Philippe Kourilsky; thank you to all those who have answered today as well. Personally, I am convinced that Contributory Democracy and the efforts it will require from all of us will be the New Frontier of France Bénévolat for the coming years. Enjoy the rest of the seminar.

2. Analysis and context by Dominique Thierry, Honorary President of France Bénévolat and Vice-President of RESOLIS

2.1 A France broken into four "pieces" that do not talk to each other!

- The unbridled monetary capitalism of France, which is taking the Planet to the wall
- The territories of France outside the "rule of law "
- "The France of fear": fear of change, fear of being downgraded, fear of Europe, fear of others...and especially of migrants
- The France of solidarity: the 20 million "hummingbird volunteers"
- The first two "pieces" ... are very close, in a situation of "anomie" according to Durkheim's concept; they represent few people (5%?) but they occupy 75% of media. The France of fear has a slight majority: we must reassure it by showing it how lucky we are to be in France.

2.1.1 The consequences

- The French are systematically "down in the dumps" (more pessimistic than citizens of developing countries!)
- The unbearable feeling that their children will be "less well off" than they are (the social lift is broken)
- The French suspicion of everything and everyone (counter-example of Quebecers)
- A democracy in peril.

2.2 The combined challenges ahead

- The socio-economic consequences, lasting and multiform, of the health crisis. Young people will bear the brunt, because the French structural mechanisms of exclusion remain at work
- A cyclical economic crisis of the 1929 type, cushioned by the rediscovery of Keynes "and the money printing press found in the cellars of the Banque de France"
- A structural economic change similar to that of 1975 /1980 and Schumpeter's "creative destruction"
- Demographic change and necessary solidarity between generations.
- And of course, the unavoidable ecological transition, at the heart of "creative destruction": will the new growth be green or not!

There are no historical examples of where we have had to face all this at the same time!

2.3 The 4 democracies

- Representative democracy in peril: record abstention rates, "all rotten, except my mayor",...
- Social democracy is the most often formal, and most often reduced to negotiations at the top, ...with the state that can't help but interfere
- Participatory democracy, which very quickly reaches its limits
- Contributory democracy, which we aim to help emerge and which is key to meeting the challenges before us...but is it in a situation of compensation, subsidiarity or complementarity?

2.4 Contributory democracy, a key emerging concept

- *Origin: the University of Clermont Ferrand, about ten years ago? ▫ Picked up "stealthily" in a Fonda article, 5 years ago ▫ Intuition that it was a key concept (2020 book)*
- *A conviction totally shared with Hervé Serieyx, Michel Bernard, Philippe Kourilsky... And you?*

3. First summary and opening of the exchanges by Michel Bernard, Professor Emeritus at the Sorbonne and Director of the AURORA collection at Harmattan

3.1 Contributive democracy, a path for the 21st century

By producing one's life, one produces oneself and by producing oneself one gives meaning to one's existence and to the work that we offer to those with whom we live, known or unknown, and those who follow us.

What are we talking about?

Citizen engagement and contributory democracy

What a beautiful perspective!

Being a person and being together

The volunteer represents someone who wants good.

A good answer has just been given for contributive democracy. Yes, we should not forget the very beautiful text by Pierre Mendes France and so many other authors who offer us lucid contributions on democracy.

It is also necessary to identify the context of our production and as much as possible of what follows as the time and place in which we live shape our contribution.

3.1.1 What context for all?

The pandemic, in an ever-changing world context, reveals neglected and/or forgotten fragilities in our history as well as deep, creeping, silent transformations that are becoming more apparent, as well as hopes that are also emerging and inviting us to a profound rebirth in everything and for everyone, but which are so fragile that without our action they can quickly wither and disappear. The pandemic reminds us of the primacy of health, defined by the WHO as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

I suggest that you retain SEVEN elements of this context

1. **The cosmos:** Now more than ever there is a new horizon where earthly struggles continue and are accompanied by what hopes? See for example the number of countries that have at least one satellite in space, see the race between the United States and China for Mars.
2. **The West:** After two centuries of undivided hegemony, Western domination of the world has come to an end. The US-China confrontation marks our time. India and Africa follow in demographic terms. Is the West lost? Has it lost itself? asks a professor from Singapore who has deep, diverse international experience. The contribution of the West to the world requires a different approach and an otherwise expected message.
3. **Technology:** The production of power throughout history, technology allows for positive, even very positive contributions, but also ambiguous, even negative, contributions. Without this extra soul of which Bergson speaks, the sorcerer's apprentice is there, and also its tragedy. Technology oscillates between our liberation and the annihilation of humanity.
4. **Politics:** Politics concerns the affairs of the city. It requires: listening, exchange, reflection, debate, even controversy. Then, in a long-term perspective, in the service of the common good, it is authority. Politics is a position, a point of view or even an ideology. All too often, it is locked into power games, emergencies, short-term objectives and partial and biased approaches.
5. **The three levels of reading: Micro, meso, macro.** The individual, the intermediate and the global. For some, the answer lies in a revolution of the global, while for others the "big night" is an illusion that too often ends very badly. So, does all profound change occur in the individual? But also in the intermediary, i.e. also in the group. Only the practice of otherness allows one to build one's life.
6. **Human, humanity and the new humanities:** This still mysterious human, this fragile humanity and these new humanities that are now necessary.
7. **Values for our journey**
 - a. Listening: So rare and yet fundamental. Without them, there can be no communication and even less communion between beings.
 - b. Knowledge: Understanding is not knowledge and even less is it information. It goes beyond information and knowledge.
 - c. Curiosity means care, desire to know.
 - d. Wonder which means astonishment, surprise, admiration.
 - e. Courage: The end of courage has been announced, but it keeps on coming back because life is a courageous fight.
 - f. Solidarity: I am thinking here of the very beautiful book by Jean François Serres in dialogue with his father Michel Serres. The title: "Solitude". The subtitle: "Dialogue on commitment".

The son at the heart of the action courageously confronts his father who is at the heart of analyses and writings. The son says to his father: The form of commitment I defend is not just humanitarian aid. My commitment is in the encounter with another. And he adds: "Accompanying a person means walking alongside, never in front; it is companionship.

- g. Love: A damaged word, a wounded word, an overused word, a mutilated word, but a word that always brings beauty, truth, happiness and meaning.

3.2 Some reminders

- The more humanity advances in its history, the more possibilities there are, but the more we experience uncertainty and fragility.
- A fast, jerky time, but always a time of maturity, a time to achieve. -A world of goods, a world of having is not in itself the answer. A world of being, of quality in everything, of solidarity is to be built - The sons of darkness are more clever than the sons of light. This wise reminder invites us to be lucid at all times.
- If democracy is the least worst solution, it requires a contributory democracy, which is a constructive democracy of the self, the other, others and the world. -Any commitment is also that of an integral ecology, distrusting the diversity of ecologies.
- The renaissance is that of each person in connection with others. This is very demanding. And the institute is inevitably subject to drifts, diversions and decompositions.

3.3 Benchmarks for the 21st century

SEVEN benchmarks at least.

1. Man is action or he is nothing, says Paul Valery; and he adds: "He is worth exactly what he is capable of in terms of action. The deepest spirit, the most intense feeling has no value except in the act or by the act that responds to them and experiences them.
2. Another world awaits us. Yes, another world is possible, but we lack imagination, courage and audacity.
3. Think and act differently. In my opinion, this is a major challenge for the 21st century. An immense collegial project lasting several years. Thinking means imagining, inventing and not imitating or copying. To think and act differently. Many authors have sketched out the path:

Examples

- a. Henri Laborit, an author who should never be forgotten. Here, I only remember this quotation and this comment:
- b. "As long as men have not become aware of their biological determinism and believe in their freedom, there is little chance that this will change. For this to change, each man must first become aware of his animality, of what links him to life as a whole, to other animal species. Perhaps then he will be able to overcome his biological conditioning."

- c. He asks us not to confuse the technical man with the imagining man. Then he specifies what creative imagination is for him.
- d. Edgar Morin. All his work, especially on complexity - Abraham Moles. All his work that we have so badly forgotten!
- e. Krismarnurti and all his work.
- f. François Jullien, who is currently producing his work and is one of the most translated contemporary French thinkers in the world.

In this perspective, how can we forget the question of fake news and the media? Without discernment, without critical thinking, how can we survive?

4. Contribution/retribution. There is no contribution without retribution. And in this field, the major reward is recognition
5. "Inter" including interdependence and intergenerational. The pandemic reminds us of our interdependence and of all the interns, including the intergenerational.
6. The political. I insist again. This return to politics to escape the impasses of politics.
7. Education. So many voices in the twentieth century have highlighted the decisive role of education! For example, Georges Friedmann, who lived in my village and who ends his beautiful book Power and Wisdom with this comment: "The success or failure of education commands the future of man. "

But teaching is not education. Certainly, it is coloured by a certain educational spirit. Which can vary greatly. The diploma is still a necessary condition, but increasingly insufficient. A professor at Sciences Po in Paris clearly states: "The more graduates there are, the more idiots there are." Is that too blunt an expression? I'll let you decide.

This confusion between teaching and education is frightening. In this field, as in many others, the question of language is decisive.

Moreover, the New Educational Spirit concerns the whole person, in all and throughout his life.

Everything great that has been done in the world

- was done in the name of exaggerated hopes,
- by minorities,
- by minorities, -with time,
- with courage, imagination and tenacity.

In order to extend this meeting, it is advisable not to forget our entire territory and to continue this type of meeting at a given rhythm, concerned with producing and linking the present with the horizon of the living.

For a collective construction, let us never forget the methodology. The word method means a way to go far. It allows us to move forward better, to better deal with complexity and uncertainty.

We are invited to a profound renaissance. To do this, let us set out to go far. Let us avoid being prisoners of the scum of the earth in order to face the open sea.

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4. Contribution by Philippe Kourilsky, President of RESOLIS and Professor Emeritus at the Collège de France

4.1 An important but emerging concept ... that still needs to be elaborated on

- "Contributory democracy" does not only concern volunteers and actors in the associative world.
→ Typology of the **actors** most directly concerned
- The term is not very explicit on the dimension of **sharing**
→ Sharing of national and global public goods and ills. > "**A democracy of contribution and sharing**".
→ The dimension of **efficiency** should be added.

4.2 The Effectiveness of Democracy: a critical and too often underestimated variable

"Democracy does not consist of episodically putting a ballot in a ballot box, delegating powers to one or more elected officials, and then losing interest, abstaining, or keeping silent for five years. It is the continuous action of the citizen, not only in the affairs of the State, but also in those of the region, the commune, the cooperative, the association, the profession. [...] Democracy is only efficient when it exists everywhere at all times." Pierre Mendès-France (1962)

4.3 Towards social ecosystems of solidarity

- The sum of individual actions (in the sense of isolated citizens or associations taken individually) does not make a "system". At the local level, isolated actions often have serious problems of effectiveness, valorisation and sustainability.

→ **Co-construct local solidarity ecosystems with all relevant actors for a given theme of action... They are more robust, more sustainable, more effective, more visible and better valued.**

- They are systems of action, sustainable and largely self-regulated, on specific territories ("life basins"), where all the relevant actors, or at least a good number of them (deconcentrated State, Collectivities, Territories, educational establishments, associations, companies...and citizens) have the will to work together in a specific field.
- Citizens are not only invited to give their opinion on what they want (participatory democracy), **but also to become concretely involved in projects (within the framework of contributive democracy).**

4.4 A method is needed

This co-construction requires a rigorous (scientific type) method. It exists:

→ **It is the RESOLIS method, which has been validated by eight years of experimentation and practice in several different areas.**

→ **The notion of a local solidarity ecosystem is today at the heart of the mission of RESOLIS (www.resolis.org) and now of ADELIS (www.adelis.org), in cooperation with France-bénévolat Ile de France.**

4.5 Local does not mean "isolated", but: bottom-up!

- Just as solitary local initiatives need to be organised within local ecosystems, **so local ecosystems also need to form a system** and organise themselves into networks at a supra-local level that can eventually reach the national level.
- **This approach is also enshrined in the RESOLIS method** and in its variations by RESOLIS and ADELIS, for a very simple reason:
 - Because of the robustness and homogeneity of the method, local ecosystems are de facto **INTEROPERABLES**: they can exchange and cooperate. It is therefore very easy to network them, and RESOLIS has already proven this.
 - For the same reason, the "**INDUSTRIALISATION**" of the most successful and useful experiences is facilitated from the outset.

4.6 Conclusions

→ *There is an urgent need to implement contributory democracy. Cf. Hervé Serieyx and André-Yves Portnoff "Alarm, citizens! Sinon aux larmes" (2019)*

→ *The approach implemented by RESOLIS, ADELIS and FRANCE BÉNÉVOLAT- IdF is A POWERFUL LEVER FOR THE PROMOTION OF CONTRIBUTORY DEMOCRACY.*



5. Individual commitment: introduction by Pierre Goupillon (Passerelle de Mémoire)

In the process of making these 10 Portraits, I had the chance to meet some wonderful people with such different profiles. Young students, French and foreigners, immigrants with or without higher education, executives, social actors, retired people and despite their differences, I realised that they all had one thing in common: Joy!

During the interviews, they all told me that their commitment to a more contributive democracy had first made them happy. Happy to be useful, to be able to help at their level to build a more generous, more human world. With Covid 19, it seemed so obvious to them that reaching out to others is of benefit to the public, because it means providing direct solutions for better living together.

So when I saw their commitments, volunteering took on another dimension in my eyes. It was no longer a hobby for a retiree who wants to stay active, it was a real lifestyle, something that makes you greater, happier.

It also strengthened me in my mission with Passerelle de Mémoire, when Nathalie talks to me about her actions with young people, when Rose talks to me about sharing her love in spite of what she has lived through, when the young student commits herself with her school to help Syrians... not to mention Nashrula who shatters all the prejudices about the world of Afghans in France... Incredible!

All of them gave me the proof that we could act and that this utopia of changing our society a little bit was perhaps feasible.

These portraits can be found in the book "Ces bénévoles constructeurs de démocratie contributive" (Dir. Dominique Thierry L'Harmattan 2020).

You can watch the videos on YouTube:

- Production Passerelle de Mémoire:
 - Rose, Thomas, Nasrullah, Sandrine, Monique and Albane, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1z7yeSj1RPkgC13gCT6p0g>
 - Pierre-Louis, https://youtu.be/9Kv_RGxn6G0
 - Nathalie, https://youtu.be/ZGGDN9MH_qc
 - Christine, <https://youtu.be/JOnACAOaZb8>
- Production Les Fripons
 - Guillaume <https://youtu.be/w7PW6SOYdgo>

6. Collective projects: introduction by Sylvie Karsenty (France Bénévolat Ile de France)

6.1 Belles Histoires - Education and solidarity in collective projects (S. Karsenty L'Harmattan 2020)

I am going to tell you a "Beautiful Story", it is that of the Beautiful Stories. This adventure began in 2015. Hervé and Dominique felt the need to record and capitalise on beautiful associative experiences. This avoided telling the same story over and over again, and prevented certain actions from being forgotten as time went by. Many of these actions are reproducible and can give the desire to be inspired by a project to launch another. This has also sometimes helped to convince funders.

My first BH was the Mur mur(e)s project, run by Barbara Boehm, head of Decumanos, with young drop-outs from a class relais at the Turquetil high school in Paris. Each of them was accompanied by a senior citizen during walks to discover urban art. The young people took photos, a street artist led workshops and Pierre-Louis Rosenfeld led a haiku workshop. I attended the opening of their exhibition and was blown away by the quality of their drawings, photos and poems. These teenagers left school in 4th or 3rd grade and are experiencing great difficulties at school, with their families and in society. It was a great achievement to get

them to come at fixed times and to produce such beautiful works for them who had always been stigmatised. One of them had not left her home for six months, another was under house arrest. One of the keys to success were these tandems, this benevolent attention given by a pensioner to a young person in difficulty. This allowed me to discover the seniors involved and to meet Barbara and Pierre Louis, whom I met again a few years later for a week of coaching young people in the youth guarantee scheme at the Mission Locale de Paris.

This was also a totally innovative scheme and I was able to attend two half-days. There were always young-senior tandems, with the participation of a professional photographer and an exceptional temp agency director who made me and the seniors change our view of temping.

At the beginning of the year, a book was published with these BH. There are 26 of them as well as 6 portraits of migrants who volunteered (some of them filmed by Pierre). The stories are classified by themes:

- young people in ML or schools
- intergenerational solidarity
- towards more inclusive retirement homes
- the ecological transition
- inclusion of people with disabilities, migrants, people in prison
- innovation during the health crisis.

If we have time, I will tell you a story that illustrates the role of FB as a whole and the strength of the collective.

The story takes place in Savoie, on the occasion of a world day for cleaning up our planet which takes place every year. Thanks to FB Savoie and the involvement of one of its members, this operation took on great proportions in this area, around Lake Aiguebelette, mobilising schoolchildren, several associations, the community of communes and companies that provided gloves and lent kayaks. The schoolchildren were so enthusiastic that they organised a second operation to collect waste around their school and in the town centre. The community of communes made its waste department available. A federation of associations for the protection of the lake, which has been organising a clean-up of the lake for 30 years, brought forward its date to join the operation. As did the diving club, which fished some waste out of the water. A total of 750 kg of waste and a number of kilos of cigarette butts were collected and schoolchildren were made aware of the issue in a sustainable way.

These BH events have allowed me to discover exceptional people, places I never knew existed (such as the Hérold garden in the 19th arrondissement and the farm in the Parc de Saint-Cloud), subjects (such as intergenerational residences), and magnificent actions that boost morale and restore confidence in humanity. What happiness!

7. Contributions/Exchanges

- *Dominique Despiney (RESOLIS Board member)*
 - Perhaps it would be interesting to develop the undermining role of certain media that favour sensationalism to the detriment of positive actions (no mention of trains arriving on time...)?
 - Perhaps it would be relevant to mention the often harmful role of social networks in the rapid circulation of often false and mostly negative information that maintains the ambient pessimism?
 - Education also plays a determining role in the analytical "capacities" of our fellow citizens. A curriculum for all that includes an introduction to science, economics and the basics of philosophy (to learn to think) would enable our fellow citizens to better understand the world

- around them and to participate more effectively in contributory democracy.
- In the LSEs (local solidarity ecosystems), the actors are consulted within the framework of participatory democracy. What particularities would this consultation have in relation to the RIC (Referendum of Citizen Initiative) that "our yellow waistcoats" demanded (we don't hear them anymore)?
- Sylvie Florio, Association *L'Esprit du Vent (Spirit of the Wind)*
 - Can we not fear, especially for a small association, that these ecosystems are not too heavy? Shouldn't we start with small projects?

7.1 Discussion/exchanges

This is an essential point, which must be taken into account:

- An ecosystem is not necessarily a big project with many people; it can start with a small project with a small number of actors involved,
- It is the learning of a collective functioning without (too many) power problems,
- It is a long process (for example, the ecosystems supported by the RESOLIS "Responsible and Sustainable Food" cluster in the Natural Parks have taken 8 years to complete (see www.resolis.org),
- It is efficient for the "life basin", but it must be an added value for each member of the collective, otherwise it will go away.
- In addition to the examples of DRA, there are also examples of ELSI[®] (Local Ecosystems of Intergenerational Solidarity) with 5 "living areas" under construction (see <https://youtu.be/psOSpFmpEUw>)
- A more inclusive retirement home" (see presentation of the programme on www.adelis.org): this is the desire to create a local ecosystem around the retirement home
- The same principles can be found in other programmes supported by RESOLIS on problems that cannot be solved at national level, such as support for the families of autistic people, prevention of obesity in children, support for Alzheimer's patients and their family carers.



France Bénévolat was founded in 2003 by merging the activities of two older entities, Centre National du Volontariat and Planète Solidarité. Today, nearly all major national non-profit networks are partners of France Bénévolat. France Bénévolat is the most important network in France welcoming and orienting potential volunteers. Their main mission is the promotion of volunteering. They promote involvement in order to develop an active citizenship. They aim, volunteering is central in building a cohesive and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship and develop social link, solidarity and fight against all forms of exclusion.



The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), established in 1992, is the European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion of, and support to, volunteers and volunteering in Europe at European, national or regional level. CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its member organisations to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe. CEV's vision is a Europe in which volunteers are central in building a cohesive, sustainable and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship. CEV is a European network of organizations dedicated to the promotion of and support to volunteers and volunteering. Our mission is to provide collaborative leadership to create an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe.