



Fostering  
Social  
Justice



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## Tools and Methods

Context: Visit at the  
French Federation

France 2021



IFS FOSTERING SOCIAL JUSTICE

# Study week in Paris – October 2021

## **Main topic: Active citizenship!**

Support for the network and social centers on empowerment, training, and tools, at the national level and in the regions.

## **About the FCSF**

The Federation of social and sociocultural centers of France (FCSF), is a network coordinating 1400 social and socio-cultural centers and 57 departmental and/or regional federations affiliated to it. Its missions are:

- ensure communication with the public authorities, partners, local officials, the general public, on the specificity of the participatory project of social centers, as well as on the richness and diversity of its network.
- support the development of existing federations and centers and to assist in the creation of new social centers and new federations.
- train and qualify network actors, employees, and volunteers, and negotiate with the professional branch of social and family actors.
- develop political strategies and prospective work concerning the future of social and socio-cultural centers in France. The FCSF employs 25 people.

Social centers in France, centers of initiatives led by residents and supported by professionals, are in urban and rural areas and have more than 37,000 employees and 100,000 volunteers. Nearly 2 million people go to social centers every year.

These are local structures approved by the family allowance funds, with a family and intergenerational vocation, participating in the animation of the social life of the territory.

Social centers carry out many adult training activities of a diverse nature, for example access to rights, fight against illiteracy, upgrading to school level for adults looking for work, workshops health, environment, sewing, cooking ...

**ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES**  
*Individual dimension*

Social center offers residents services and activities adapted to the needs they have expressed, in cooperation with local communities, for example:

- Activities for the whole family
- Leisure and cultural activities
- Educational support
- Digital, cooking, language workshops
- Social and legal permanences
- Parenting support

**PROJECTS SUPPORT**  
*Collective dimension*

Social center supports residents' collective projects to meet their desires and needs, for example:

- Support trips and holidays departure
- Support associative life : help to create an association, technical support...
- Support in creating and leading parents, tenants, elderly groups...
- Organization of neighborhood parties, community garden...

**CITIZENSHIP SUPPORT**  
*General interest dimension*

Social center strengthens residents' empowerment on societal issues concerning their neighborhoods, by promoting innovative answers, for example :

- Organization of debates on general interest issues : housing, health, transports...
- Support residents' initiatives to answer the issues they are facing : sharing driving rides, exchange of services...
- Support residents' expression in public sphere
- Co-training and peer knowledge
- Involvement of residents' in decision-making spaces in social centers

## 3 dimensions of social center

Social centers are part of popular education movement and stand for 3 values : **human dignity, solidarity and democracy**



Several national projects are carried out by the FCSF, including the training of employees and volunteers, and international cooperation.

**Website:** [www.centres-sociaux.fr](http://www.centres-sociaux.fr)

**Presentation video on YouTube** <https://youtu.be/BILQa4dDc7Y>



**Fédération des Centres sociaux  
et Socioculturels de France**  
FCSF – Mars 2021





# The sources of inspiration contributing to the way of thinking about empowerment in our federation

## Paolo Freire (1921 – 1997) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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In this work, published in 1968 and translated into French in 1974, Paolo Freire, Brazilian Christian philosopher and educator explains that the illiterate, who are also the oppressed in the social structure, have internalized their oppression.

Their emancipation therefore requires educational work to raise awareness.

« The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, fear freedom. »

Freire's work significantly inspired a popular education movement in South America in the 1960s and 1970s. As the result of radical social criticism often linked to progressive Catholic circles, this movement proposes a process of social transformation based on a practice known as conscientization. Practice by which the oppressed collectively analyze their situation, become aware of the oppression they suffer from and understand the need to organize

themselves to change the structure of society.

Paolo Freire himself applied these methods:

- Particularly in Brazil with agricultural workers,
- Or in Chile where, exiled after being imprisoned by the military dictatorship, we worked with the Christian Democratic Movement for Agrarian reform.

« No one educates others, no one educates himself alone, men educate themselves together through the world. »

His methods then had an important echo within the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) at the United Nations. He taught at Harvard in 1969 where his approach echoed the concerns of social and ethnic minorities as well as feminist movements.

## Saul ALINSKY (1909 – 1972) and *Community Organizing*

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Activist trained in sociology at the University of Chicago, Saul Alinsky is considered the father of Community Organizing. In 1971 he published *Rules for Radicals*. Based on his own experience, Alinsky offers a methodological guide to act. Alinsky asks the question of social justice: he clearly sits on the side of the have nots against economic, political and establishment power. He defines himself as "radical". For him, the question of power is central, the program coming after.

« If people don't think they have the power to solve their problems, they won't even think about how to solve them. »

The Community Organizing method proposed by Alinsky is the result of an elaborate and pragmatic strategy, the foundations of which are the following 3 key ideas:

- The interest (whether that of individuals, a group, an organization), which is for him the primary motivation on which the facilitator must rely on.
- The power to be acquired by the organization to be entitled to the chapter and modify the power structure.
- Conflict as a technique for the social integration of the contending group and the disintegration of the functions of the contested power to lead it to negotiation and compromise.

Any conflict must lead to negotiation. Alinsky applied a very realistic conflict tactic. The mythology of the conflict was: the enemy, the picket line, confrontation, negotiation, victory, celebration.

Before organizing a picket, the facilitators had to know what they were asking for; the text of the negotiation had to be well measured: to win, and therefore to be able to celebrate a victory, it was necessary to demand only the possible.

You need to know how to negotiate simply and never make someone really lose face when expected to negotiate with you.

## **Yann LE BOSSE and *Empowerment development***

Yann Le Bossé is a professor in the Department of Educational Foundations and Practices at Laval University in Quebec City. As part of the field of community psychology, Yann le Bossé thought up a theoretical translation of the concept of empowerment that was developing in the Anglo-Saxon world. He therefore practiced and developed the notion of the "Development of the Power to Act" which he defines in this way: it refers to the concrete capacity of people (individually or collectively) to exercise greater control over what is important for them, their loved ones, or the community with which they identify.

« You go to the street, here is your sector, you know the people, you discover with them a problem for which they can mobilize, and which can be the opportunity for them to organize themselves, you bring them together, you necessarily decide something to the end of the meeting and, preferably, a step against someone. »

The proposal is quite radical in the sense that it proposes a modification which touches the very root of the mission of social practices. To the question "how do we help?" », the answer is neither to relieve suffering as in charitable approaches, nor to heal suffering as in professional approaches based on the medical model nor to denounce the causes of suffering such as militant approaches, but rather to free oneself from suffering. In "freeing oneself" there is the idea of "crossing an obstacle".

Most often, this barrier includes both social and personal dimensions. It is therefore no longer a question of apprehending the difficulties experienced by people as solely psychological problems or learning failures, nor is it a question of considering all the difficulties experienced by people as the sole result of social injustice. The adoption of the purpose of empowerment rather comes down to focusing on overcoming the obstacle, whatever its origin and nature. It is therefore a very pragmatic approach which, without eluding the importance of reflection on the origins of social problems, focuses primarily on the optimal way to eradicate them.

From this perspective, the general is expressed in the particular and local action makes it possible, as the ecological adage suggests, to act globally.

« It is about being able to act where the context and the situation seem to give the impression that nothing was possible anymore. »

### **Context**

**Lyon's Congress in 2013 and FCSF's project, « La Fabrique des Possibles (The factory of possibilities) » adopted in 2014 during our General Assembly**

### **Empowerment, a dynamic inscribed in the history of social centers**

The history of social centers tells us about times when our network chose to put residents' capacity for action and decision-making at the heart of its project.

Thus, the foundation of the “social houses” at the beginning of the 20th century, precursors of social centers, is in opposition to paternalistic practices towards the “poor”, founded on compassion and charity. On the contrary, it is about recognizing the dignity and freedom of people, capable of transforming their living conditions, in alliance with others.

In the 1960s, after a more particular emphasis on proposals for activities and services, and when several congresses (3 organized between 1967 and 1972!), Social centers were redefined as catalysts for living forces of their neighborhood.

At the Marseilles congress in 1972, Henri Théry, president of the FCSF, clearly defined the new position: “It is not only a question of curing or preventing ailments. We must promote a more and a better society, by allowing individuals and groups to promote themselves, to take responsibility as much as possible, to integrate actively into society, therefore, to conquer or defend their identity, to take responsibility.”

Through the preparation process for the 8th Congress of Social Centers in Lyon in June 2013 and the event itself (the largest gathering in our history with 3,300 people and the presence of peers from the IFS international network), FCSF has provided momentum for the years to come. It is a question of changing the ways of doing things to go back to basics: to strengthen inhabitant’s empowerment!

Thus, in the preamble of the FCSF 2014-2022 project, entitled “La Fabrique des Possibles”, Claudie Miller, the president, states:

« What we are aiming for is the implementation of a strategy based on a clear vision of the direction in which we are going: more social justice, more empowerment for the inhabitants, the desire of active citizenship »

Thus, the priority of the federal project is to strengthen inhabitants’ empowerment, considering that the best way to promote the emergence of initiatives aimed at responding to societal, democratic, and ecological challenges and of contributing to a future society marked by social justice consists in unleashing the capacities of imagination and action of civil society. In addition, the existence of relations of domination and social inequalities is affirmed, against which we wish to contribute to fight by this means.

The reinforcement of inhabitants’ empowerment will take concrete form, among other things, in the promotion of awareness-raising dynamics and the support of self-organization dynamics.