

Déborah BOÏCO, “Urbanization and postal equipment. The installation and adaptation of post offices in the Paris suburbs from 1960 to the early 1990s: the case of Seine-Saint-Denis” (“Urbanisation et équipement postal. Implantation et adaptation des bureaux de poste en banlieue parisienne, des années 1960 au début des années 1990. Le cas de la Seine-Saint-Denis”), master’s thesis in contemporary history directed by Pascal Griset, Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2006, 176 p.

The unique status of the French Post Office was a distinguishing feature in the second half of the 20th century: moving away from administrative governance, it began to take a more business-like outlook toward its operations. This study analyzes the evolution of the role of the post office in a changing field, at a time when operative goals and methods were on the upswing in an acute process of redefinition. In looking at a period when the postal service and its “public face” – the post office – was perceived as having fallen into disuse, it is interesting to see to what extent considerations regarding the opening of post offices in suburban areas affected changes in the general evolution of post offices. “Far from being a simple extension of the home like the local bar, neighborhood restaurant or supermarket,”¹ the post office is an integral part of its social environment.

Research in national archives, the departmental archives of Seine Saint-Denis, municipal archives (especially those of Saint-Denis), as well as official correspondence from the postal administration, prefectural or municipal authorities, together with city council reports, project reports, surveys, and audits all shed light on the role and the importance of the post office for city planning in outlying, densely urbanized areas in the period from the 1960s to the time when post offices were no longer administratively controlled but became the responsibility of a public institution in 1991.

Through the example of the department of Seine Saint-Denis, which was developed at the same time as the first “grands ensembles” or large housing developments cropped up in the 1960s, we follow the actions of the post office and its innovations in the area of opening new offices as well as its interactions with different agents of city planning. Our research was indirectly guided by the politics of city planning and the installation of collective equipment before focusing on those neighborhoods where problems coalesced.

At the beginning of the 1980s a new strategy that led to a closer alliance of public service and business politics appeared. At that time the postal network was modernized in an effort to accommodate changes in the spectrum of services offered. This was done in order to keep abreast of new technologies as well as address competition from banks in the financial services market.

In 1983 a contemporaneous neighborhood program of social development was launched that directly affected Seine Saint-Denis. La Poste began taking a series of original steps toward integrating itself into this new partnership created by urban politics.

Although it was harried by business concerns in the heart of so-called difficult neighborhoods, post offices at the end of 20th century found themselves more than ever at the epicenter of the politics of social interactions.

¹ “Réflexions pour 1985”, in *La Documentation française*, Paris, 1964, p. 75.