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SEPARATING TOGETHER: UNDERSTANDING INSURGENT RECYCLING IN BORDEAUX, JOHANNESBURG

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Abstract

As a result of state-mandated recycling efforts in Johannesburg, reclaimers who collect reusable and recyclable materials are increasingly dispossessed of their livelihoods, perpetuating their vulnerability, informality and undermining their access to self-employment. Therefore it has become imperative to seek new solutions to integration that challenge the city's neoliberal approach to recycling that is ignoring the contributions of those already active, albeit informally, in this sector.

The African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) is working with members of the Bordeaux community and residents association (BSRA) to create their own collaborative recycling system, providing an alternative to the mechanisms of the state and private sector. Based on six months of mixed methods research in Bordeaux, using observations, interviews and a survey, this report argues that the reclaimer-resident recycling collaboration be considered "insurgent recycling" since it subverts accepted formal mechanisms of state service provision, and challenges predominant neoliberal ideas of class, belonging and informality in the suburbs. It further establishes that a collaborative approach to recycling transforms relationships between residents and reclaimers by 1.) facilitating residents' engagement with reclaimers, 2.) legitimizing reclaimers' work in Bordeaux, 3.) improving residents' perceptions and acceptance of reclaimers active in the collaboration. Together a win-win system is created with residents having some shared control over reclaimers' work in their area, and reclaimers having better access to more materials. Therefore this report recommends grassroots collaborative insurgent recycling systems as an alternative model for integration to Pikitup's exclusionary S@S system.