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Conference Report

The 2019 Conference of the French and British Planning Study Group, The Governance of Metropolises and City Regions – territorial reforms, spatial imaginaries and new forms of cooperation, Tours Polytechnic, Tours, 11-12 April 2019

Introduction

The issues of metropolitan governance is currently at the centre of political and research priorities in many countries. Reflecting this context, the theme of the 2019 conference of the French and British Planning Studies Group held in Tours was the Governance of Metropolises and City Regions – territorial reforms, spatial imaginaries and new forms of cooperation. The conference was organised by the research centre Cities, Territories, Environment and Societies (University of Tours-Centre National de la recherche scientifique) with support from the French government (Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture), Tours Metropole Val de Loire, the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) and Association pour la Promotion de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche en Aménagement et Urbanisme (APERAU). The main aim of the conference was to facilitate an interdisciplinary comparative debate on the institutional and spatial dynamics of metropolitan areas and their governance in the United Kingdom and France. Contributions bringing insights from other European and non-European countries were also welcomed and featured in the programme. Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter, presentations were given by representatives from a wide-range of disciplines including planning, geography, history, law, political science, economics and sociology. The papers presented took a number of forms including historical overviews of institutional reforms, conceptual frameworks, and case studies which addressed specific countries or metropolitan areas, or provided comparative analyses. This conference report provides an overview of the key themes of the conference and its proceedings.

An evolving context for metropolitan and city regional governance

In recent decades, the major western agglomerations have experienced both economic and demographic growth and a sharp increase in mobility, increased sealing of the soil, a rise in socio-spatial inequalities and the emergence of conflicts related to the location of major infrastructure (Scott, 2001; Kunzmann, 2004; Kirat and Torre, 2008; Herrschell, 2014). Such trends and spatial development issues have often be cited in justifying local government reform in the heart of large urban areas. Over the past decade, several European countries have undergone institutional restructuring affecting different levels of government (Nunes Silva and Buček, 2017; Zimmermann and Getimis, 2017). These "territorial reforms" have modified the distribution of allocated powers and / or the geographical area of intervention of local authorities. Sometimes they create additional levels of action, drawing new spatialities for local public policies (Kantor and Savitch, 2010; Halleux and

Breuer, 2016). Ongoing institutional developments seem to be following the decentralization movement that was particularly a feature of the period from the 1970s to the 1990s (Wollmann, 2012; Béhar, 2015). The reorganization of territorial powers is sometimes challenged by local authorities who, based on their established electoral legitimacy argue for the maintenance of existing territorial governance networks. In contrast, national legislative and executive levels often claim that their goal in pursuing metropolitan reforms is simply to simplify multi-layered and complex systems of territorial administration. The merger of provinces in Sweden or of regions in France illustrate this logic in action. Elsewhere, the aim is to give densely urbanized areas a more integrative level of action, even if it means adding a level to the hierarchy of local governments. The creation of Combined Authorities in England and *métropoles* in France are two recent examples (Demazière, 2017). And these two methods can also be combined: in Italy, *citta metropolitane* align with the perimeters of the provinces they replace whilst being equipped with new competences (De Luca and Moccia, 2017). Therefore, according to different times and countries, metropolitan institutions can adopt very different governance modes, ranging from being authoritarian creations of the State - like the *communautés urbaines* in France in the 1960s - to more voluntary approaches in which actors combine on a territory, through forms negotiated between state and local authorities (Tomàs, 2017). But the overall question of whether the establishment of a metropolitan decision level can really increase the capacity of certain players in large cities to deal with issues that affect their territories remains rather open?

Informed by this context, the conference explored a number of overarching themes:

- Firstly, are drivers such as the new public management and the search for territorial competitiveness the main motivations for metropolitan reforms? Or should we recognize other influences, such as the search for a better alignment of institutions on functional spaces, or the promotion of the "equality of territories"?
- Secondly, what, if anything, is really new in the recent forms of coordination between municipalities within city regions, especially in terms of resources and capacity to deal with the problems of metropolitan areas (Tomàs, 2017)?
- Thirdly, metropolitan governance capacity building processes do not occur in a territorial vacuum (Baraize and Négrier, 2001; Louargant and Le Bras, 2015; Sykes and Nurse, 2017) but need to find their place within existing hierarchies of multi-level spatial governance. There are therefore questions relating to relationships, for example, of local governments to metropolitan areas. And it should not be forgotten that metropolitan policies can also simply result from coordination between existing levels of local government, whether they have the same competences (municipalities, for example), or not (region, province, county etc.). This raises the question of whether we can distinguish different models of metropolitan governance according to the types of institutional arrangements that produced them?

These questions were explored over the two days of the conference.

Day One

The *first session* set an initial context by exploring the institutionalisation of metropolitan governments and the movements of ideas for, or against, the creation of a level of metropolitan government in different countries. Questions included how does metropolitan reform affect, if at all, national political debates; and whether new scales of territorial governance have emerged from 'top down' decentralisation or more bottom-up local initiatives. The paper by Christophe Demazière examined the institution of a new scale of metropolitan government in England, France and Italy, drawing attention to the enduring context-specificity of the measures adopted in each country. These included the effects of peri-urbanisation and the later impacts of 'austerity' on local governments in France with cuts to local budgets from 2015 as compared to England where these began earlier. Gilles Crague explored the mixed logics driving metropolitan reform in France, with rationales drawing on metropole as driver of both growth and social solidarity. John Sturzaker and Alex Nurse considered the rescaling of urban governance and the balance between localism and more strategic thinking in institutional change in England, pointing to various competing initiatives and logics at local, city/sub-regional, and interregional scales (e.g. the 'Northern Powerhouse'). Meanwhile Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin compared the USA where there has been no federal initiative promoting city regions with France. Referring to the cases of Minneapolis and St. Paul and Lyon, she discussed the articulation of metropolitan areas with their adjacent territories, raising for the first time a theme which was to return later in the conference relating to the 'solidarities', or 'oppositions', that could arise between metropolitan and non-metropolitan territories.

The *second session* presented more specific cases of the governance and planning of metropolitan areas and city regions. The presentation from Nadia Caruso considered metropolitan reform and new forms of cooperation in Italy. The influence of EU Cohesion Policy and the EU's 2001 White Paper on Governance were cited as factors helping the emergence of new geographies of governance, as well as the developing EU Urban Agenda in the 2010s. By 2014 10 *città metropolitane* had been founded based on the boundaries of existing provinces, though only seven have made a strategic plan. Work had been undertaken to map spatial links within these areas, but weakness in these institutions remained in terms of considering the 'urban dimension' beyond the central city and core and 'the rest' relationships. The presentation from Patricia Feiertag provided a view from Germany on the French metropolitan reforms including their 'preshistory' with the emergence of *communautés urbaines* from the 1960s onwards. Another historical perspective was provided by Pierre Allorant who used archival material to present a long view on plans for the development and governance of the present territory of Orléans-Métropole including those for a 'garden metropolis' proposed in the early 1970s. The issue of how metropolitan reforms may set out to address inequalities, but this objective may fall somewhat by the wayside, was then explored by Clément Lescloupé with reference to the case of the Métropole du Grand Paris. This was followed by a presentation from Gilles Novarina and Benedetta Giudice on the *città metropolitana* in Italy which looked at institutionalisation versus cooperation and the involvement of civil society in these bodies. A southern focus was maintained with the following presentation from Mathilde Vignau and Boris Grésillon which looked at the 'impossible governance' of the Aix-Marseille metropolitan region, asking if the territorial reality of the area was nuanced by culture?

The *third session* was the first of two which explicitly considered an issue which was to become one of the key themes of the conference – the wider territorial dimensions of the city regional agenda

including the integration of metropolitan areas and peripheries. This related to issues such as the diversity of institutional arrangements emerging to govern metropolitan/city regional spaces, and if and/or how the new metropolitan institutions manage to build 'interterritoriality' between the spaces composing the same urban region. This session also focussed on another important sub-theme - that of reciprocity, including the question of what kinds of reciprocal benefits or challenges may emerge between metropolitan core and intermediate urban poles (Dembski et al., 2017)? In this session, the question of how to identify and foster interdependencies and 'reciprocities' between the different territories of the Grenoble metropolitan area was addressed by Magali Talandier and Josselin Tallec. The 'tales' and the scales of the creation of a metropolitan institution were then considered by Xavier Desjardins and Jean Debie in relation to the emergence of the Métropole Rouen-Normandie. Finally, the potential for the rejection of metropolitan integration by locally elected politicians from peripheral parts of the metropolitan area was considered by Maxime Agnola's presentation. This proposed analysing the construction of metropolitan political systems by considering their 'frontiers' (i.e. boundary areas), and considered the cases of Rennes and Brest in Brittany.

The first day was rounded-off by a reception at the *hôtel de ville* de Tours where the deputy-mayor Antoine Godbert spoke eloquently about the need for ongoing international cooperation between cities and urban researchers, notably in the face of nativist and insularising processes such as the proposed 'British Exit' (Brexit) of the UK from the European Union.

Day Two

The fourth session focused on how city regions and metropolitan areas can be built through project and sector-led approaches. This recognises that alongside the metropolitan governments which have been explicitly created by legislation to deal with the challenges of very large cities, there are other more, or less, institutionalized forms of cooperation, such as those associated with agencies tasked with managing and delivering specific services (public transport, waste management, etc.) over a large area (Breuer, 2017). Given that mobility is a major element in the creation of the functional geographies of city regions, unsurprisingly a number of the presentations focussed on transport. The presentation from Richard Stephenson and Thomas Buhler provided a comparative review of the urban policy discourses and linguistic differences in French *Plan de déplacements urbains* (PDUs) and UK Local Transport Plans (LTPs). It showed how issues could be framed in subtly different ways and how textual readings could reveal different policy assumptions and priorities. The focus remained on mobility in the next presentation, by Frédérique Hernandez, which examined mobility projects in the Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence and illustrated how different project choices within the territory might be needed to balance everyday mobility needs and wider strategic metropolitan accessibility improvements. Project-led city regional governance – notably making use of large strategic sites with a past or ongoing transport function, was also the subject of the next presentation from Alex Nurse and Olivier Sykes. This considered the cases of Seoul and Liverpool to show how multi-level metropolitan governance approaches could vary based on the 'ownership' of strategic opportunities and different institutional configurations. In some cases arrangements created a potential for competition between scales and political figures – e.g. the central city and its elected mayor and the city region and its elected mayor (Liverpool), but in others strategic oversight and control was more clearly vested in one institution and individual (Seoul). The potential frictions and synergies between specific urban projects and wider metropolitan strategies and goals was also addressed in another comparative paper from Marco Cremaschi and Aurélie Calafate, which considered the situation in

Paris and London. It seemed that there need not be a disruptive tension and that specific experiments urban projects need not 'trespass' on metropolitan strategies if they were 'opportunistically' responded to and stitched into the wider metropolitan agenda.

The *fifth session* returned to the theme of the interrelationships and possible forms of integration between metropolitan areas and peripheries. The paper from Thomas Perrin and Didier Paris addressed metropolitanisation and Europeanisation in north west Europe through a consideration of the interface between metropolitan and cross-(national)-border cooperation in the Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL). This account of the most emblematic of French city regional cases again allowed a distinctive and compelling story to be told of how shifting geographies from the local to the cross-national levels create the conditions, necessity, and opportunities for territorial reconfiguration at the metropolitan scale. Aside from these institutional outworkings of material and symbolic geographical relations, the MEL case seemed a good example of how spatial imaginaries can emerge at different scales, and play a role in setting the political agenda and allocating resources (Davoudi et al., 2018; Jaillet and Vanier, 2015). A spatial imaginaries perspective was adopted by Phil O'Brien in his comparison of the MEL area with the Merseybelt in North West England, which considered if and how spatial imaginaries might order city regional development through embedding certain planning images in local planning cultures. The question of which metropolitan territory and which level of territorial influence was appropriate to associate with a given central city was explored by Lionel Prigent, with reference to Brest in Brittany. His presentation considered the historical context of the relations between this (French) 'state built' port city and its Breton hinterland, and how latterly its spatial relations and networks have now expanded across around half the territory of the Finistère département. This means that, though the central city of Brest is the smallest métropoles designated by the French government in the 2010s and has a fairly static population, it is the metropolitan centre for an extensive surrounding region raising the question of interrelationships and reciprocity with surrounding intercommunal groupings.

The *sixth session* considered how the emergence of metropolitan areas and city regions could be construed and evaluated. Rémi Le Fur presented the results of an analytical exercise which proposed a new typology to help anticipate and categorise the reconfiguration of institutions and planning instruments – e.g. the role of regions and métropoles and their spatial strategies such as the SRADDET and SCOTs. This was followed by the presentation of a concrete case of the building of a métropole, with the case of the conference host city/métropole of Tours Métropole Val de Loire forming the focus of Stephen Hall and John Mawson's paper. Franck Guérit and Sylvain Dournel considered how la "ville intense" (intensive city) could "faire métropole" (make the métropole). Finally, Olivier Sykes presented a paper on reurbanisation and suburbia in Northwest Europe raising questions about what current trends might mean for places and territories that are 'peripheral', or 'adjacent' to, metropolitan areas and the potential governance challenges in developing relations between central cities and such areas. This seemed to raise the wider question of does the metropolitan agenda really favour the largest cities and urban regions to the detriment of spaces that are peripheral within, adjacent to, or that lie outside the shadow of city regions altogether?

The final session drew conclusions from the presentations and debates and allowed an open forum for the sharing of ideas about future research questions. Issues raised included:

- whether in the case of France and the United Kingdom, there is meaningful and committed support from national government for the implementation of metropolitan reform (e.g. regarding issues such as legal autonomy and financial support)?;
- the question of which forms of legitimacy the new scale of metropolitan government has vis-à-vis other levels of government and citizens, for example in terms of its mode of election;
- how the tools and approaches of metropolitan planning, described by Booth et al. (2007) which are today perceived to be in great need of transformation (Desjardins, 2016) have evolved and continued to evolve?
- how spatial imaginaries of respective national territories emphasise and nuance the territoriality of public governance and policy (e.g. is the national territory perceived as being composed of regions, city regions, rural regions, or 'small towns' etc. and which of these scales is currently 'privileged', or emphasised, in policy design and resource allocation?)

It was clear that these, and other questions, will provide a fertile research agenda for the reflections of the group and specifically they will be addressed in edited French language and English language publications which will be based on the contributions given at the Tours colloquium.

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