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Abstract

This article develops a comparative analysis of the recent processes of creation of metropolitan governments in two European countries: England and France. Although coinciding in time, the new forms of metropolitan government are embedded in specific institutional systems. Comparative analysis focuses on the motivations of the actors of metropolitan reforms – government, parliament, local elected officials considering that this focus is important to explain the new modes of governance put in place. Finally, we analyse the capacity to act and the spatiality of the new metropolitan governments in both countries.

Keywords: territorial reform, metropolitan government, decentralisation, new public management, England, France, Italy

9.1 Introduction

Over the past decade, several European countries have undergone institutional restructuring affecting different levels of government (Nunes Silva and Buek, 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 institute new scales of action, thus drawing new spatialities for local public policies. These ongoing institutional changes seem to follow on from the movement towards decentralization which was particularly marked during the years from 1970 to 1990 (Béhar, 2015). Decentralization involves transferring competences and funding from the national government to the local level, giving local officials greater leeway to meet the needs of the population and specific target groups. In various European countries (Spain, France, Belgium, and Italy), decentralization has been a political response to a societal demand for autonomy - including for historic regional and national territories (Ismeri Europa and Applica, 2010). In the 2010s, territorial reforms have modified the balance of powers by reworking, often under the influence of reforms promoted by national governments and parliaments, the competences, capacities, and perimeters of intervention of certain local authorities. This is not necessarily a recentralization but may be a process driven by a government agenda which seek the reorganization of powers in the constituent territories of a state. This agenda is carried forward by national legislative and executive powers, but the resulting reconfigurations of territorial governance, may be contested by local authorities who, citing their electorally derived legitimacy; argue for the maintenance of sometimes long-established territorial boundaries and networks. In the French case, Feiertag (2018), drawing on analysis of parliamentary debates and official speeches, points to a search for many, and sometimes contradictory objectives: a desire to enhance the effectiveness of public action, territorial competitiveness, budgetary austerity, and, greater territorial equality. To this diversity of objectives, is added a plurality of means of implementation and acting. In some cases, national governments claim to want to simplify the nexus of territorial administration. The merger of provinces in Sweden and regions in France, or the abolition of counties in Denmark, illustrate this. Elsewhere, the aim is to provide densely urbanized areas with 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 the *métropoles* in France are two examples.

Within the context of the territorial reforms introduced above, this text analyzes the institution of "metropolitan governments" (Lefèvre, 1998) for large cities and urban areas in France and England. We consider the evolutions which led to these reforms which aim at the reorganisation of the sub-national territories of public action, our analysis then focuses on several key issues: Do the reforms carried out constitute a radical change, or do they proceed by successive increments? Are there any quid pro quos granted by the State in return for the implementation of metropolitan reforms (for example, greater autonomy and/or financial support)? Having explored these issues it will be our contention that, far from being a response only to the management of metropolitan areas, the institution of metropolitan governments is part of a wider project of the national government of the country concerned.

9.2 Research context and approach

The type of territorial reform discussed in the introduction is rooted in spatial dynamics that are widely documented in geography and spatial planning. In recent decades, large Western agglomerations have experienced both economic and demographic growth (Scott, 2001, Herrschell, 2014) and a sharp increase in mobility, increased soil sealing and land consumption, rising socio-spatial inequalities and the emergence of conflicts related to the location of major infrastructure (Kunzmann 2004, Kirat and Torre 2008). In this context, the establishment of a metropolitan decision-making level could provide certain public authorities in large cities with a greater capacity to deal with issues affecting their territory. Such a process of institutional creation may adopt very different modes, ranging from creation by the state - like the *communautés urbaines* in France in the 1960s - to a voluntary approach of actors aligning themselves with a territory, or forms of negotiated settlement between the state and local authorities (Tomas, 2017). Different models of metropolitan governance can be distinguished according to the types of institutional arrangements that produced them (Breuer, 2017). Alongside the metropolitan governments created explicitly by the law to deal with the challenges of very large cities, there are in some countries other more selective forms of metropolitan governance such as agencies that have been tasked with managing specific services like public transport, or waste management, over a large area. Metropolitan policies can also simply result from coordination between existing levels of local governments, whether they have the same competences (municipalities, for example), or not (regions, provinces, counties) (Tomas, 2017).

The most institutionalized format of governing the metropolis - metropolitan government - is the subject of this chapter. Metropolitan government can be analysed for the scope of its powers, its autonomy vis-à-vis the higher levels of decision-making and its constitutive municipalities, and its democratic legitimacy (Lefèvre, 1998). Various authors have pointed to the failure, since the 1960s, of attempts to build institutions at this institutional scale (Sharpe 1995, Lefèvre and Weir 2010). Following a comparative approach, developed by Lefèvre (1998) and pursued more recently by researchers such as Breuer (2017) and Breuer and Halleux (2016), we will explore here the metropolitan reforms carried out in two European countries: England and France. England is a nation of the United Kingdom, the most centralized country in Europe and, unlike Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it does not have its own Parliament. For its part, France has experienced decentralization and more recently several institutional reforms affecting all levels of local government. By comparative analysis, our objective is to gain a fresh perspective, to identify what is essential, but also to isolate what is incidental, in the creation of metropolitan governments. To do this, it is necessary to identify the reasons for the establishment of institutions to govern the metropolises and to revisit the debates that have emerged within each nation. Although contemporaneous, the new forms of metropolitan government that have emerged in both countries are embedded in very different institutional systems (Section 9.3). The comparative analysis will focus on key protagonists in these processes, including central government, parliament, and locally elected politicians, considering that unpacking the motivations and goals of these agencies and actors, is key to understanding the new modes of governance put in place (section 9.4). Finally, we will analyse the spatiality of the new metropolitan governments in the two countries (section 9.5). In England, and in France, the new metropolitan governments account for 30.6% and 25.1% respectively of the population of the country concerned¹. The geographic extent of the area they cover is more differentiated, with institutional metropolises accounting respectively for 8.9% and 2.1% of the national territories

of England and France. These differences in spatial coverage need to be explained, as European cities are generally expected to contribute not only to the competitiveness of the economy, but also to the resource-efficient management of a functional urban region (Kunzmann, 2004, Nahrath et al., 2009).

9.3 Institutional Systems in Evolution

A classic typology of sub-national government systems distinguishes between northern and southern European models (Page and Goldsmith, 1987). The criteria used are the extent of the functions assigned at the local level, the legal discretion left to the local authorities and the access of local politicians to the national government. In the UK considered to be a "northern country", local authorities are traditionally conceived of as a mechanism for providing local services. Their actions have had to be exercised with reference to statutory duties attributed by Parliament and have often needed to comply with many national guidelines. This situation has evolved gradually with a 'general power of competence' for local authorities being introduced by the Localism Act (2011) (Sandford, 2016); though its introduction during the 'austerity decade' has limited the practical implications of this in many cases. In France, the action of local authorities is based on the conviction that the territories must be administered and developed according to local interests. France appears as a "southern country" where responsibilities and discretion are traditionally weak, but where there is access to central decision-making through the role played by a number of local elected representatives at the national level. However, France has experienced a process of decentralization that has strengthened the prerogatives of certain levels of local authorities. The United Kingdom has undergone a continuous process of reform of grassroots local government, with the aim of centralization, though a rhetoric of 'localism' has emerged in the 2010s.

In both countries, the creation of metropolitan governments is not simply driven by the need to formulate responses at the "right" scale to some of the widely documented challenges facing European agglomerations, in terms of spatial planning, or of social development (Scott, 2001; Kunzman 2004; Nahrath et al., 2009). The processes of defining a new framework of public intervention are anchored in the history of the institutional system specific to each country. In the remainder of this section, we will successively elucidate three dimensions of the institutional systems of England and France: the evolution of the pattern of local government as urbanisation has developed; the processes of decentralisation or centralisation that facilitate or hinder the emergence of a local capacity to act; the implementation of structural reforms aiming in particular at a greater control of local public expenditure. For each theme, the presentation of each national context will be followed by a comparative summary.

9.3.1 The territorial mesh of basic communities: stability or evolution?

The institutional systems of territorial administration are always part of specific geographic and historical dynamics (Breuer and Halleux, 2016). In 2017, England has 55 million inhabitants on an area of 130 000 km², while France has 67 million inhabitants on a surface four times larger (550 000 km²). England is the country which had the earliest experience of the Industrial Revolution; more than half of the population was urban by the end of the 19th century. Urbanization was later in France. Industry attracted rural populations to large cities but also to small towns that benefited from industrial decentralization (Demazière, 2015).

Table 1 - Municipalities in England and France (2017)

Country	Principal local governments	Number	Average number of inhabitants	Average area (km ²)
England	Metropolitan Districts London Boroughs County Councils Non-metropolitan districts Unitary authorities	353	170,600	404
la France	commune	35,885	1870	15

Source: Office for National Statistics, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies

The framework of local government is very different between the two countries. England has a variety of different forms of local administration for large cities, cities or sparsely populated areas. Since 2000, the 33 London boroughs have been joined by the Greater London Authority. The six major metropolitan county areas of Merseyside, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and the West Midlands are administered by 36 metropolitan districts. Non-metropolitan areas are governed either by 56 single tier ‘unitary authorities’, which manage all local services, or by a ‘two tier’ structure of 27 county councils and 201 non-metropolitan districts. The total number of local government areas is small at 353, reflecting mergers in the second half of the 20th century. The average population of an English local government areas is over 170 000 inhabitants and the average surface area is greater than 400 km²; respectively 20 and 10 times more than an Italian commune, and 80 and 25 times greater than the average French commune (Table 1). France has nearly 36,000 municipalities, that is, 41% of all municipalities in the European Union for only 13% of the European population. France has not experienced a major reduction in the number of its municipalities. The institutional system of territorial government, designed at the end of the 18th century for a rural country, must today cope with the fact that 80% of the population lives in towns and cities.

Perhaps as a result of the context outlined above, in Europe, France presents a strong case of inter-municipal cooperation: all municipalities, whatever their size or geographical position, are currently involved in inter-municipal cooperation (Demazière, 2018). For more than a century, the provision of services (water, electricity, public transport etc.), or the management of waste, was delivered at supra-communal levels which allowed economies of scale. But they remained under the control of the municipalities, which decided every year the amount of grant to be allocated to support their provision. From the 1990s, the French State favoured the creation of *établissement public de coopération intercommunale* (public intercommunal cooperation institutions - EPCIs) to which municipalities voluntarily transfer resources (such as the tax paid by companies) and strategic competences such as economic development, culture, and housing. These EPCIs are eligible for major government subsidies, which has

encouraged municipalities to engage in them. Baraize and Négrier (2001) have described inter-municipal cooperation as a "silent revolution". Although the elected members of these structures are elected at the municipal level and not directly to the EPCIs, the latter must be considered as an important level of French territorial authority, which is progressively replacing the communes.

In both countries, urbanisation has put strain on the long-established, or sometimes even centuries' old, framework of local government. In England as in other Northern European countries (like Germany, Belgium, and Sweden), the merger of local government areas has been pursued, resulting in a less fine grained territorial government framework. In France, the permanence of the communal map has given birth to an additional inter-communal network, which now applies across urban and rural areas in France.

9.3.2 Decentralization or centralization?

The United Kingdom remains one of the most centralized countries in Europe in terms of revenues collected and controlled by the state (Ismeri Europa and Applica, 2010). Since 1999, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have had their own parliaments that exercise certain powers. On the other hand, England does not have its own national parliament, or assembly, but is administered by the Parliament and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Moreover, there is no intermediate level in England between the central government and the country council, district, or unitary authority (Table 2). These are traditionally the executing agencies of the central power, acting in accordance with binding directives of the ministries. Their room for manoeuvre, which has become increasingly narrow since the 1980s, is limited to their ability to adapt these policies to the needs and expectations of the populations in their care (Breuillard, 2001). The rhetoric of 'localism' in the 2010s has done little to reverse this trend against a backdrop of regressive cuts, which have hit some of the poorest local authority areas hardest. Moreover, in the absence of a written constitution, the functions and the territorial organization can evolve according to the will of the government and the Parliament in place. Many reforms have been taking place for more than half a century, such as the amalgamation of districts, the abolition of some counties, the regionalisation attempt by the Blair government in the 2000s and its subsequent suspension by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 (Sykes and Nurse, 2017).

Table 2 - Local Government Levels in England and France in 2017

Geographical scale	England		France
	Name	Number	Name
Régionale			Région
Subregional	County Councils 27		Département
Local	Metropolitan Districts London Boroughs Non-metropolitan districts Unitary authorities	326	Commune

Source: Office for National Statistics, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies

In France the regions were created at the beginning of the 1980s, while the *departements* and *communes* constitute a network that goes back to the French Revolution. The institutional system was then centralized, with a prefect, the local representative of the government in each *département*. Local and departmental elected officials were introduced at the end of the 19th century, but until the early 1980s, the prefect continued to lead the implementation of central government sectoral and spatial policies, while controlling the actions of local authorities. Since then, France has experienced decentralization and the centre of gravity of French institutions has moved from the centre to local authorities. The three levels of local government are now freely managed by elected councils, using their own resources (local taxes and other taxes) and allocations from the state. The principle of autonomy extends to relations between the local governments and none exercises control over another. This creates a very complicated institutional system, mocked by some as a territorial "mille-feuille".

In total, the number of levels of subnational government is varied: very small in England, it reaches the number of three in France, bearing in mind that the structures organizing inter-municipal cooperation (the EPCIs) are often considered to constitute a fourth level, given the importance they occupy today in local public policies (Baraize and Négrier, 2001). In addition, the capacity to act of different local governments is also diverse, depending on the degree of decentralization in effect. In both countries, the recent institution of a level of metropolitan government is part of this contrasting landscape.

9.3.3 Controlling public spending, an objective shared today by national governments

England was the first country in Europe to implement new public management. Under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, the reforms launched from 1979 aimed at controlling public spending through major reorganisations of the administration. Local governments were targeted because they accounted for nearly 70% of public expenditure (Breuillard, 2001). State grants have been trimmed, local taxation and borrowing capacity have been regulated (Booth et al., 2007). Subsequently, the government was able to reduce local budgets in authoritarian fashion depending on whether or not the districts achieved spending control objectives. In addition, privatization policies directly concerned local authorities, in particular as regarded their social housing stock.

In France, controlling local public spending is a much more recent topic. Thanks to decentralization, local authorities have the capacity to define their own agenda and fund their projects. At the end of the 2000s, spending by French local authorities accounted for 21% of general government expenditure, which is much less than in a regionalised country, such as Italy (31%) (Ismeri Europa and Applica, 2010). But financial autonomy is high in France: more than half of the local revenues of subnational governments come from local taxes. The proportion of locally raised funding is about 48% in England (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018). Many French municipalities have promoted economic and residential development, sometimes generating, within the same agglomeration, territorial competition to attract or retain businesses and households (Hertzog, 2015). This competition has resulted in similar public investments (convention centres, business parks, etc.) in neighbouring municipalities. Vertical coordination among the three levels of government is also lacking. An extreme example can be cited in Marseille, where two museums dedicated to Mediterranean culture were opened in 2013, one financed by the municipality and the other by the region (Demazière, 2018).

Inter-municipal cooperation has helped to unify public action in the major French cities and their suburbs, but only to a certain extent. Many periurban municipalities have grouped themselves into an EPCI in a defensive manner, to avoid being integrated into a larger structure where urban municipalities dominate because of their demographic weight. In 2010, there were more than 2,600 EPCIs for 300 functional urban regions (Geppert, 2014). By seeking to eliminate competition between municipalities, the state has stimulated the emergence of more powerful players, the EPCIs. In many cases, competition for employment and local taxation has been exacerbated within and between urban areas. This was probably a major cause of land consumption in France during the last decade (Serrano and Demazière, 2016).

In France, a general effect of the decentralization laws has been that elected officials have tended to increase public spending in order to respond to citizens' demands regarding the quality of public services. Local government spending rose from 5% to 8.5% of GDP between 1983 and 2013, and according to the OECD (2015), more than half of this rise cannot be accounted for by the new competences it has acquired. In the 2000s, the salary costs of local government increased by about 3% per year due to the increase in the number of employees, inflation-linked salary scales and bonuses (Court of Auditors, 2014). While the national government has continuously supported this growth of local spending by increasing its grants, it changed tack in 2015, reducing subsidies to local governments for three years, and making a return to a stable level of support contingent on efforts to control local government spending. Indeed, the control of public spending has been one of the arguments deployed to justify territorial reform.

9.4 The Establishment of new metropolitan governments in France and England

In the previous section, we outlined the historical role of local governments and their strengthening or weakening according to the agenda of the national government. In both countries, these elements provide the backbone of the reforms undertaken over the past ten years to establish or consolidate local governments in for large metropolitan areas. In this section, our analytical framework will address several points. Do the reforms carried out constitute a radical change, or do they proceed by successive increments? Are there any *quid pro quos* granted by the State in return for the implementation of metropolitan reforms (for example, greater autonomy and/or financial support)? It will be seen that, far from being a response only to the management of metropolitan areas, the institution of metropolitan governments is part of a wider project of the national government of the country concerned. In England, it is a matter of selective decentralization on a case-by-case basis. In France, the metropolises are participants in a large-scale territorial reform, which affects all levels of local authorities without removing any of them. The metropolitan government is only one form of EPCI among others and in the final analysis, metropolitan governments are part of a pre-existing institutional system

Table 3 - Position of the Metropolitan Government in the Institutional Architecture

England	France
Metropolitan District	Commune
	Etablissement public de coopération intercommunale
Combined Authority	Métropole
	Département
	Région

Source: Author

9.4.1 The establishment of Combined Authorities in England: a fluctuating interest for the local government of large cities

In England, the question of metropolitan scale institutions is marked by the considerable weight of the United Kingdom Government. In the 1960s, the reflection on the fragmentation of the local government system led to the creation of the Greater London Council (GLC), then later in the 1970s to the creation of six Metropolitan County Councils (MCC) in charge of addressing strategic planning, transportation, economic development and waste management. Their role was close to that of French *communautés urbaines* (urban communities), created at about the same time. The MCCs operated from 1974 to 1986, before being abolished by the Thatcher government. The Labour Party controlled the MCCs and partly in response to this - and a classic (neo)liberal critique of their effectiveness and expenditure, their abolition became a campaign promise of the Tories during the general election of 1983. This was carried out once the Conservative majority was renewed on a tide of jingoism following the Falklands war. Their disappearance led to a lack of a strategic vision for metropolitan areas as different plans were now drawn up by the individual metropolitan districts for their own areas (Sykes and Nurse, 2017).

In 1997, the accession to power of Tony Blair led to new reforms, but the big cities were not immediately on the agenda. After granting autonomy to the Celtic nations and establishing Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in England, the government recreated a tier of metropolitan authority for the capital: the Greater London Authority (GLA). Its main responsibility was to develop and adopt a metropolitan strategic plan. Gradually, the GLA acquired responsibilities for transportation, economic development, environmental management, policing, culture and sports, health and energy. In addition, the creation of the office of directly elected mayor and its effects in terms of leadership served as inspiration for the recent reform creating Combined Authorities.

At the same time, the New Labour government's desire to make industrial and urban brownfields a lever for development led to a focus the big cities in the north of the country. The most acute phase of deindustrialisation being over, the latter were considered as the foci of future national growth, around the knowledge economy, innovation and creativity. In the mid-2000s, a number of official papers focused on functional urban areas, and led to a rising focus on city-regions, and the benchmarking of metropolitan institutions in other countries (Parkinson et al., 2004, Marvin et al., 2006). This attention to big cities was also driven by cooperation between local districts in some metropolitan areas - notably Greater Manchester. In addition, since 1995, the cities of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield have been part of an English Core Cities Group. This

organization only has an informal status but gives these regional cities higher profile and a certain collective lobbying capacity towards the UK government and European bodies.

In 2009, the Brown government made local district cooperation for transportation and economic development possible by the establishment of Combined Authorities. After 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government abolished the regional organisations such as the Regional Development Agencies and implemented a public expenditure reduction program that targeted local government. In Manchester, the first Combined Authority was created in 2011. It brings together without merging them the 10 districts that had been part of the previous MCC of Greater Manchester. The main responsibilities of the new Combined Authority cover transportation, strategic planning, economic development, urban planning, housing and the police. Meanwhile the Core Cities Group has continued to advocate for a rebalancing of the national / local relationship by the government, the only solution it sees to meet the challenges of local economic growth, public service reform and better governance (Sykes and Nurse, 2017). This approach has had effects at the central level, with the government promoting Combined Authorities. The principle is that the districts wishing to cooperate submit a project to the government, which examines its content and territorial coherence and proposes (or not) to the Parliament the creation of the Combined Authority. A contract granting certain competences and resources (a 'devolution deal') is then signed between the government and the local authorities involved. Compared to local districts, Combined Authorities have greater powers in economic planning, urban renewal and transportation and exercise them over a wider territory. The competences attributed to the Combined Authorities and their resources are negotiated on a case-by-case basis between the local actors and the government, so they vary according to the areas. Not all attempts to create Combined Authorities are successful, as shown by the case of Norfolk, whose Combined Authority project was rejected by the government because of the low degree of collaborative action envisaged, or that of the North East, whose districts have disengaged from the project invoking the risks to for public finances of the UK leaving the EU (Cléchet, 2018). A law passed in 2016, The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act, allows Combined Authorities to acquire competences decentralized by the State, in addition to those pooled by the constituent districts, and to opt to have a directly elected metropolitan mayor. Six Combined Authority areas elected their mayor metro in May 2017. However, turnout for the election was low, varying between 21% and 34% of the electorate (BBC News, 2017). Though such weak democratic participation is not unusual for local elections, leading some observers to go so far as to comment that 'British local democracy is that of a failed state' (Jenkins, 2018). Still, as of July 2017, there were 9 Combined Authorities in total, but another five were under discussion. In addition, these structures are gaining momentum in terms of competences and the budgets of the Combined Authorities of Manchester and Liverpool each amounted to £230 million in 2017 (Cléchet, 2018). Though this needs to be set against the socially regressive cuts in local authority budgets since 2010 which have penalised some of the core metropolitan districts the hardest. Liverpool's local authority has, for example, seen a real-term fall in spending of 32% from 2009/10 to 2017/18 (Thorp, 2019). The institution of Combined Authorities may thus allow the government to practice selective decentralization negotiated on a case-by-case basis with certain areas, but at the same time it is imposing budgetary austerity on some of the Combined Authorities's constituent local districts, and other districts in England.

9.4.2 *The creation of metropolises in France*

After a phase of decentralization that strengthened the various levels of local authorities, territorial reform in France was justified, as in Italy, by the adoption of new public management (Wollmann, 2012). From 2000 to 2014, the annual expenditure of regions, departments, municipalities and EPCI increased from 152 to 247 billion euros, while local public employment increased from 1.5 million to 1.7 million. Between 2010 and 2016, two successive reforms of local authorities were carried out, first by a right-wing government and then by a socialist government.

The first wave of reform was prefigured by an official report to President Nicolas Sarkozy. Entitled *Il est temps de décider* (It's time to decide), this report published in 2009 proposed the reduction of the number of regions through mergers, comprehensive national coverage of intercommunal cooperation, the setting of a population threshold for any EPCI, and the creation of *métropoles* (Comité pour la réforme des collectivités locales, 2009). At the time, these measures were not all implemented, many parliamentarians of all sides being hostile. Indeed, until the very recent prohibition of politicians holding multiple offices (2017), many Members of Parliament also headed local governmentsⁱⁱ. For decades, this has thwarted government efforts to reform the institutional system.

Promulgated in 2010, the *loi de réforme des collectivités territoriales* (law for the reform of local authorities) forced the 2,000 municipalities still reluctant to engage in inter-municipal cooperation to join an EPCI. The law also put on the agenda the merger of some EPCIs, defining a minimum threshold of 5,000 inhabitants. This policy orientation was continued after 2012 by the socialist government, and in fact strengthened since the minimum population threshold of an EPCI was raised to 15,000 inhabitants. From 2010 to 2017, the number of EPCIs was halved, while the proportion of population covered by an EPCI increased from 89.1% to 100%.

In 2015, the *loi portant sur la nouvelle organisation du territoire de la République* (law on the new organization of the territory of the Republic; often abbreviated to *Loi NOTRe*); clarified the responsibilities of the different levels of territorial authorities, in particular by removing the clause of general competence for the departments and the regions. The department is weakened being largely confined now to the maintenance of the road network and the payment of social benefits whose amount and rules of eligibility are decided in Paris. The government had even stated the intention to abolish the department as a local authority, but it had to back down. However, another reform was carried through, with the number of regions being reduced from 22 to 13, with in addition 5 regions overseas. At the time, the justification put forward by the government for this reform was the need to establish regions of 'European size' – i.e. more comparable to those in other European countries.

As regards the creation of metropolises in France, there is also a certain continuity between governments of right and left. In 2010, the trend towards grouping together of independent municipalities led to the creation of a special status of metropolis for the biggest of these Paris. Despite opposition from the Ile-de-France region and neighbouring counties, this project was pursued by the socialist government after 2012. The *métropole du Grand Paris* (Greater Paris metropolis) was legally created on 1 January 2016 as an EPCI grouping Paris, the 123 municipalities of the three neighbouring departments and 7 other communes - i.e. approximately 7.5 million inhabitants. Similarly, the 2010 *loi de réforme des collectivités territoriales* (law for the reform of local authorities) made possible the creation of a new type

of EPCI - called a *métropole* ('metropolis') - for any municipal grouping of more than 500,000 inhabitants. The competences were those of a *communauté urbaine* (urban community), to which were added by legal transfer, or by agreement, certain competences of the departments and regions. However, elected officials had in fact wanted to create a *métropole* only in Nice, whose mayor was close to President Sarkozy. Also, in 2014, the *loi de modernisation de l'action publique territoriale et d'affirmation des métropoles* (literally the 'law for the modernisation of territorial public action and affirmation of the metropolises') revived the notion of a more integrated form of intercommunal cooperation. Under Article 43 of this, the *metropole* is supposed to lead a "*projet d'aménagement et de développement économique, écologique, éducatif, culturel et social [du] territoire afin d'en améliorer la cohésion et la compétitivité et de concourir à un développement durable et solidaire du territoire régional*" ("a development project for the economic, ecological, educational, cultural and social development of the territory, in order to improve cohesion and competitiveness and to contribute to a sustainable and equitable development of the regional territory" – author translation). In addition to Nice, the law designated eight "*métropoles*" on the basis of their *communauté urbaine* (urban community) status and their having more than 400,000 inhabitants in an urban area of more than 650,000 inhabitants - namely: Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lille, Nantes, Rennes, Rouen Strasbourg and Toulouse. As mentioned above the metropolis of Greater Paris has its own bespoke arrangements. Its governance operates at two levels: the metropolitan level, and the territorial groupings of communes in different areas of the metropolitan region. The object of strong opposition from the mayors of Provence, the *metropole* of Aix-Marseille Provence, was created on January 1, 2016. The pre-existing EPCI's were renamed "*conseils de territoire*" (territorial councils) and must be consulted before any decision taken by the *metropole* on territorial planning and local services. With a specific budget, they manage a certain number of powers delegated by the *métropole*. It is ultimately in Lyon, however, that the most complete form of metropolitan governance in France has taken shape. Through a transformation of the *communauté urbaine du Grand Lyon* (the urban community of Greater Lyon), the new *Metropole de Lyon* has absorbed the skills of the Rhône department within its boundaries. Moreover, it is amongst the *métropoles* the only one to be a fully-fledged local authority, which will result in the direct election of metropolitan councillors in 2020.

It is difficult to say whether these multiple reforms will improve the implementation of public policies at local level in the short term. Faced with a major public deficit, the socialist government had to take the unprecedented measure of reducing its grants to local authorities by 11 billion euros over the 2015-2017 period. The aim of this was to encourage them to reduce their operating expenses, but most of all there was a drop in public investment. Following the election of President Macron, the government elected in 2017 committed to not lowering grants to territorial authorities, which in practice meant that increases in their operating expenses would be limited to 1.2% per year. In addition, it is anticipated that municipalities will choose to transfer more responsibilities to voluntary groupings in order to achieve economies of scale. The *métropoles* illustrate this logic since their creation leads to new transfers of powers by municipalities. There is a strong local appetite for this institutional form since urban areas that did not reach the threshold of 400,000 inhabitants have sought and managed to transform themselves into *métropoles*: three in 2015 (Brest, Montpellier and Nancy), and seven in 2017 (Clermont-Ferrand). Ferrand, Dijon, Metz, Orleans, Saint-Etienne, Toulon, Tours).

9.5 Characteristics of Metropolitan Governments

Work on the emergence or institution of a metropolitan government has identified three main features (Sharpe 1995, Lefèvre 1998). The first concerns a strong political legitimacy, obtained by the direct election of its political representatives. We must distinguish here between the “inter-communal” model and the “supracommunal” model. In the first case, the political legitimacy derives from the representatives of the member communes. However, the metropolitan governments need their own political legitimacy so that actions carried out are accepted as they apply to everyone; notably to their constituent local authorities. The direct election of their executives is considered as an essential ‘input’ (Taylor, 2018) element of this legitimacy – i.e. in terms of representation of the governed and consultative mechanisms.

Secondly, the metropolitan government must enjoy significant autonomy vis-à-vis higher levels of government as well as in relation to its own constituent local authorities. This is acquired through adequate financial (and human) resources and significant powers to intervene in metropolitan affairs (Lefèvre, 1998). The policy fields generally mentioned are strategic territorial planning, economic development and the management of infrastructure networks (transport, water, sanitation, waste treatment), fire services, and culture. Finally, it must have an institutional geography roughly corresponding to the functional urban area. These elements are needed to bolster the ‘output’ legitimacy of the metropolitan government - i.e. its effectiveness in acting in the interests of the governed and its “*problem solving quality*” – Schmidt, 2013).

These characteristics would allow the metropolitan institution to be legitimate, powerful and autonomous. But there is clearly a gap between such theoretical notions and practice. We will see that the Combined Authorities and the French *métropoles* are both incomplete according to the criteria defined in the literature, but in different ways.

9.5.1 Size and geographical area of metropolitan institutions

Firstly let’s consider variables that can be measured quantitatively, namely the population and area covered by the 23 metropolitan governments identified in both countries (Figure 1). A strong heterogeneity emerges. Almost two thirds of the territories have a population of less than 1 million inhabitants (from the West of England downwards) and some in France even have a population of less than 500,000 inhabitants. In addition, the comparison of Sheffield and Lyon shows that population and area are not always correlated. An institutional metropolis covering a large population can be established within a small area, while a large land base does not necessarily mean a major demographic weight. Following the preceding sections, there are also substantial differences between the two states. In terms of population, 5 out of 8 Combined Authorities (West Midlands, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, Liverpool, Sheffield) are in the top third of the territories in Figure 9.1 and none are present in the bottom third. French *métropoles* are divided into two distinct groups. A handful of major cities (Paris, Marseille-Aix and to a lesser extent Lyon and Lille which exceed 1 million inhabitants) contrasts with most others which lie in the bottom third of the graph and occupy the last 9 ranks. These different spatialities are not the result of chance. They are linked to the choices made in the reforms which instituted, in each state, these metropolitan levels of action.

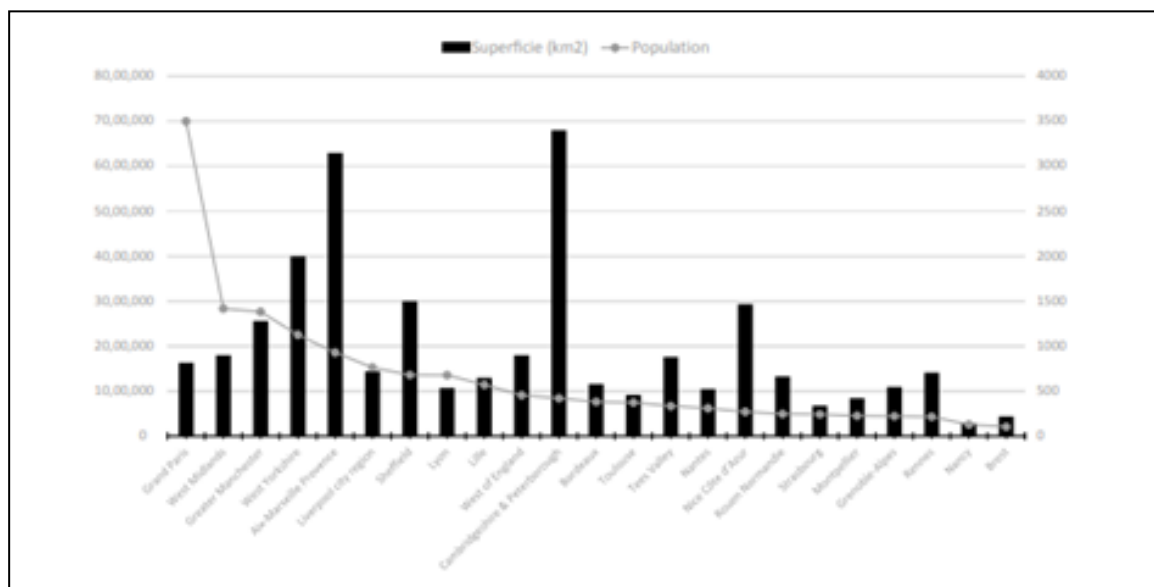


Fig 9.1 - Population and area of Combined Authorities and Metropolises

Authors: Christophe Demazière & Chaymae Ez-Zriouli

Source: National data - England: July 2017; France: population on 1/1/2014, area on 1/1/2017

Overall, Combined Authorities have an average population of around 1.4 million, compared to 700,000 for French *métropoles* outside Grand Paris. Their area is three times greater than their equivalent in France (2,300 against 750 km²). In France, the smallest metropolis - Brest - represents 3% of the population of Greater Paris and 11% of that of Aix-Marseille Provence. And of the 17 metropolitan areas of less than 1000 km² shown on the graph, only 4 are Combined Authorities – these being also the largest among these smaller territories, and the 13 others are all French *métropoles*.

The larger geographical area of the Combined Authorities aims at capturing a functional regional reality. In France, the process of *metropole* creation was essentially a question of renewing the perimeters of pre-existing EPCIs - with the exception of Marseille-Aix and Greater Paris - and not of transforming *départements* into metropolitan authorities. This leads to a major difference: 7 French *métropoles* out of 15 have a population lower than that of the corresponding *unité urbaine* (urban unit) and 9 have a population less than two thirds of that of the *région urbaine fonctionnelle* (functional urban region) (Demazière, 2017).

9.5.2 A very variable degree of autonomy

The autonomy of a type of metropolitan government can be assessed vis-à-vis the state, which is often at the origin of its creation, and other higher, or lower, levels of territorial government. Below we examine these two dimensions of metropolitan-regional relations in the two national contexts under consideration here (for a more comprehensive treatment see Cremaschi et al., 2015).

In England, metropolitan cooperation is presented as taking a "pragmatic" form, with the first step being the coming together of metropolitan districts to negotiate with the state, the business community and civil society around specific policy goals and projects. As a result, shared, or decentralized competences, differ from one Combined Authority to another, as do

the resources allocated by the government. On an experimental basis, some Combined Authorities have been able to keep local business rates paid by companies. Although the rate of this tax is fixed by the government in a uniform manner for the whole country, this constitutes a beginning of fiscal decentralisation. Moreover, in addition to resources related to the transfer of competences - for example £6 billion of health and social care funds transferred to Greater Manchester - the government has committed itself to funds of around £ 250 million each year for the territories that have signed devolution deals.

The situation in France is different, even if a metropolitan fund with €150 million euros has been set up, its importance is limited because the *métropoles* are part of a long history of decentralization and reinforced inter-municipal cooperation, which has constantly increased the room for manoeuvre of the local elected officials involved. As far as their relations with the central government level are concerned, the *métropoles* have a much greater autonomy than the Combined Authorities, whether in terms of competences or fiscal resources. Local elected officials can even play a vital role in the creation of the *métropole*. Take for example the lobbying by elected representatives from certain big cities who succeeded in February 2017 - thanks to an amendment tabled under the *loi Grand Paris* (Grand Paris law); in modifying the *métropole* designation criteria, allowing a second wave of seven *métropoles* to be created. The list of these speaks volumes of local influence on the process: Clermont-Ferrand, Dijon, Metz, Orleans, Saint-Etienne, Toulon and Tours, being rather intermediate cities as opposed to metropolises (Deraeve, 2014). Here was an excellent illustration of the effects of multiple office holding (e.g. the holding of local and parliamentary mandates by the same individuals) on the framework of French territorial governance structures, in this case only a few weeks before the prohibition of this practice.

The wide autonomy of the French communes and their groupings vis-à-vis the State underpinned the fact that the functioning of the *communautés urbaines* (urban communities) - which prefigured the *métropoles* - was variable in space and time, and with regards to the 'buy-in' and inclusion of actors in the project (Lefeuvre, 2015). This diversity is mainly due to the relations between the representatives of the main commune and the mayors of the other communes, with a lower demographic, economic and political weight. In Toulouse or Grenoble, for example, elected officials have feared the hegemony of the central city, something strongly felt in the past, and are wary of an inter-municipal structure that would reduce their control of their own communal territory (Escaffre and Jaillet, 2015; Louargant and Le Bras, 2015). Conversely, in England, given the merger of the districts in the 1980s, the Combined Authorities only bring together a small number of them – ranging from 4 districts for West of England to 10 for Greater Manchester. According to Leclercq and Loew (2017), territorial governance is more "balanced" than in France. For example, in Greater Manchester, the population of the local authorities brought together by the Combined Authority (e.g. places like Salford, Trafford, Oldham etc.) is more comparable than is typically the case of the constitutive *communes* of the French *métropoles*, even if the central city of Manchester still has the greatest demographic weight. In Manchester, strategic planning and the management of key services have been transferred to the Combined Authority, while in France this point is problematic for mayors. Yet the transfer of competences and their exercise in practice may be two different things – for example, the production of a Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) has been marked by public protests from those who jealously guard local planning power, notably as regards to any changes to designations of Green Belt land (Green, 2019). As regards economic development, in England 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) between businesses and local authorities are supposed to encourage synergies between sub-regional/city regional governance and the business sector. In certain places such as

Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region, the area covered by the Combined Authority is the same as that covered by the LEP. This isn't always the case though and in the West Midlands, three LEPs cut across the Combined Authority area. In theory these partnerships can play an important role in the decisions of the new Combined Authorities whereas in the French case, the establishment of *conseils de développement* (development councils) does not apparently lead to joint decision making.

9.6 Discussion: Governing the metropolis or the urban region?

This section provides a comparative discussion of the findings as presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4 - Institutional Context and Forms of Metropolitan Government

	England	France
Previous reforms of boundaries and decentralisation		
Reform of local government areas	Yes, in the 1970s	No (failure of a reform in the 1970s). Encouragement of inter-municipal cooperation addressed to all municipalities becoming almost mandatory in the late 2000s. Since the 1960s, financial and institutional support of the State to the grouping of communes in the big agglomerations
Decentralisation	No. Recentralisation from the 1970s and a single level of territorial authority	Yes (since 1982). Three levels of local government, including regions created in 1982
State objective of limiting the spending of sub-state territorial authorities	Yes, since the 1980s. A decrease in the scope and spheres of action of local authorities	Yes, since 2015. A decrease in state grants to local authorities
Metropolitan government model		
Relationship to constitutive local authorities	Intercommunal model but metro mayor elected by direct universal suffrage (realized in 6 out of 8 cases)	The president of the <i>métropole</i> is elected by the metropolitan councillors, who are also local councillors
Competences exercised	Variable from one Combined Authority to another. They are pooled by the districts or decentralized by the government. Competences are limited and often involve urban transport, strategic planning, economic development, urban planning, housing and police	Homogeneous with the exceptions of Greater Paris and Lyon. The competences are very significant: spatial planning; economic, social and cultural development; local housing policy; urban policy ; protection and enhancement of the environment and local amenity/liveability ; management of public services of collective interest
Territorial extent	Large (average area of 2,300 km ²) and often centred on the core of the functional urban area	Smaller (average area of 750 km ²), less than the built-up area in the case of half the <i>métropoles</i>

Source: Authors

The first part of Table 4 above underlines the vital role played by the national government vis-à-vis local and regional authorities. In both France and England actions have been carried

over the long term by the national level, in terms of reforms of the framework of territorial government, and the competences and autonomy granted (or not) in terms of financial resources and expenditure to sub-national levels. In both countries, urbanization and peri-urbanization have tested the relevance of the established geography of sub-state government, but it has only been significantly reworked - and expanded – in England. In France, bypassing the fierce resistance of mayors to the merger of municipalities, the state has strongly encouraged and stimulated inter-municipal cooperation. The gradual deepening of the latter in the largest cities has brought into being more and more integrated local institutions, prefiguring the emergence of true metropolitan governments. In effect the laws of the 2010s only formalised this status, even if, in the case of Greater Paris and Aix-Marseille Provence, the state imposed the metropolitan reform on the municipalities and *departements* concerned.

In both cases, the old relations between state and local governments are both a resource and an obstacle for the institution of a metropolitan level of government. For example, the resistance of other levels of local authorities to metropolitan reform. This was a sensitive issue in France, but several elected officials who simultaneously held the positions of mayor of a big city, president of an EPCI, and parliamentarian forged an alliance with the government to ensure reform succeeded. In England, the strong culture of centralisation sees Combined Authorities emerge from national legislation under which groups of two or more local authorities may come forward seeking to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. The success of bids to become a Combined Authority is not guaranteed and they must be approved by the Secretary of State, alternatively the latter may decide to establish a Combined Authority, if the councils in the relevant area agree (Sandford, 2017). The fields of action and resources of a Combined Authority are granted by the UK government, which then evaluates their actions, illustrating "remote government" (Epstein, 2005).

The second part of Table 4 summarizes, in both countries, the characteristics of metropolitan government considered essential by Lefèvre (1998) and examined in section 9.5 above. The only common feature of the two countries is the importance for the new metropolitan institutions of the relationship to the constitutive local authorities within their areas who are the stakeholders in the new metropolitan governance. In France, the legitimacy of municipalities is strong, which limits the autonomy of the metropolitan government in dealing with them. The metropolitan councillors, who represent the local municipalities, elect the president of the *métropole*, which open the possibility of electing another figure than the mayor of the main core city and municipality of the area. This is the case for Greater Paris, Aix-Marseille Provence, Lyon, Lille - the four largest French *métropoles* by population - as well as for Grenoble, Strasbourg and Nancy. In England, the legitimacy of the districts is much weaker, which has allowed the national government to push for the direct election of a metropolitan mayor, and this has not happened in most, though no all, areas.

In terms of competences, the Combined Authorities seem to illustrate, an experiment in decentralization in a highly centralized country, which initially has principally targeted the largest cities. The process of case-by-case formalization of devolution deals is probably less a reflection of the national government's desire to address the heterogeneity of the issues facing these large agglomerations than of limiting the possibility of a common expression of these claims. Combined Authorities are an experiment to which it is always possible to put an end. In contrast, French *métropoles* are part of a longer-term evolution and have an almost unique set of competences. These are only restricted for Greater Paris, which leaves the organization of mobility or the tendering of energy networks to the Ile-de-France region. In contrast, the

Lyon *métropole* has added to its core fields of activity the exercise within its area of the competences of the Rhône *département* (social action, construction and maintenance of secondary schools, and management of the road network). In France, the unique format of modes of action is questionable, given the strong heterogeneity of the *métropoles*. It might be thought probable too, that in the smaller *métropoles*, action in some policy fields will not be very developed, in light of a lack of expertise, or because - despite what may be claimed; some dimensions of 'metropolisation' are not very present (Deraeve, 2014).

Regarding the boundaries of the institutions created, path dependency seems to outweigh the importance of introducing a new territorial framework well-adapted to addressing issues of spatial planning. In England, the territorial extent of Combined Authorities is wide. However, the establishment of new relations between the state and the local does not revolve exclusively around the metropolitan spaces of large city regions. Thus, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is a Combined Authority for a territory of interlinked medium-sized cities, and the government has also signed devolution deals with non-metropolitan areas such as Cornwall, and Greater Lincolnshire. The level of centralization and the hegemony of the London agglomeration in the national economy, do count for nothing in accounting for the difficulties that the big cities of the North of England experience in being recognized as key sites for future decentralisation-fuelled development. In the mid-2010s the UK government started evoking the notion of a 'Northern Powerhouse', as an urban ensemble made up of the conurbations of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle. By fostering this group of cities, the stated strategy was to counterbalance London's economic growth. This territory is superimposed on that of the very big cities around which Combined Authorities have emerged and seeks to unite these historically rival cities across the geographical and cultural distance which separates them.

In France, the narrowly drawn boundaries of the *métropoles* created by the metropolitan reform is in direct continuity with the geography of pre-existing forms of intercommunality. It is on this territorial basis that some elected officials have launched, since decentralisation, daring and striking urban projects including- urban regeneration operations, tramway lines, and business centres. These elected officials sometimes had very high national level political responsibilities, for example, mayors of Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, and Nantes, have all at one time led the national government. Perhaps as a result of this, from Lyon to Metz, from Toulouse to Brest, the representation and conception of the *metropole* is urban-centric. It is attached to the (larger or smaller) central city of an urban area and extends little beyond the urban core. This narrowness of the territorial base of the *métropole* still leaves the urban region, or the wider metropolitan area, fragmented at the level of local government. This can make it difficult to cooperate with surrounding areas.

9.7 Conclusion

In geography and spatial planning, an abundant literature has emerged which celebrates metropolitan spaces as centres of innovation, competitiveness and wealth creation (Scott, 2001, Parkinson et al., 2004), and points to the multiple spatial issues that call for the setting up of institutions dedicated to their governance (Kunzmann, 2004, Nahrath et al., 2009). However, since the 1990s, many studies in political science have shown the difficulties which can accompany the emergence, or creation, of metropolitan government (Sharpe 1995, Lefèvre 1998). In their comparative analysis of institutional reforms in metropolitan areas in

Europe and North America, Kantor and Savitch (2010: 129) point out that "national government responses are by no means a mere reflection of an evolution of economic pressures. On the contrary, regional governance policy is invariably a matter of contention". The findings of this chapter confirm these analyses. England and France are two European nations with relatively similar levels of development that face similar challenges. But distinct paths have been taken towards the establishment of metropolitan government. This is explained partly by the interactions between the distinctive national institutional systems, which have evolved over a much longer time period than that over which the recent reforms have been introduced, and the more recent agenda setting of the respective national governments regarding the metropolitan issue. The findings underline the importance of the role of national governments which have orchestrated change over the long term, successively reforming the framework of territorial government, and the competences, autonomy and resources available to sub-national levels. In both countries, urbanization and peri-urbanization and new functional geographies have tested the relevance of the established geography of sub-state government, whilst established relations between state and local governments have shaped the emergence new governance scales. At times there has been resistance to the metropolitan reform from existing local authorities who fear a loss of autonomy, but such antagonism is by no means ubiquitous and in both countries there were examples of cooperation across and between government scales. The presence of such similar dynamics around the formation of metropolitan governments in two different national institutional and political settings, also points to the need to be sensitive to sub-national contexts (e.g. specific city regional settings) and avoid the trap of 'methodological nationalism' (Reimer et. al. 2014, p. 3) which seeks to account for differences solely in terms of different national systems. Yet some fairly clear national differences remain such as the influence of the relative strength of local municipalities vis-à-vis new metropolitan institutions which is stronger in France, and the national government's encouragement of the election of metropolitan mayors in England. Meanwhile, whilst Combined Authorities can be seen as the latest manifestation of England's rather stop-start quest to develop some kind of 'larger than local' scale of sub-national territorial governance, French métropoles are part of a more consistent longer-term evolution of decentralisation processes. Yet the territorial extent of Combined Authorities in England is wide, contrasting with the narrowly drawn boundaries of the métropoles which generally remain calibrated on the pre-existing intercommunal spaces and rather urban-centric leaving wider metropolitan areas, fragmented at the level of local government. Ultimately, in both countries, the choices around the spatial bounding of metropolitan governments are based on context-dependent factors. Allied to the competences of the new metropolitan governments, which vary between the two countries and sometimes within the same country, these boundaries will certainly influence the capacity of the public authorities to deal with the multifaceted issues encountered in the development of metropolitan areas. It should be remembered too that far from being solely a response to the management of metropolitan areas, the institution of metropolitan governments in both countries takes place against a background of wider national government political agendas and projects. It is clear that many aspirations and agendas have been attached to the new metropolitan governments. Given this, it is perhaps too early to say, how far they will acquire their own political legitimacy, in terms of 'output' effectiveness in addressing the issues which provided the rationale for their creation, and citizen identification with and 'input' to the democratic life of these new territorial institutions.

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ⁱ For England, the number of Combined Authorities taken into account in this article is those which were established by July 2017. For France, we have taken into account here only the 15 métropoles resulting from the *loi de modernisation de l'action publique territoriale et d'affirmation des métropoles* (law of modernization of the territorial public action and the affirmation of metropolises) of 2014, leaving aside those that were created in 2017. Indeed, the aim is not to conduct an exhaustive analysis of metropolitan areas, but to compare the national determinants of the implementation of these new levels of government.

ⁱⁱ In 2012, 82% of deputies of the *assemblée nationale* and 77% of senators held at least one other elected office. The proportion of parliamentarians at the head of a local executive (mayor or chairman of a county or regional council) was 45% for the deputies and 48 % for senators. These figures make France an exception in Europe. In Italy, 16% of parliamentarians hold at least one other elected office, 15% in Spain, 13% in Great Britain and 10% in Germany. In January 2014, the French parliament adopted a law prohibiting the combination of local executive functions with a deputy or senator's post. This law came into force on March 31, 2017.