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ENHANCING TERRITORIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH PUBLIC POLICIES? INSIGHTS FROM INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION IN FRANCE

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Introduction

In recent decades, the study of space has undergone a profound transformation across the disciplines of social sciences, which has led to a re-examination of the concepts of place, territory and scale (Massey, 2005; Warf & Arias, 2009). A number of authors have argued that today's modernity was characterised by a transformation in individual relations to space and time, variously identified in terms of space-time compression (Harvey, 1989a; Bauman, 2000), spatiotemporal distancing (Giddens, 1990) or the emergence of a networked society (Castells, 1996). For Scheller and Urry (2006), the fact that many interactions no longer require proximity but rely on other forms of connection that entail different types of bodily, physical, virtual and imaginary mobility, constitutes the primary argument justifying a renewal of social science paradigms and concepts. Beyond differences in interpretation, most of the authors agree that there has been a profound transformation in the modes of social interaction and structuring, wherein simultaneity of connections, the inversion of near and remote, the spatial dispersal of activities, play a central role. Space is no longer considered purely in its physical aspect, as the receptacle or medium of human activities, but as a product of social relations. This new perspective has been accompanied by a revival of interest in critical analysis of the processes whereby space is appropriated and territories established, as portions of inhabited and developed space, but also as objects of conflict and balances of power between different social groups (Ripoll & Veschambre, 2005).

Reflections on the dynamics of socio-spatial structuring put a specific emphasis on the processes of state rescaling, at a time when globalisation has challenged the sovereignty of nation states and diminished their capacity for political regulation (Gualini, 2006). For Neil Brenner (1999, 2004), the economic drivers of capitalist deployment have led to a process of de- and re-territorialisation of political power. The outcome is a spatial organisation in which the big marketplaces (in particular metropolitan regions) are automatically advantaged to the detriment of other areas (Cox, 1997; Scott, 2001; Harvey, 2001). In this view, therefore, globalisation does not reduce the role of place: on the contrary, it is attached to 'fixed points' (Brenner, 1999), to local knowledge and skills that constitute limits to the hypermobility of capital (Cox, 1993).

This reorganisation of political space is accompanied by profound changes in modes of collective action. The state becomes one actor amongst many, and multiple agents – public and private – are now involved in making policies, especially at local scale. Following this diagnosis of the incapacity of governments to respond to the problems they face and to adjust to new forms of social, political and economic organisation, the notion of governance gained the ascendant as a means of describing these new forms of collective action (Harvey, 1989a; Mayntz, 1993). The term governance refers to systems of action in which governments, in order to achieve their political ends, are obliged to collaborate with a multiplicity of private actors. It is a way of accounting for the existence of fragmented processes of public action, for the different actors' diverse forms of legitimacy and the dynamics of negotiation they entail, for the vertical and horizontal nature of the modes of coordination and the blurring of the boundary between public and private actors (Le Galès, 1995). All this raises crucial questions about the actors involved, about forms and systems of

coordination, and about the ability to establish political networks with varying degrees of looseness and durability (Le Galès & Thatcher, 1995; Rhodes, 1997).

While the authors agree on the significance of this political rescaling process, there is less consensus about the capacity for political action of these “new territories”. Some commentators see this process as proof of the emergence and consolidation of the big cities as collective actors, stressing the resulting empowerment of local players (Bagnasco & Le Galès, 1997). Others, by contrast, are sceptical about the political capacity of the cities as autonomous players, showing that the ability of local actors to join forces around a collective project depends more on the history of the relations between the economic and political spheres than on the changes associated with globalisation, and stressing the importance of cities in sustaining or – conversely – undermining local initiatives (Jouve & Lefèvre, 1999). For their part, the adherents of critical geography condemn what they see as a trend towards the depoliticisation of decision-making processes, through the powerful influence of economic and neoliberal principles in urban policies (Harvey, 1989b, 2001).

In this chapter, we propose to tackle the question of the rescaling of political action through the implementation of public policies and, more specifically, of new forms of *territorial public regulation*. We argue that territorial development policies, in a context characterised by the growing strength of local actors and the development of new instruments of public action (contracts, territorial plans, etc.), are contributing to the formation of new territories. From this perspective, one of the crucial questions is the capacity of these multiple actors, representing different social groups but working together on a single territory, to integrate divergent interests.

While our empirical thinking draws primarily on French case studies, we will show that the question of the involvement of local actors in the implementation of territorial planning policies, and more specifically in the coordination of sectoral policies, forms part of a wider global trend in spatial planning and development policies, both at European level and in Europe’s different member states. This is evidenced, in particular, by the evolution of the concept of territorial cohesion within the European context and its implications for spatial planning and public action. The first section recalls in its broad lines the emergence of a European regional policy that seeks to incorporate the territorial dimension into the process of European integration. In the second section, we show that the emergence of this policy has been closely associated with changes in the regional policies conducted by the different member states which, despite their diversity, reveal converging global trends. The third section tackles the question of the implementation of territorial action that requires the coordination of a multiplicity of actors with potentially conflicting interests. It analyses the ways in which these different interests are integrated through a pragmatic approach to collective action, emphasising the methods whereby rules of action are co-constructed for a territory. Rather than taking a normative approach to issues of territorial governance, we shift the focus of analysis to the local (infra-regional) territorial scale, in order to observe the new forms of territorial public regulation. The fourth section applies this approach to the French case, drawing on two case studies of intermunicipal structures in the Île-de-France region.

1. From territorial cohesion to territorial policy integration: changes in European regional policy

In the common vocabulary of European planning officials, regional policy refers to a coordinated set of measures in the economic development and employment sectors, designed to even out disparities between regions within a single country (Nadin & Dühr, 2007). For a long time, the Commission’s prerogatives in regional policy remained limited, because of the reluctance of member states to delegate matters that they saw as within their area of responsibility.

Nevertheless, the idea of territorial cohesion, understood as the principle of balanced territorial development with the aim of fostering the development of the most dynamic regions while bringing

the least advantaged regions into parity, featured in thinking on European integration from the start (Faludi, 2007). For example, the Spaak report of 21 April 1956, which set out the broad lines of a future European Economic Community, recommended measures to support regional development (Pierret, 1984). Setting aside these recommendations, however, the authors of the Treaty of Rome ensured that regional development would remain a matter for member states, outside Community competence. For several decades, European regional policy was essentially associated with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), set up in 1975 to contribute to the financing of local development programmes intended to reduce the disparities between the different European regions. Moreover, in limiting the Commission's capacity to influence the choice of ERDF recipients, the member states played a central role in this policy by selecting projects to be put forward for European financial support.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) of 1999 was the first successful attempt to implement the principle of Europe-wide territorial cohesion (Faludi, 2006). In the first half of the 2000s, the priorities associated with territorial cohesion changed with the introduction of social cohesion and sustainable development objectives alongside economic competitiveness, in reference to the Lisbon strategy adopted in 2000 and amended by the Göteborg European Council meeting in 2001. Europe's spatial planning policy is built around three central concepts: polycentrism and the partnership between city and country; equal access to infrastructures and knowledge; sustainable development and the protection of natural and cultural heritage (EEC, 1999).

In the European Commission's thinking, territorial cohesion gradually became associated with the goals of harmonising regional policy and European sectoral policies. The conviction that European legislation was increasingly influencing national planning systems was in fact one of the major motives for the reinforcement of initiatives by the European institutions to enhance coordination between sectoral policies and achieve more harmonised territorial development in Europe (Dühr, Stead & Zonneveld, 2007). Meeting in Rotterdam in 2004, European Union ministers agreed on two goals: to anticipate and assess the impact of European sectoral policies, which were threatening to weaken the impact of territorial economic development policy; to take into account the diversity of potential in the different regions of the Union (Schout & Jordan, 2007). These two aims led to the establishment of the "Territorial Agenda of the European Union: towards a more competitive and sustainable Europe of diverse regions", adopted in Leipzig on 25 May 2007. In it, the notion of territorial cohesion is approached as a complex concept, relating to issues of coordination between territorial scales and sectors of intervention. In this framework document, territorial development policies are envisaged as the way for regions to develop their potential, or "territorial capital" (Waterhout, 2007).

Representing a break with previous European regional policy, which confined itself to providing financial support for regions in difficulty, the development strategy conceived from the 2000s onwards was based on the mobilisation of local authorities, with a primary emphasis on issues of governance, i.e. the mobilisation and coordination of local actors. To this end, it placed the accent on the capacity of the regions to coordinate development through formal and informal structures of cooperation, through debates, negotiations and decision-making processes aimed at implementing shared measures to promote regional dynamism (Meijers & Romein, 2003). For Farinós Dasi (2013), the goal is to foster the emergence of new and more ambitious forms of territorial cooperation, with the intention of developing local development strategies and spatial visions that are not restricted to local responses to the problems posed by globalisation, but form part of a wider strategy of collective action and contribute to the establishment of alternative models of sustainable development founded on the potential of regions.

The territorial integration of sectoral policies undoubtedly constitutes the most ambitious challenge in the quest for a more coherent approach to European territorial development. By contrast with the traditional approaches to spatial planning, which are generally top-down, this objective entails a less formal, bottom-up approach, based on proactive intervention by public actors at the different levels

of government (Schout & Jordan, 2007). Though ostensibly consensual, territorial policy integration is nevertheless associated with no concrete objectives, therefore running the risk – according to Schout and Jordan (2007, 841) – of becoming “a public good for which no one feels particularly responsible”.

The trend towards the harmonisation of sectoral policies is not specific to European regional policy: it emerged in various European countries as far back as the 1970s, at the time when the first reforms in territorial administration were being put in place. The prevalence of territorial cohesion principles in EU documents, then the growing importance of territorial policy integration, reflect the combined influence of various national traditions and initiatives for territorial development, planning and territorial reform.

2. Paradigm shift in regional policies in European countries: from the territory as a target to the territory as an object of public action

According to Faludi (2004, 2006), the French conception of territorial planning as developed under the aegis of the French Regional Planning Agency (Datar), set up in 1963, was a significant source of inspiration for European regional policy. Moving away from a regulatory approach to planning, whereby urban development is regulated through land-use norms, the initial aim of Datar's policy was to counterbalance the growth of the Paris conurbation by encouraging the development of the big provincial conurbations. Until the 1980s, this policy was underpinned by strong state intervention, in particular through the deliberate relocation of several large public and private enterprises and through the funding of large infrastructures. At regional scale, the implementation of this planning policy entailed the signature of State-Region Planning Contracts (*Contrats de Plan Etat-Région*),¹ which embodied national objectives and regional priorities in the form of large programmes for big infrastructure and development projects, jointly financed by central government, the regions and, to a lesser extent, by other territorial authorities.

Several concepts adopted by the European Commission and featuring in the European spatial development plan, such as territorial cohesion or networked polycentrism, were partially transposed from Datar's territorial development strategy or from the forward planning objectives it initiated for France (Faludi, 2007). Apart from these French sources of inspiration, the preparation and implementation of Europe's spatial development plan reflect a complex interplay of reciprocal influences, described by Dühr, Stead & Zonneveld (2007) as a circular Europeanisation process. All the Member States contributed to defining the content of the plan (Faludi, 2004) and, in return, applied these principles to national planning, resulting in changes to local policies and institutions, as Shaw and Sykes (2003) showed for the United Kingdom.

National traditions of territorial development, institutional organisation and spatial planning still exhibit significant diversity to this day. Nonetheless, since the 1990s, several convergent and interdependent trends would seem to reflect a change in territorial policies and in the means of their implementation.

The first concerns a turnaround and paradigm shift in regional policies. Following a period of withdrawal of regional policy due to the hostility of political majorities to active economic intervention by the state, new concepts emerged around the promotion of endogenous territorial development (Bachtler, 2003). Abandoning the redistributive aspirations characteristic of the welfare state, the new territorial development policies put the accent on the capacity of regions or metropolitan areas to innovate, to exploit local capacities and to establish an environment favourable to mutual learning, interactions and business networks, as well as collaborations between companies and public authorities (Morgan, 1997). In France, these policies represented a break with the centralised setting of planning rules, creating the conditions for local management of

¹ Changed to State-Region project contracts (*Contrats de Projet Etat-Région*) in 2007.

development across the country (Douillet, 2003). This change of perspective was closely linked with economic globalisation, where “firms escape territorial influences, while territories become more dependent on firms”: against this background, the power of states to regulate the balances between regional economies was weakened, whereas the development and integration of the regions into the global economy seemed increasingly linked with regional characteristics (Keating, 1997, 386).

The second trend reflects the revival of interest in regional and local strategic planning, in particular at large metropolitan scale (Bachtler, 2003; Salet, Thornley & Kreukels, 2003). This planning revival was motivated by the increasing need to coordinate public policies, whether between sectors of activity or between levels of government. The new planning tools attributed greater importance to projects than to rules or plans, and applied equally to sectoral dimensions (transport, economic development, urban regeneration, etc.) and to more transversal planning and development strategies (Healey et al., 1997; Albrechts, 2006). These territorial development projects might be implemented at the scale of existing administrative areas, or conversely be underpinned by formal or informal partnership relations, allowing strategies to be applied at whatever territorial scale was deemed to be functionally relevant. In France, for example, the 1999 Law ‘Orientation pour le développement et l’aménagement durable du territoire’ adopted a federalist conception of territorial development: it promoted the development of territorial projects at regional or conurbation scale, where necessary cutting across the boundaries of existing institutions.

The third trend relates to the reform of territorial institutions. The reforms conducted in the 1970s in many European countries reflected the need to adapt administrative perimeters to functional spaces, more specifically in large conurbations or metropolitan areas. Successfully implemented in Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, the UK and in certain former Eastern Bloc countries, they were notably founded on municipal mergers (Marcou, 2012). In the 1990s, the involvement in institutional questions ceased to be a matter for states alone. The ongoing decentralisation of powers, common to numerous European countries, combined with the process of European construction, which contributed to thinking about the reorganisation of territorial decision-making levels (Jouve & Lefèvre, 1999). In the big conurbations or metropolitan areas, these institutional changes provided opportunities that were seized upon by local actors in order to try to create governments or intermunicipal partnerships at a wider territorial scale.

The general aspiration of the new territorial policies was to promote the involvement of local actors in the establishment of development strategies suited to the specificities of their territories. This meant that the territory was no longer considered as a space for the application of public policies, but as an object and an instrument of collective action focused on fostering local development (Douillet, 2003). However, the development of collective action strategies depends on the emergence of a shared territorial vision and on the coordination of a multiplicity of public and private actors with divergent interests. It is in terms of this crucial question of the reconciliation of interests that we propose to examine the emergence of a capacity for collective territorial action.

3. A pragmatic approach to territorial public regulation

The reconciliation of different and even divergent interests, embodied by a multiplicity of legitimate actors representing distinct social worlds, is a central question in the analysis of local public action. How do these actors contribute to the constitution of public problems? How do they mobilise to act collectively and how do they deploy the resources and means to resolve them? How do they adjust their interests to make action possible? All these questions, closely associated with the problem of governability, relate to the way in which certain social problems, characterised by a heterogeneity of priorities, of actors and of action itself, become “politically tractable”: in other words, the question is no longer “Who governs?” but “How to achieve governability?” (Lascoumes, 1996, 326).

In opting to approach the question through pragmatic analysis, with the aim of describing “politics in action”, we explore the transactions between the public actors representing different geographical scales around the implementation of local development projects (Gallez & Ollivier-Trigalo, 2011; Gallez, 2014). We have applied this analysis to the intervention of the *communautés d’agglomération* (intermunicipal structures) in France, in order to consider the specificity of the role of these cooperative intermunicipal institutions, entities that have their own financial resources and extensive powers, but which until recently lacked specific political autonomy. Indeed, until 2014, towns and cities were run by mayors or municipal councillors, elected by direct universal suffrage at municipal – but not intermunicipal – level.²

In reference to J.-D. Reynaud’s social regulation theory (1989), we have employed the notion of *territorial public regulation*, which refers to the processes whereby public actors at different scales, acting on a given territory, compare rules and agree on a system of shared rules. The setting of these rules reflects the diversity of political rationales, depending on whether they relate – in particular – to a hierarchy of urban functions (e.g. maintaining a balance between housing and employment) or a hierarchy of values (e.g. promoting or conversely restricting the building of social housing). We consider how these rationales collide and culminate (or not) in common rules that guide public action. More specifically, we try to characterise the role of intermunicipal actors in a process of regulation that seeks to reconcile priorities that are in principle different, possibly through resistance to rules set by other actors, in particular emanating from state level.

Taking as our starting point the theory that J.-D. Reynaud applied to relationships and conflicts in the corporate world, we have adapted his hypotheses to the analysis of transactions between the public actors involved in implementing local planning operations.

1°) On the basis of Durkheim’s postulate that there is no such thing as a society without rules, and that these rules are imposed on individuals from the outside, Reynaud argues that the existence of a variety of social groups introduces an interplay between these rules. The interactions between individuals are made up of alliances, rivalries and conflicts.

In the sphere of local public action, the combined reinforcement in the prerogatives of the state and of local authorities or public intermunicipal institutions in the construction of urban public action results in the confrontation of different principles for the setting and territorialisation of the rules of action. At intermunicipal territorial scale, two types of rationale in particular collide: a *top-down* principle, mainly from state or regional actors, which begins with norms or objectives set at national or regional level and then applied to the local level of municipalities or municipal groupings; a *bottom-up* principle, pursued by local actors and in particular elected municipal and intermunicipal councillors and officials, which consists in setting rules for the municipal or intermunicipal area through the aggregation of municipal needs, an aggregation that can be influenced by different techniques, ranging from addition (or juxtaposition) to prioritisation.

2°) The individual’s relation to rules is negotiated. Individuals do not comply with imposed constraints or big principles, but reach agreement on rules that they consider legitimate.

Likewise, we argue that the relationship of local actors to the rules set at state or regional level is negotiated. More specifically, we envisage these negotiations from the perspective of a confrontation of rules constructed separately by state representatives and local players. By contrast with the idea of cross-regulation (Grémion, 1976), where territorialisation is understood as the process of adapting policy drafted at national scale to the specificities of a territory, we consider that the local actors contribute to the identification and resolution of public problems affecting the territory they represent.

² Until 2014, intermunicipal councillors were appointed by municipalities following municipal elections. This method of operation maintained municipal sovereignty and the principle of the freedom of municipalities to join intermunicipal institutions, constantly reaffirmed by the reforms in territorial organisation in France since the failure of the Marcellin Act of 1971 on municipal mergers. For the first time in March 2014, intermunicipal representatives were elected by direct universal suffrage, by earmarking, in municipalities with more than 1000 inhabitants.

3°) Individuals use these rules as resources, and the maintenance of the rules depends on their adherence to a shared project. This adherence generally arises from the agreement of individuals around a project, and their interest in its implementation.

In the sphere of territorial development, we see an increasing use of instruments for the coordination of collective action, such as projects or contracts, in place of classic planning instruments such as plans or norms. Several recent works on the harmonisation of transport and development policies have notably shown that coordination between sectoral actors takes place within the context of tangible projects, or within the framework of specific contractual procedures, rather than in the implementation of general master plans or strategic plans, whose scope is more directed towards promoting a territorial authority's political project than in the – necessarily conflictual and negotiated – implementation of that project (Gallez et al., 2013; Maulat, 2014). In the case of specific development operations, on the other hand, the public actors are generally well advised to agree on common rules in order to make collective action possible. Financial timeframes, amongst other things, provide a powerful incentive for the actors to work together to bring the project to fruition. This process forces the parties to accept compromises, and sometimes, for those less well endowed with resources, to give up their demands, thereby becoming marginalised in the collective decision-making process.

4. Intermunicipal structures in territorial public regulation

Works on urban governance have helped us to understand the evolution of collective modes of action, in particular the influence of economic factors in public regulation. Nevertheless, these analyses say little about the specifically political dimension of the arenas of local action, about the degree of autonomy of local actors vis-a-vis higher-level economic or political pressures, or about the differences between metropolitan areas (Faure, 2007; Kübler and Tomàs, 2010). Moreover, few authors have so far explored the connections between structures of intermunicipal coordination and metropolitan scale governance (Nelles, 2009, 2013). However, according to Nelles (2013), the capacity for metropolitan governance crucially depends on the strength of the horizontal partnerships between municipalities within the urban region. In focusing on how the interests of the public actors operating within a given territory are reconciled and on the particular role of intermunicipal structures in this process, our aim is to contribute to the analysis of the political dimension of governance around an entity – the intermunicipal institution – which clearly bears a problematic relation to questions about the coherence of public action and about democracy.

Assessed in terms of their perimeters, or the responsibilities delegated by the member municipalities to the intermunicipal institution or to its operational procedures, the intermunicipal structure's capacities for collective action have generally been judged very inadequate by researchers, whether working in a legal, political science or planning perspective. Numerous works have reached largely convergent conclusions regarding the inadequacy or undesirable effects of the (re)organisation of local administrative and political territories, which makes the protection of municipal autonomy a major principle. Some political scientists have stressed the opacity of the decisions taken at intermunicipal level and the system of "municipal consensus" that enhance the power of mayors – more so than municipal councils – to the detriment of democratic practices that would demand transparency and adversarial debate (Desage, 2009). As for the spatial planning or local finance specialists, they cite narrowness of perimeters, inadequate integration of municipal prerogatives, opportunism of alliances, additional financial cost and lack of rationality of public action, among the typical failings of intermunicipal institutions with tax-raising powers which – despite laws introduced in the 2000s to encourage project-based intermunicipal action – they see as doing little more than to concentrate the management of collective services (Delannoy, Rieu and Pallez, 2004).

However, even now, few of these works have looked at the content of intermunicipal policies. Yet it seems to us essential to do more than criticise – necessary as this is – certain failings or inadequacies in these structures, and to analyse what they contribute to produce. To this end, one must avoid an excessively normative vision of the intermunicipal institution, of its ‘appropriate’ scope or its ideal powers, and to shift the interrogation to its concrete role within the local system of actors. Starting with the conclusion established in earlier work – i.e. that the intermunicipal structure is not an autonomous political entity, independent of its constitutive municipalities – we have formulated the hypothesis that, in these circumstances, the specificity of the intermunicipal role lies in its capacity to strengthen the legitimacy and capacities for negotiation of municipalities in their dealings with the other public actors (Gallez, 2014). If the intermunicipal structure has not become a new collective actor, arbitrating between municipal interests and acting in the name of a ‘higher’ territorial interest, does not its activity nevertheless serve to make municipal representatives aware of a community of interests, and help to develop collective action for the purpose of defending the priorities of that territory and its inhabitants?

In testing this hypothesis, our analysis followed two paths. The first was to identify to what extent membership of an intermunicipal structure changed the conditions of dialogue between municipalities, state representatives and other local authorities, and the impact that this had on the content of development projects. The second concerned the role of intermunicipal technical departments which, by contrast with the political actors, constitute a specific component of the intermunicipal structure. Beginning with the idea that the technical managers of these departments are not directly accountable to the municipalities and that, in principle, they develop specific intermunicipal level expertise, we examined their capacity to construct a global vision that would contribute to the visibility and credibility of projects, or even transgress the territorial boundaries of municipalities and the established distribution of powers.

We looked at the case of the Île-de-France region through the study of two *communautés d’agglomération* (intermunicipal groupings), located in the inner and outer suburbs of Paris (Gallez et al., 2011). Here, we will draw selectively on examples taken from the study of two planning operations implemented within the territory of the Communauté d’agglomération du Val-de-Bièvre (CAVB), a grouping of seven municipalities in the inner suburbs of Paris: the covering of a section of urban motorway, the A6b, and an urban regeneration project for a social housing estate, Chaperon Vert, overlapping the municipalities of Arcueil and Gentilly.

Three dimensions appear to us particularly characteristic of the role of the intermunicipal structure in the territorial public regulation: a strategic dimension, a political dimension and a cognitive dimension. These dimensions are neither independent of each other nor mutually exclusive, and their relative significance can moreover alter depending on the maturity of the process of intermunicipal cooperation, on the evolution of political alliances or political conflicts within the intermunicipal institution, and on exogenous events or factors that modify the ingredients of alliance.

4.1 A strategic role: being recognised as a legitimate interlocutor

First of all, the intermunicipal structure plays a role as the representative of the municipalities, which provides or facilitates the access of municipal players to arenas of discussion or negotiation with the state or other territorial authorities, which they would find difficult to access individually. This first dimension of the intermunicipal role is, in principle, the one that requires the least integration of municipal policies. It is dominant in informal modes of cooperation, during the first phases of more formal cooperation or early in the construction of collective projects, when the internal debate does not (yet) bear on the direction or the content of collective action. The aim, then, for elected representatives, is to be recognised as legitimate interlocutors through the intermunicipal structure and to obtain external visibility.

According to one of the mayors in the CAVB, the conviction “that together they will get more for their territory” characterised the move towards intermunicipal cooperation in Île-de-France in the 1990s. The establishment of a first intermunicipal understanding between five members in 1995 was indicative of a minimum level of engagement, placing very little constraint on the municipalities. The collective effort undertaken by municipal representatives and technicians in this first cooperative structure would facilitate the creation of the *communauté d’agglomération* in 1999, despite the overt hostility of the mayors of certain municipalities to the Chevènement Act, which sought to reinforce the resources of intermunicipal structures with tax-raising powers.

Deciding against retrenchment on their municipal areas and realising that competition between municipalities was counter-productive, the mayors decided to cooperate on employment and economic development, a boundary shift that made it possible to tackle territorial competition within the *département* or region. In particular, the need for a change of image and collective action on the environment was perceived as much more decisive in attracting new firms than differences in business tax levels. The involvement of the CAVB’s representatives in the Vallée Scientifique de la Bièvre (VSB) process was indicative of this desire to join forces in promoting territorial priorities. This community approach emerged in the 1990s at the instigation of the chairman of the Val-de-Marne Development Council, who approached the mayors of some twenty municipalities in Val de Marne and in Hauts de Seine in order to convince them of the desirability of a project to promote the Vallée de la Bièvre area around research and innovation activities, already a strong presence in the territory. For the mayors in the CAVB, participation in the VSB project was a way to remedy the failings of a municipal area of whose inadequacy they were well aware: they collectively used the VSB to promote an area specialising in research and scientific development activities, in order to influence planning priorities at regional level.

Within a context of strong territorial competition, the intermunicipal structure’s strategic support proved particularly effective in obtaining funding. This effectiveness was apparent in the operation to covering the A6b motorway, where political backing from the intermunicipal entity was influential both in giving the mayors an organised and credible voice, and also in ensuring the project’s inclusion in the State-Region Planning Contract, where there was tough competition between municipal authorities to obtain priority for their projects. The CAVB’s support for the Chaperon Vert urban regeneration project was also decisive in obtaining an initial state subsidy, again in a context of strong competition over project selection, even though the estate was in fairly good condition and not in urgent need of renovation.

4.2 *An instrument of political resistance*

Through the *communauté d’agglomération*, local actors can negotiate for their interests and contribute to the setting of framework rules for local policies. The *political* dimension relates to the active negotiation of the norms or orientations of intermunicipal action, either internally, on behalf of the conurbation’s collective interests, or in external negotiations with central government or other territorial authorities. This political role is not always underpinned by integrated intermunicipal policies. In many cases, however, it entails arrangements, or even compromises, at intermunicipal level.

The capacity of local politicians, and particularly mayors, to defend and negotiate their interests with state representatives through the *Communauté d’agglomération* clearly emerges from the analysis of the two development operations studied.

The solidarity shown by the mayors of the CAVB in the negotiations with the state and local authority representatives that were contributing financially to the project, worked in favour of the recognition of local demands. This solidarity was first expressed between the mayors of the municipalities directly concerned with the two projects. Without a strong coalition of municipal actors backing demands for the “urban repair” of the fracture caused by the A6b motorway, it would seem unlikely that the state would have accepted to go back on its plan to rebuild the existing

acoustic barrier in exactly the same way. Once the first phase of canvassing the finance providers to get the project included in the State-Region Plan Contract (CPER) was over, the following phases, focused on defining the content of the project and on applications for an extended programme, give a good picture of the political aspect of intermunicipal engagement. The strong alliance between the mayors was able to reverse the balance of power with the state, project owner of the motorway infrastructure. First, the negative opinion expressed by local politicians through the *communauté d'agglomération* during preliminary consultation on the project registered in the CPER, forced the state to take account of the demands of the municipalities through a programme extension. The face-off around the contents of the project between the state and local representatives continued: the three mayors' unyielding refusal to pursue negotiations until the project included an extension of the line to the town of Arcueil, shook the central government departments, which had an urgent interest in completing the project. The three-mayor coalition enjoyed the support of all the municipalities of the CAVB, even those not concerned by the project. This was evidenced by the unanimous vote by elected municipal representatives in favour of financing further studies as a basis for counterproposals. Similarly, at the moment when the two parties were moving towards an agreement around the development project, backed by local politicians, the CAVB allocated part of the intermunicipal budget towards providing the finance needed.

The Chaperon Vert urban regeneration project also demonstrates the effectiveness of intermunicipal support for a project that was out of step with the canons of the National urban renewal agency (Agence nationale de la rénovation urbaine or Anru). Local politicians in Gentilly opposed the application of the demolition-reconstruction principle promoted by Anru in order to encourage a greater social mix in social housing areas. For these communist councillors, the strong demand for social housing in the municipality and the impossibility of rehousing all the estate's inhabitants, some of them in a very vulnerable situation, made the demolition of the existing social housing out of the question. The mayor of Arcueil took a different view of the demolition option: if its implementation was made conditional on the possibility of rehousing all the people in the area who wanted to move, he saw this option as an opportunity to be seized, at a time when funds for the renewal of social housing had become hard to find. Despite these differences, the mayor of Arcueil stood with the Gentilly councillors, thereby strengthening the two municipalities' negotiating hand. Exploiting the good relations that he had maintained with the Agency's representatives since the renovation of another social housing zone located in his municipality, he played a mediating role with Anru's regional representative, who promoted the project with the Agency's financial partners.

In both projects, the intermunicipal technical departments responsible for the technical management of the planning studies for the CAVB played a very important role. The mayors and councillors in the CAVB agreed to provide technical specialists to deal with the different project owners and contractors involved in the two operations and to guarantee the project's progress and technical continuity. However, it could not be assumed in advance that the legitimacy of these interlocutors would be recognised, and here again, a patient and complex process of mediation was required for these technical actors to gain the trust of the state engineers in the case of the motorway works, and of the municipal developers and the state's regional representatives in the case of the Chaperon Vert renewal project.

4.1 A cognitive role: building a global vision without imposing it

The political role of the intermunicipal structure would seem to be inseparable from its expert role, whether performed by its own technical services or by outsourced specialists. The ability of the intermunicipal technical services to develop a global project vision, partially spanning municipal boundaries, relates to the cognitive dimension of intermunicipal learning.

The Chaperon Vert urban renewal project demonstrates the leeway open to these services to promulgate a more collective vision and practices of development.

From the start of the project, the preliminary redevelopment studies, conducted by several architectural teams, revealed disagreements between the two municipalities about the demolition option. Responding with scepticism to the architects' proposals, the councillors from the two municipalities decided to call in their own developers. Here, the role of the intermunicipal services was to harmonise the two municipal projects, which had been developed separately.

The first task was to achieve a balance between the different aspects – relating to housing, transport, amenities or social policies – within the tight and restrictive framework imposed by Anru and by the involvement of the developers. According to the operation's project manager, the resulting priority placed on work on the buildings rather than on developing a global vision of the urban project, made the task of the municipal services particularly tricky. Adjusting the area's transit plan, on the basis of traffic plans drawn up by each of the two municipalities, was particularly difficult, because of the two communities' different expectations regarding the opening up of the neighbourhoods. The harmonisation process therefore demanded day-to-day mediation between the principal players: as one councillor noted, the intermunicipal structure made it possible to avoid the tensions that might have arisen from direct dialogue between the municipalities.

Moreover, the intermunicipal technical services became involved in the "blank areas" in the project, in particular those largely neglected by the developers or points of obscurity, which required further work. For example, the district's central square, which overlapped both municipalities but was of no interest to the developers, received specific and substantial attention from the intermunicipal project managers. By infiltrating the interstices of the project, the technical departments were able to intervene in domains or on spaces that would normally fall under municipal responsibility, in support of the global vision backed by the project team. For example, the question of parking was tackled, at the request of the representatives of both municipalities, by the intermunicipal departments, which conducted an assessment and proposed parking measures and a parking management scheme within the district and its immediate surrounds.

In the case of the covering of the state-owned A6b motorway, the involvement of the CAVB's technical services in the content of the project was more limited. It became greater in the final phase, however, when the priority was to conduct the preliminary project studies as quickly as possible. It was the intermunicipal services that provided the state with a legal solution for further studies, which enabled the CAVB to retain control over the choices relating to urban development. They also closely maintained close supervision over the work of the engineering office, in conditions of particularly sharp conflict between the architects and the state engineers, by ensuring that the engineering contractor adhered to the specifications and the project timelines. In organisational terms, the phasing developed by the intermunicipal departments for the different sequences of the project made it possible for the mayors concerned to be more directly associated with the scheduling of works. According to the CAVB project manager, this approach also allowed comparisons between the municipalities' choices and work to harmonise the main development priorities. The intermunicipal technicians, together with the councillor responsible for the project, took particular care to ensure that the three municipalities primarily affected should agree on the assessment and on the main development options.

At all times, the work of the municipal departments remained under the political control of the municipal authorities, though to varying degrees depending on the nature and stages of the project. The degree of autonomy granted by municipal representatives to the intermunicipal structure depends on their trust in the technicians. For example, the first intermunicipal project director for the Chaperon Vert renewal project was sacked by the mayors, who felt that she was exceeding her powers by intervening directly on the project content. Conversely, in the situation of uncertainty that followed the municipalities' approach to developers, the municipal representatives clearly recovered their confidence in the intermunicipal services, which facilitated and stabilised their relations with the developers, initially marked by mutual distrust.

More generally, attempts by the intermunicipal structure to emancipate itself from the municipalities through the proposals or initiatives of the technical departments were counterbalanced by the determination of the municipal representatives, in particular the mayors, to maintain their decision-making powers, in particular with regard to urban development. The municipal councillors and mayors were concerned that the intermunicipal structure, by gaining too much influence in the management of development or housing policies, might restrict their municipal development choices or their population strategy.³ This tension was particularly marked in the case of the CAVB. One representative explained that the difference in technical resources between the municipalities and the intermunicipal structure can create imbalances that are difficult to manage, in particular when the lead taken by the intermunicipal services makes it difficult to keep municipal representatives and populations informed of technical choices. Other councillors emphasise the impossibility of reducing urban planning issues to technical factors. So although municipalities cannot ignore intermunicipal or metropolitan priorities, they must also “integrate them into a debate with the populations, through choices that are democratically constructed”. Against this background, the mayors see themselves as the primary guarantors of this democratic debate at municipal level.

Conclusion

As an instrument that mayors can use to defend their autonomy, a mouthpiece and reinforcement in the negotiation between municipalities and other public actors, the intermunicipal structure largely fails to meet normative expectations about territorial reorganisation, but instead contributes actively to the defence of local interests. To claim that intermunicipal structures do little, or even nothing, to harmonise municipal priorities and to promote a shared vision, is to make the implicit assumption that such a global (or even optimal) vision exists and would be preferable to the juxtaposition of particular municipal interests. It would seem doubtful that there is such a thing as a global vision that it is incumbent on local territories to accept on purely functional or rational criteria (even criteria that have been debated at national level), at a time when the problems posed by economic globalisation, increasing environmental pressure or the widening inequality associated with the economic and financial crisis, require political engagement and choices by local actors.

As for the intermunicipal structure’s function as a *territorial intermediary*, it is no doubt more marked in Île-de-France, where competition for finance between municipalities and the pressure from central government and the Region for metropolitan priorities to be taken into account are particularly strong. Nevertheless, while it may not be possible to draw general conclusions from the situation observed in Île-de-France, it does permit us to make certain qualifications to the claims put forward by certain authors (Desage, 2009; Epstein, 2012) regarding the depoliticisation of intermunicipal decisions or the free compliance of local actors with state norms. For Renaud Epstein (2012), decentralising reforms since the early 2000s have led to convergence rather than differentiation in local policies. In his view, while this does not reflect a wholesale return of the state, which no longer enjoys hierarchical authority over local actors, the latter – because of the strengthening of certain incentive mechanisms (notably in the method of financing urban renewal projects) – now comply freely with state norms. However, the capacity of local politicians and populations to resist technical norms and the political doxa promulgated by certain state representatives seems to us to provide evidentiary counterexamples to that argument. For his part, Fabien Desage (2009) observes a trend towards the depoliticisation of debates within intermunicipal assemblies, which is characterised by the dominance of consensus and by the almost total absence of partisan conflict. Nevertheless, while it is true that compromise dominates at intermunicipal

³ In France, mayors are responsible for issuing building permits, on the basis of a PLU (local masterplan) which defines protected areas and construction areas. They also play an important role in deciding the content of development operations (housing types, balance between business and residential property) and in the allocation of social housing.

level, conflicts of interest, the opposition to state norms and the negotiated construction of shared rules of action – in a word, politics – reappear forcefully in the negotiations conducted between municipalities and the state through intermunicipal structures. Beyond the apparent standardisation of the instruments and procedures of public action, and despite the reinforcement of state-imposed constraints, local actors – through the support of intermunicipal structures – are actively involved in the political construction of public policies (Zittoun, 2013).

Several questions emerge in the light of these observations.

The first concerns the political capacity of intermunicipal structures. While our work highlights, in certain particular projects, the emergence of new ways of co-constructing a territorialised common good, uncertainty remains on the ability of intermunicipal structures to implement redistributive community policies in their territories. This ability crucially depends on financial resources and their distribution, in a system of local taxation that does little to encourage cooperation between municipalities. It also varies sharply depending on the sectors of action considered: whereas transport and mobility policies constitute a unifying theme, which has significantly contributed to the emergence and reinforcement of political power at agglomeration scale in France (Gallez, 2007), housing policies – associated as they are with population dynamics – remain under strong mayoral control (Desage, 2012).

The second question concerns the role of the other public actors, in particular the Regions and central government, in the implementation of parity policies at the metropolitan, regional and national scales. There is a serious risk that the emergence of local territories might fuel interterritorial competition, without adequate instruments to ensure solidarity at the regional scale. Now many local players, while expressing a strong desire for political autonomy, also complain of a lack of strategic vision on the part of the state and the retreat of state actors into no more than a legal monitoring role (Gallez, 2014). This paradoxical situation highlights the ambiguity and complexity of a mode of governance in which state actors are hard put to find a legitimate function. It would also seem to indicate the lack of a unifying plan, embodying ideas and even ideals that could harmonise the different territorial projects.

The third question concerns the possibility of drawing general lessons from analyses conducted at local level. As Reimer and Blotegel (2012) point out with regard to comparative analyses of spatial planning in Europe, the emphasis placed on regulatory and organisational factors has given a false impression of convergence between planning systems, an impression belied by the analysis of local practices. Indeed, significant specificities persist in spatial planning practices and local public action, reflecting national planning traditions and territorial administrative and political organisation, but also reflecting systems of action and local urban, social, economic and demographic conditions that affect both the conditions of production and the content of planning (Farinós Dasi, 2007; Gallez et al., 2013). The aspiration, expressed by many spatial planning specialists and reflected in European structures, to identify good practices and to find “models” for the harmonisation of territorial policies, has inhibited comparative research into local planning practices and local urban policies. Yet it would seem essential to understand and to identify local specificities in order to understand the different conditions that govern change and the engagement of local public actors in managing the challenges that they will face in the coming decades.

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