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► To cite this version:

Lydie Launay. Polarisation and social mix policies in metropolises : thinking the governance of housing in Paris perceived through the London experience. Regions The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association, 2013. halshs-01908141

HAL Id: halshs-01908141

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01908141>

Submitted on 21 Jan 2019

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Polarisation and social mix strategies in metropolises: The governance of housing in Paris perceived through the experience of London

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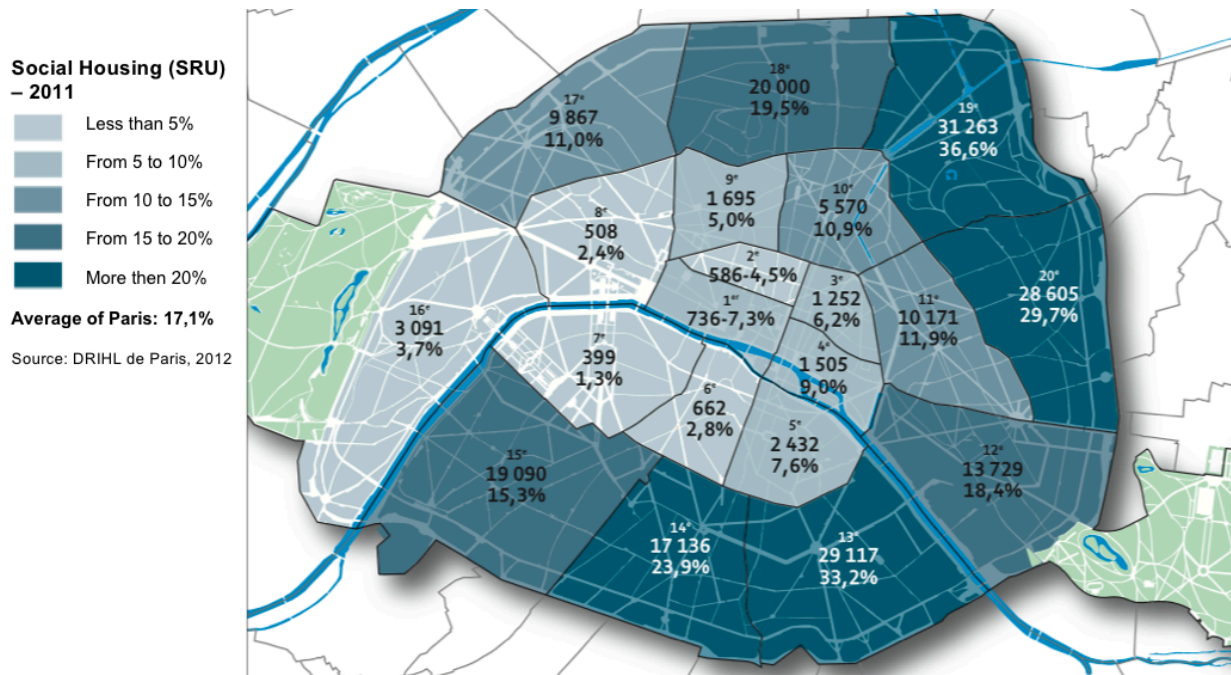
Within the context of the economic crisis and increasing social inequalities, the accessibility to quality housing has become a problem for a growing number of households in Paris and London, as they are pushed into the suburban and exurban areas, not well connected to the core of these metropolises. This rise in urban inequalities raises the pertinent issue of spatial justice (Marcuse, 2009) which, to be achieved, requires the governance of housing policies on a metropolitan-wide scale. Although this requirement, which has arisen out of globalisation and decentralisation (Le Galès, 2003), was established in London due to the 2007 transfer of housing authority to the Greater London Authority (GLA), it will only emerge in Paris with the creation of the Grand Paris. In the absence of a governance authority, the City of Paris has since 2001 led a social mix strategy whose aims and methods have strong similarities with those put in place in Greater London, raising the question about the possibility of extending it on a metropolitan scale. Thus, a comparative approach of these strategies contributes to the ongoing discussions on urban and institutional issues around the creation of a metropolitan governance body for housing in the Grand Paris.

Fighting against polarisation

Governing housing is one of the main challenges in both capital cities. For over thirty years, the historic polarisation has been reinforced, widening urban inequalities (Hamnett, 2003; Préteceille, 2003). The centrifugal force of the real estate on the residential choices of modest households pushes them farther out, sometimes beyond regional borders. Also, beside this fragmentation between the centre and the suburbs, overlaps another one between the western affluent areas and the working-class areas of the eastern areas. However, these areas are affected by different evolutions at a micro-local scale, gentrification of old houses and industrial buildings and impoverishment of social housing estates, which produce a social mosaic. Faced with this polarisation and within a context of inter-city competition, the City of Paris and the Mayor of London are conducting social mix housing strategies that aim both to rebalance the location of the affordable housing supply in the stated goal of promoting greater spatial justice (Launay, 2011). The two institutions perceive the polarisation as a threat to social cohesion, as it penalises

firstly deprived households and also the middle classes, and the competitiveness, economic growth of the metropolis, which needs the presence of a broad variety of workers. While the perimeter of intervention of the London strategy includes thirty-two boroughs and then covers a large part of the metropolitan area, Paris' strategy is limited to the core of the metropolis, the twenty *arrondissements*, which considerably reduces its scope.

Figure 1: Social housing in Paris, 2011



Coercion versus incitement

These two strategies set out in the main housing programmes, the Programme Local de l'Habitat (PLH) in Paris and the Housing Strategy in London, have ambitious objectives in terms of the production of affordable housing: in Paris, 25% of housing must be social; in London, under the 2004 London Plan, 50% of new supply was to be affordable of which 70% was to be social housing and 30% was to be other sub-market (intermediate) housing. Incorporated in the overall urban plan, the Plan Local d'Urbanisme (PLU) in Paris and the London Plan, these objectives must be reached in a rebalancing objective so as not to reinforce the concentration of social housing and to create mixed communities. After 10 years of implementation, the Paris strategy has produced encouraging results (see Figure 1), while the results of London's strategy have been middling. Apart from the fact that the London experience is more recent, this difference comes to its incentive aspect, which is the opposite of the Paris experience. Indeed, the mayors of the affluent *arrondissements*, all opposed to the strategy imposed by the socialist mayor Bertrand Delanoë, cannot go against them; their jurisdiction in terms of housing is limited to the allocation of 25% of social housing. Conversely, the London strategy adapts to the local needs and also to the

political context, which gives an important role to the boroughs in the application of the strategy. While Ken Livingston favoured the centralisation of decisions and jurisdiction and increased the coercive powers of the metropolis, Boris Johnson has since 2008 strengthened the autonomy of the boroughs. The affluent boroughs, primarily conservative, can more easily deviate from the principle of rebalancing. This permanent tension between the local and the metropolitan level, identified by Travers (2003), seriously weakens its implementation.

There is another point of tension in the two metropolitan areas: the State remains a central actor in housing. It produces laws and allocates funding to local authorities (notably housing benefits) and we can also assume that the austerity measures contribute greatly to the rise of urban inequalities. Moreover, the State intervenes directly on planning, through urban renewal programmes for example, which can create tensions and conflicts between institutional levels.



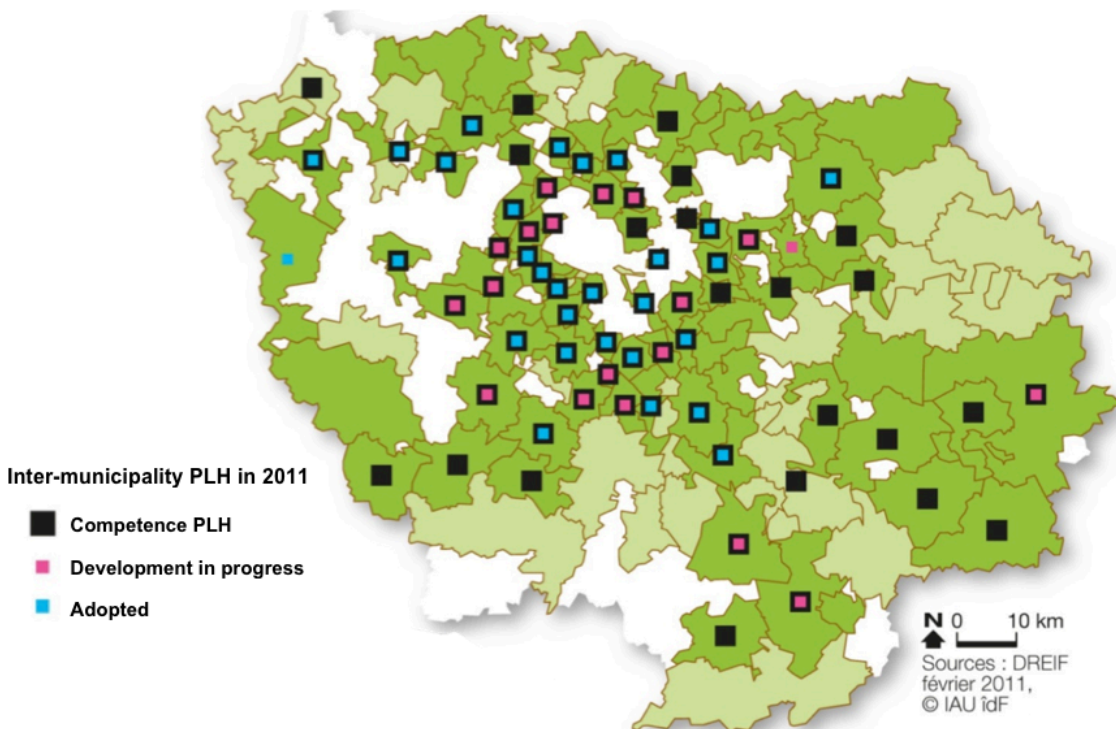
Social housing in the African neighbourhood, la Goutte d'Or, Paris.

For strong housing governance in Paris

The absence of governance in Ile-de- France has created both horizontal and vertical fragmentations in local policies (Lefèvre, 2009), which have led to greater urban inequalities. Many locally elected officials have grasped the urgent need to coordinate programmes at a regional level and have come together to form a syndicate, called Paris Métropole, in order to think about the future of the region and its metropolitan governance. Along with that, the regional urban planning plan, called the Schéma directeur de la région Ile-de-France, was updated in 2008. In response, the conservative government has tried to re-centralize metropolitan government by creating the Grand Paris in 2010, which has stirred up tension between the different institutional levels. However, the election of President Hollande promises a favourable

environment, the City of Paris, the Region and the State are now all socialist. The minister for Housing, Cecile Duflot, plans to create an organising housing authority in charge of establishing main orientations at a regional level and coordinating housing programmes, including the PLH, within the framework of new decentralisation laws. One point remains debateable: the degree of decision-making autonomy and the coercive power devoted to this authority. It is a central stake for the State that wants to hang onto control of that region, considered to be the economic powerhouse of France.

Figure 2: Inter-municipalities PLH 2011



Armed with the housing jurisdiction, this authority could deeply transform the socio-spatial landscape of the region and reduce its segregation. To do this, it will have to face several challenges, first of all the coordination of timetables. Many local authorities (there are 1200 communes in Ile-de-France) have adopted a PLH or are working on the creation of one (see Figure 2), whose orientations can interfere with the idea of regional rebalancing of social housing. These strong divisions will require the re-articulation of local programmes as well as institutional perimeters in order to rationalise and improve the efficiency of local programmes, undertakings with varied logics, to build a coherent regional strategy. This reconfiguration of the political, institutional and administrative framework of the Ile-de-France cannot emerge without a strong political will and a shared vision of its future, which transcends local ambitions and self-interests. This is one of the major challenges that the future authority will face – even more so since, within a context where central questions such as housing will be raised, the multiplicity of actors will incite conflict – with each actor wanting to impose his or her vision on the broad orientations and methods of intervention. Subject to the fluctuations and turbulence of the politics, political games

and national and local alliances, this authority will have to create a “territorial leadership” (Lefèvre, *op.cit*) in order to produce governmental housing policies which are viewed as a legitimate project.

The feedback provided by the London experience shows that a metropolitan authority can be a real pressure point for an overall housing strategy to reduce urban inequalities, through its ability to provide a coherent vision of the metropolitan area and to rationalise local finances and jurisdictions. However, in the absence of coercive powers, the actions of the Greater London Authority (GLA) remain dependant on the current system of national and local actors (particularly with the boroughs), and on the GLA’s ability to negotiate with them, since the boroughs possess relatively large room for manoeuvre. On the contrary, Paris imposes its strategy on the *arrondissements*, which inhibits the effects of local self-interests and oppositions. However, if it can inspire the future metropolitan strategy, the issue of local democracy has to be raised. How can one articulate, within the metropolitan system, the different and sometimes conflicting visions and logic of local and national actors involved in the region, in accordance with the democratic requirement? This difficulty can be viewed as a stimulating challenge, which confronts the regional organising housing authority and, more generally, the Grand Paris, to achieve both efficiencies and spatial justice; its creation represents a huge opportunity to rethink the balance between representative and participatory democracy in order to promote a more ‘Just City’.

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Note: ‘Competence PLH’ means ‘PLH authorised’

Pour citer cet article :

Lydie Launay. Polarisation and social mix policies in metropolises : thinking the governance of housing in Paris perceived through the London experience. *Regions*, Informa UK (Taylor & Francis), 2013, pp.11-24