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Metropolising Marseille. Mission impossible? Challenges and Opportunities of Metropolisation Processes in the Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to knowledge on the level of metropolitan governance through the analysis of a specific case: the Marseille metropolis in southern France. Marseille is broadly considered a postindustrial city in crisis, which has failed to achieve a functional transformation and a change of narrative in the age of globalisation. Over the last two decades, however, processes of regionalised and integrated metropolisation have had an impact on the city's urban renaissance prospects. The paper identifies three central projects, which symbolically represent and concretely articulate different axes of Marseille's metropolisation processes: *Euroméditerranée* (1995-*), The European Capital of Culture Marseille-Provence 2013 and the institutional creation of the *Métropole d'Aix-Marseille-Provence*. This paper proposes to approach metropolisation as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Drawing on the three aforementioned cases, we analyse the different territorial-spatial scales affected, as well as the various geographic scales of governance stakeholders involved. Reflecting on their scopes of impact, the aim of the study is to investigate the challenges and opportunities of multi-scalar metropolisation for Aix-Marseille-Provence, and to discuss to what extent this conflictual plurality might be promising (or not) for better consensual metropolitan integration in the future. In conclusion, we show that the study on metropolisation in the Marseille region, including the region's unique features, successes and failures, sheds light on and contributes to a better understanding of the evolution of other metropolises of a similar size in France and Europe.

Keywords: Metropolisation ▪ Marseille ▪ Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence ▪ Scale ▪ Governance ▪ Political Power ▪ Local Stakeholders

Die Metropolisierung von Marseille. Ein unmögliches Unterfangen? Herausforderungen und Chancen der Metropolisierungsprozesse in der Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag liefert Erkenntnisse auf der Ebene der metropolitanen Governance und analysiert zu diesem Zweck ein konkretes Beispiel: die südfranzösische Metropole Marseille. Marseille wird weithin als Großstadt erachtet, die sich in einer postindustriellen Krise befindet: Sie hat es verpasst, einen funktionalen Wandel zu vollziehen und sich an die veränderten Rahmenbedingungen im Zeitalter der Globalisierung anzupassen. Regionalisierte und integrierte Metropolisierungsprozesse haben in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten jedoch die Aussichten auf eine urbane Renaissance der Großstadt verbessert. Der Beitrag stellt drei zentrale Projekte vor, die die einzelnen Teile der Metropolisierungsprozesse von Marseille sowohl symbolisch darstellen als auch konkretisieren: *Euroméditerranée* (seit 1995), die Europäische Kulturhauptstadt „Marseille-Provence" 2013 und die institutionelle Gründung der *Métropole d'Aix-Marseille-Provence*. Dieser Beitrag schlägt

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einen Ansatz vor, der die Metropolisierung als multidimensionales Phänomen erachtet. Aufbauend auf den drei genannten Beispielprojekten werden die einzelnen relevanten territorial-räumlichen Ebenen und die verschiedenen räumlichen Dimensionen der beteiligten Governance-Akteure analysiert. Mit dem Ziel, die Herausforderungen und Chancen der mehrdimensionalen Metropolisierung von Aix-Marseille-Provence zu untersuchen, analysiert der Beitrag den Wirkungsbereich der Projekte und diskutiert, inwiefern diese konfliktreiche Pluralität zukünftig zu einer besseren und konsensorientierten metropolitanen Integration beitragen kann. Abschließend soll unter Berücksichtigung der Besonderheiten, Erfolge und Fehlschläge dieser Region gezeigt werden, dass die Studie über die Metropolisierung von Marseille für die Entwicklung von ähnlich großen Metropolen Frankreichs und Europas neue Erkenntnisse liefert und zu einem tiefgreifenderen Verständnis beiträgt.

Schlüsselwörter: Metropolisierung ▪ Marseille ▪ Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence ▪ Ebenen ▪ Governance ▪ politische Macht ▪ lokale Akteure

1 Introduction

The process of metropolisation is commonly and etymologically understood as the development of metropolises as a consequence of extended urbanisation processes spreading across the territory in question (Di Méo 2010: 23). At the turn of the 20th century, this city type (i.e. primarily capital cities such as Paris and London, but also New York City, for instance) emerged as the architectural, industrial and cultural form of Western urban modernity *par excellence* (Hall 1998; Harvey 2003; Lees/Lees 2007). In the wake of the post-World War II period, massive decolonisation and post-Fordist deindustrialisation, paired with globalised capitalism and neoliberalism, shifted the definitional and functional nature of metropolises (Harvey 1989; Brenner 2013). As a result, metropolitan areas are now an urban showcase for the imperatives of networked global competitiveness and the world economy (Sassen 1991; Taylor 2003; Brenner/Keil 2005). Through metropolisation processes, the urban question is negotiated beyond the traditional spatial boundaries of 'the city': "Metropolisation is this ability and will towards global functional integration, of control through urbanisation mechanisms of ever wider spaces, placed under the authority of cities [*cités*], of cores operating as networks (...) to the extent that they will constitute some kind of unique and virtual (foil) entity on a global scale beyond the city [*la ville*] as such" (Di Méo 2010: 24; translation by the authors).

Accordingly, metropolisation processes embody the constitution of integrated urban structures that transcend and reinvent the geographic, functional, institutional and imaginative spatiality of the city. In this context, the imperative of overcoming the traditional understanding of the city as an enclosed spatial entity is contingent on understanding metropolisation as regionalised and networked urbanisation processes. This implies a redefinition and re-scaling of the urban as a category of analysis.

The unprecedented growth and extent of urban morphologies call for new urban planning strategies. Social structural imperatives of the globalised era and the regionalisation and networking of urban systems challenge strategies based on spatially confined cities. Drawing on the new regionalism debates and the global city-region model, researchers and policymakers planning the city-region focus on heterogeneous social structures, spatial and functional polycentricity, trans-regional or trans-national urban networks, as well as cross-border governance (Scott 2001). These territorial reconfigurations suggest a convergence in the meaning of 'city' and 'metropolitan region' and imply a gradual process of integration. As formulated by Meijers, Hoogerbrugge and Hollander (2014), metropolisation is essentially understood in terms of the structural and cultural integration of a territorially embedded network of cities. These developments are both the grounds for and the result of the dissolution of the binary representational system of space (e.g. centre/periphery, urban/rural). Contrary to colonial metropolitan semantics (Blanchard/Boëtsch 2005), a contemporary urban geographical and planning approach to metropolisation invokes a fluid and multi-level perspective, expressed through pluralist terminology.

There is a dichotomy between understanding metropolisation as a homogenising process of territorial integration and understanding it as a plural heterogenisation of urban space. Indeed, in the process of transcending these seemingly divergent understandings, it can be important to recognise situations in which integration advances on a macro-level, while a conflicted and non-linear metropolisation process remains visible on a micro-level. In order to engage with this differentiation, this paper seeks to examine what a conflict-oriented approach to integration might reveal about the process of metropolisation at different scales, through an analysis of the case of the *Métropole d'Aix-Marseille-Provence* (M-AMP), in France. The paper questions whether metropolitan policy implementations aiming at stability and integration can *de facto* co-exist with a fragmented metropolisation of space at smaller scales, where metropolitan integration is perceived differently by, and has a variety of impacts on, different local settings and actors.

The current territorial, political, economic and cultural reconfiguration of traditional cities into polycentric urban regions has spread globally. In France's second-largest

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city Marseille, five decades of regionalisation and urban redefinition debates ultimately led to the official launch of the *Métropole d'Aix-Marseille-Provence* on 1 January 2016. The emergence of this new metropolis provides the impulse for this investigation of metropolisation processes in France's second-largest city and its surrounding region. Due to its long history, the complex interaction between its stakeholders and institutions, as well as its splintered territory, the phenomenon of metropolisation expresses and impacts a plurality of geographic scales. This plurality represents both an immediate policy challenge and an analytical angle for this research.

Conceptually, we draw on the variable of scales, which we understand as "the extent or size of a phenomenon" (Dahlman 2009: 189). Based on the assumption that both empirical and theoretical foundations of contemporary metropolisation are multiple and heterogeneous, we argue that metropolisation processes in Marseille and the surrounding region manifest themselves in multiple interlocked dimensions. It is particularly relevant to engage with the case of Aix-Marseille-Provence, for in many regards this territory resists unifying tendencies and integrative models. In light of the most recent metropolisation theory, this localised process in-the-making allows for an analytical oscillation between the risk of metropolitan failure and the emergence of an innovative alternative development mode. Therefore, throughout this paper, we want to ask to what extent the fragmentation and the conflictual multiplicity of geographic scales impacted by the metropolisation process can be favourable for a consensual integration process.

2 Paper Outline and Methodology

The multiple case study approach is based on three projects that explicitly address, shape and contribute to Marseille's metropolisation. The first is the major state-driven urban regeneration project *Euroméditerranée* (1995-2015), which was branded as the port city's "metropolisation accelerator" (Bertoncello/Dubois 2010). The so-called *Euromed* targets the expansion and modernisation of the built infrastructure in Marseille's inner city districts and competitive place branding for the sake of economic growth and international capitalisation.

Second, we analyse the impact of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) festival 'Marseille-Provence 2013' (MP2013). With this European award, culture became a catalyser and driving force for urban economic development, as well as a laboratory for collaborative metropolitan governance in the regionalised territory of the 'capital'. 'Marseille-Provence 2013', which has been acclaimed as "the creative and popular expression of metropolitan consciousness [*sentiment métropolitain*]" (Mission interministerielle pour le projet Aix-Marseille-Provence 2016: 11), embodies metropolisation processes by dint of launching festivals throughout the region, rebranding local heritage and fostering new modes of inter-municipal cooperation.

Third, we focus on the newly created metropolitan region the *Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence* (M-AMP). The metropolis represents a new mode of collaborative governance and urban policymaking in a regionalised urban territory, merging 92 municipalities and almost two million inhabitants in and around the urban cores of Aix-en-Provence and Marseille. This innovative administrative categorisation of the territory envisions increased productivity and competitiveness by means of multiplying resources and sharing an increased and unified spatial dimension.

This paper first discusses how and why metropolisation processes can be comprehended through a scalar perspective. To better illustrate this argument, we have chosen to operationalise the empirical cases analytically with a differentiated lens on the various scales implicated. To begin, we consider the territorial-spatial scales at which metropolisation processes become visible. Subsequently, we discuss the different scales at which urban governance stakeholders operate. Finally, we reflect on their respective scopes of impact. Overall, we explore the challenges and opportunities of a multi-scalar metropolisation for Aix-Marseille-Provence by investigating the underlying processes of metropolitan pluralisation and integration.

This paper does not rely on a single methodology but pursues several methodological approaches, mostly grounded in geography, sociology and political science (in the sense of spatial planning and development policies). Overall, this paper is the product of ongoing exchanges, and formal and informal collaborations between both authors over recent years. Based on a comprehensive review of literature, including both theoretical aspects (in particular theories of metropolisation, governance and scales) and practical considerations (on planning for Marseille, urbanism policies, urban marketing strategies etc.), the research is based to an equal extent on thorough field study, regular and documented visits to the locations analysed herein and a qualitative content analysis of 37 semi-structured interviews with cultural policy stakeholders involved in the ECOC selection process and the realisation of MP2013 (Grésillon 2011; Grésillon 2013; De Saussure 2020), as well as with urban stakeholders in *Euroméditerranée* and the M-AMP developments (Grésillon/Vignau 2020).

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3 Theoretical accounts of the processes of metropolisation

Approaching metropolisation from a scalar perspective reveals a series of related inquiries. On what scale(s) can processes of metropolitan development be discussed? Could a scalar approach define – and limit – metropolisation normatively? What different dimensions exist (spatial/territorial, sociopolitical, economic, temporal), and at which different scales does each dimension manifest itself?

In geographic terms (Dahlman 2009) and alongside burgeoning globalisation, the normative assumptions of scale and processes of scaling are being redefined and enjoying attention amongst scholars. Adam Moore's article (2008) "Rethinking Scale as a Geographical Category: from Analysis to Practice" provides an insightful account into the state of research on scale theory and politics, as well as discussing shortcomings and criticism, and serves here as an orientation for the following discussion.

Within critical approaches, scholars react to the analytical limits of widespread geospatial categories used as givens and often articulated in a somewhat reductive dichotomy, such as 'local/global' or 'rural/urban'. Furthermore, Brenner (2001) argues that we often evoke scales when in reality we are talking about socio-spatial processes and localisation. The ensuing confusion between spatial and social configurations has resulted in a "tension between fixity and fluidity in scale conceptualization" (Moore 2008: 205). Responding to traditional understandings, critical voices have challenged the notion of scale as a normative measurement and organisation of geographical space (Taylor 1982), arguing that scales are "socially constructed, fluid, and contingent" (Marston 2000: 222). This approach implies a political dimension, the so-called politics of scale (Cox 2002), focusing on the ideological and power-related contingence of the concept. Following this understanding, neo-Marxist and political-economic scholarship theorises scales as both expressions and results of globalised capitalism accumulation (Harvey 1982; Taylor 1982; Smith 1995; Brenner 1997; Brenner 1998). Additionally, a socio-spatial theoretical thread considers scales as "embodiment[s] of social relations of empowerment and disempowerment and the arena through and in which they operate" (Swyngedouw 1997: 169). Marston, Jones and Woodward (2005) question the scalar approach, criticising the inevitable reproduction of a hierarchical ontology of spatial politics.

While Moore (2008: 222) suggests that "despite a recent constructivist turn, the scale politics literature remains wedded to a problematic conceptualization of scale as a substantial category of analysis", Dahlman (2009: 193) sheds a more optimistic light on these issues, suggesting that "the call to evacuate human geography of scale" essentially manifests "an anxiety to 'get space right'". Even if scale were a construct that does not render justice to human geography, it nevertheless provides a category as common ground and a starting point for critical discussion.

In the course of recent years, the debate on the notion of scales has been supplemented and made more complex by research on the degree of pertinence of the metropolitan scales (Gross/Gualini/Ye 2019). There is not only a compelling need "to get space right", but also – in the light of globalisation and a new international perception of development – "to get the territory right", which is understood to include the metropolitan area (Schindler/Kanai 2019: 40).

With these critical accounts in mind, we propose a pluralist approach, which enables the dismantling of the variety of scales inherent to given phenomena through an analytical process. An understanding tending towards distinguishing and comparing the socio-political and socio-spatial components of scales resonates with the complex nature of the metropolisation processes in Aix-Marseille-Provence. Indeed, not only are different territorial levels implicated, but these are also produced through the interplay of a complex landscape of actors with different geographical scopes. Grounded in the critical reading of scales introduced above, we therefore analyse our case studies through the perspective recently proposed by D'Albergo, Lefèvre and Ye (2018) as the outcome of an international comparison between Rome, Paris and Shenzen, a perspective in which the metropolitan scale is expressed in terms of spatial, economic and political levels. Whilst Marseille as a metropolis is not really comparable to the three cities studied by the authors, the approach proposed by D'Albergo, Lefèvre and Ye (2018) lends itself to the case study under consideration, despite its specificities. Hence, it is this three-tiered analytical approach – spatial/territorial, socio-economic and political – which guides our analysis of the Marseille metropolitan area.

Being aware of the political, economic and spatial components of scale constructs and actors, as well as how they differ and often conflict, is particularly important in complex urban regions such as Aix-Marseille-Provence. In fact, in a post-welfare-state era, the monopoly of the national government has transformed into a multi-level governance model (Hooghe/Marks 2001; Gualini 2004). In this context, heterogeneous urban regions have arguably become arenas for innovative policy negotiations (Brenner 2004). These shifts have directly involved metropolisation processes: "The crucial challenge of metropolitan policy coordination is the spatial complexity of social and economic activities in the context of institutional fragmentation and the resultant diversity of power coalitions" (Salet/Thornley/Kreukels 2003: 3).

In definitional governance debates, the notion of a shift

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from government to governance appears recurrently. According to Pierre (2011: 5), "Governance, unlike 'government', looks at the interplay between state and society and the extent to which collective projects can be achieved through a joint public and private mobilization of resources". Accordingly, national governments and state institutions still play a crucial role. However, the policy-making hierarchies are renegotiated and the stakeholder arena is diversified (Hooghe/Marks 2001; Brenner 2004).

The levelled hierarchies and multiplication of governance actors imply a new contingency of governing power and scale (Shirlow 2009). The question '*Who* holds power?' is asked under new premises and answered variably on multiple scales. Furthermore, the mode in which power is implemented shifts. According to Shirlow (2009: 50), "good governance is constructed around heterarchy (inclusion) rather than hierarchy (exclusion)". A heterarchical or integrative approach suggests forms of collaborative governance that essentially emphasise cooperation between public and private sectors, as well as across institutional and civil society actors (Ansell/Gash 2008). This resonates directly with the question of scales discussed above, and affects all the phenomenon's various scalar parameters, from territorial geography to economic and political stakeholders to social processes and cultural integration. Therefore, the governing and administrative structuring of large-scale urban settlements in the metropolisation process has not only become diversified, the multi-level processes have catalysed new modes of multi-level collaborative governance as well (Zimmermann/Galland/Harrisson 2020).

Finally, as Fricke and Gualini (2018) point out, the metropolitan area is also a heterogeneous discursive construction, within which different lines of argument confront each other or are merged in order to contribute to the creation of diverse metropolitan scales. We will see that the analysis of metropolises from the perspective of "Metropolitan Regions as contested spaces" (Fricke/Gualini 2018) proves to be particularly fruitful in the context of the Aix-Marseille metropolis, where the clash of projections and visions contributes to the deconstruction of a common metropolitan perspective and helps turn the metropolitan area into "a regional problem" (Harrison/Growe 2014).

Given that the processes of perception and of metropolitan construction across several tiers (from the local to the international) are becoming ever more diversified and complex (Lefèvre/Pinson 2020), the function of metropolitan *governance* plays a crucial role, now more than ever. The question is not so much: 'What is good governance?' but rather: 'Which mode of governance is *adapted* to this particular metropolitan territory?' In the case of the Aix-Marseille metropolis, this question is essential. We examine it based on three examples of metropolitan projects. Each of the projects can be seen as typical of a particular approach to metropolitan governance: urban regeneration/renewal linked to self-marketing and competitiveness in the 1990s with *Euroméditerranée*; a project-based cultural approach in the early 2010s with *European Capital of Culture Marseille-Provence 2013*; and the renaissance of institutional approaches to metropolitan reform in the mid-2010s.

But before jumping straight into the crux of the issue, it is necessary, in particular for readers not intimately familiar with the subject, to briefly contextualise our case study within the general framework of the evolution of metropolitan policies specific to France.

Twentieth-century metropolitan governance constitutes a unique chapter in French postmodern administrative and urban political history. Developments in metropolitan policies have reflected a paradigm shift in the country's territorial administration and post-decentralisation multiplication of (in)formal policymakers and policy- coordination/implementation bodies (Le Galès 2002; Lefèvre 2009; Pinson 2009). Among the various spheres in which the urban is being negotiated throughout France, there is a tendency for both departmental and regional authorities to lose their relevance in light of contemporary metropolisation politics. The national scale remains significant in the context of traditionally and administratively centralised France. However, the wave of territorial and functional decentralisation laws since the 1980s have led to the transformation of the Jacobin nation-state model in favour of clustered territorial areas, partly managed through new forms of metropolitan governance. Last but not least, the European Union is promoting metropolitan development politics and thereby forms yet another influential scale of urban structuration.

The history of metropolitan planning policies has shaped France's urban governance landscape since the 1960s, with legislative milestones such as the *métropoles d'équilibre* (1960s-1970s), city networks and intermunicipalities (*intercommunalités*) (1990s) and metropolitan areas and metropolises (*Métropoles*) (2000s-2010s) (Deraëve 2015). French decentralisation laws in the second half of the 1900s catalysed a shift of paradigms, from a centralised elite government toward multiple localised politics (Donzel 2001; Dubois 2009). The end of the national welfare-state era and the rise of diversified and multilevel metropolitan governance could signify the political materialisation of French decentralisation. The alternative model for collaborative governance has enabled the rise of a new metropolitan age. Here, the pluralisation of power and the complexity arising from an increasing number of stakeholders represent two crucial challenges for decision-making processes. According to Ansell and Gash (2008: 547), "collaborative governance is not a 'winner-take-all' form of intermediation between single separated interests. In collaborative

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governance, stakeholders often have an adversarial relationship to one another, but the goal is to transform adversarial relationships into more cooperative ones". The agonistic character of collaborative governance, provocatively summed up here as a "not a 'winner-take-all'" solution, must be borne in mind while investigating the conflict-ridden, multi-scalar metropolisation processes in Marseille and its surrounding region.

4 Unpacking Marseille's Metropolisation: Three Exemplary Cases

On the scientific level, the case of the Marseille metropolitan region is of particular interest in that it does not correspond to established patterns or classical models of a metropolisation process. Practitioners of urban geography continue to develop new concepts ("polycentric urban regions": Meijers 2005; "post-metropolitan territories": Balducci/Fedeli/Curci 2017) in order to grasp how metropolises have evolved in all their complexity, with certain metropolitan areas functioning like a 'gigapolis' (notably, the Tokyo-Yokohama bay region), whereas others (such as the Ruhr) are now spatially, functionally and institutionally so integrated that they might appear as huge cities composed of their individual neighbourhoods. The Marseille-Aix region, however, remains in the nascent phase of metropolisation. It has yet to make substantial progress in terms of the functional integration and political cooperation now present in many large metropolitan areas. It does, however, theoretically possess all the requisite assets to form such a metropolitan area. With a population of almost two million, it is one of the most densely populated regions in France and along the Mediterranean coastline. Marseille, and secondarily Aix-en-Provence, are nexuses of political and economic power. Every single day, tens of thousands of workers, students and commuters travel to and from the main cities in the region.

On the political level and in terms of identity, however, this budding metropolis is not just complex but also a continuing source of conflict, teaming with ruptures and entrenched rivalries. Hence, "Marseille, the impossible city" (Viard 1995) or the "unfinished metropolis" (Club d'échanges et de réflexions sur l'aire métropolitaine marseillaise 1994; Chouraqui/Langevin 2000) remain topical to this day. Nonetheless, a process of metropolitan construction has recently begun, based upon certain 'metropolitan catalysts' that we now introduce. Three factors have decisively shaped Marseille's metropolisation processes over the last two decades: *Euroméditerranée*, the European Capital of Culture Marseille-Provence 2013 (ECOC MP 2013) and the *Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence* (M-AMP).

Figure 1 Perimeter of the Operation of National Interest *Euroméditerranée* in the centre of Marseille – in green on the map (Scale: 1cm: 300 m)
Source: Opération d'intérêt national Euroméditerranée
Credit: Mathilde Vignau

4.1 Euroméditerranée

Firstly, we examine *Euroméditerranée*, the major urban renewal project in Marseille's city centre. *Euroméditerranée* was initiated as a state-driven project in 1995, at a time when almost a fifth of the working population in Marseille's inner city was unemployed, and a quarter were living below the poverty line (Bertoncello/Dubois 2010: 38). Covering a 300-hectare area in the city centre (see Figure 1), the regeneration plan was intended to rehabilitate the industrial docklands and develop Marseille's emblematic waterfront, along with constructing a financial quarter, first-class cultural facilities and housing (Rodrigues Malta 2001). Explicitly addressing notions of metropolisation, *Euroméditerranée*'s marketing campaign claimed that it was an "accelerator for the metropolis" and the motor for creating a large and efficient regional metropolitan entity (Bertoncello/Dubois 2010).

In the long run, *Euroméditerranée* promises to positively impact the region's prevailing social problems, boost economic growth and enhance the city's international stature. This project has been criticised (Jourdan 2008), inter alia, for its neo-liberal market-oriented approach toward urban renewal, in the sense that elitist-driven policies espouse gentrification while destroying the social fabric and cultural diversity in the city centre. Changing the level of analysis, Bertoncello and Dubois (2010) recall that *Euromediterranée* did not – and does not – set out to initiate a process of gentrification but instead aims to conduct a vast operation of economic and urban regeneration, even if the impacts of such a process on the most vulnerable cannot be fully anticipated. In this respect, the French State, which to a large extent initiated, organised and co-financed the operation, enabled France's second city to overcome the thirty years of social and economic morass into which it had plunged and to set foot in the 21st century (POPSU 2009).

This project reveals an approach to metropolisation that focuses on extending and modernising the urban fabric in Marseille's inner-city districts as a way to cement its role as the core city within the metropolitan region. Primarily, its objectives are economic growth and international capitalisation, thereby transforming Marseille into a 'global metropolis'. *Euroméditerranée*'s other key target is economic, namely, to attract investors and companies. The fact that CMA-CGM, the world's third largest shipowner, established its headquarters (designed by the late Zaha Hadid) here in 2011 was deeply symbolic: a high-profile multinational company decides to return and set up on Marseille's new waterfront after decades of the area being an economic backwater. This by no means transforms Marseilles into a 'global metropolis', but it does give the city back its place on the map of the Mediterranean as a highly performing metropolis, which, in turn, reinforces its potential in terms of urban branding logics (Brantz/Disko/Wagner-Kyora 2012). Furthermore, *Euroméditerranée*'s successes and international standing have had a positive impact on the entire metropolitan area. For example, the strong and continual increase in cruise ship activity in Marseille *Euroméditerranée*'s port (1.75 million cruise passengers were registered in 2018) has also benefited other tourist destinations in the metropolis, notably Aix-en-Provence.

4.2 Marseille-Provence 2013: European Capital of Culture

A further dimension in the metropolitan development of the Marseille region was the year-long event MP2013, following Marseille's designation as European Capital of Culture in 2008. During the years preceding its selection, Marseille scarcely seemed suitably qualified or equipped for such a nomination. The cultural stakeholders in charge of the application nonetheless discursively transformed this 'handicap' into positive rhetoric, arguing that Marseille was "the very city most in *need* of the title of ECOC" (Latarjet 2010: 28). Indeed, the title is pitched at worldwide visibility, a positive factor in attracting tourists and enhancing a city's symbolic capital. Moreover, as the title indicates, MP2013 operated on a regional level, encompassing the Provence region in addition to Marseille itself. This territory corresponded to the new metropolitan area, thereby prefiguring a new territorial scale (see Figure 3). For the purpose of this cultural event, the diverse stakeholders collaborating on the project forged an innovative form of intermunicipal cultural governance, which was to set a precedent for future metropolitan governing practices. These included the 92 municipalities within the MP2013 area, the department of Bouches-du-Rhône, the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, the French State, the private sector in conjunction with numerous small and large companies in the metropolitan area, and multinationals. They all supported the event with a combined contribution of €15 million, making a total budget of €91 million.

Figure 2 'Panorama'-Tower, Friche de la Belle-de-Mai Art Factory, Perimeter Euroméditerranée
Credit: Mathilde Vignau

MP2013's key institutional innovation lay in the unprecedented creation of an associative structure that brought together all the actors, both public and private. This was to 'force' them to talk to each other and to come to a mutual understanding. In other words, for the first time in the history of this conflict-ridden region, there was a metropolitan decision-making structure, albeit limited to a one-off cultural event. As soon as MP2013 ended, the association was dissolved and the participating entities reverted to type with 'business as usual', focusing their attention

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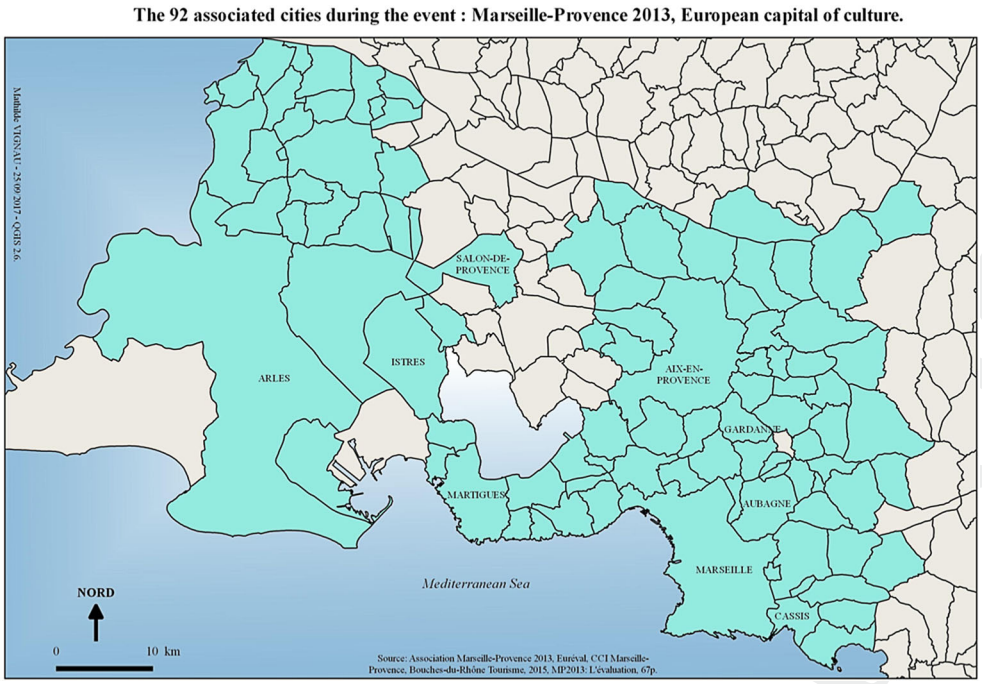

Figure 3 The 92 municipalities involved in MP2013
Credit: Mathilde Vignau

on their local affairs. In addition to the new collaborative practices, a metropolitan precedent, however, had been created. Its manifestations included new sustainable cultural infrastructures and new museums, of which the Museum of Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean (*Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, MuCEM*) is certainly the best known. Inaugurated in 2013 during the European Capital of Culture as France's first national museum located outside Paris, MuCEM immediately assumed a national and international function while serving as an emblem and icon not only of the *Euroméditerranée* district but also of a metropolis in-the-making (see Figure 2). Arguably, for the French State, MP2013's resounding success served as a launching pad for establishing the Aix-Marseille-Provence metropolis in 2015 (Andres 2011; Maisetti 2017). In this context, the major cultural event MP2013, with eight million visitors registered in one year (2013) and with its new cultural flagship (MuCEM), represented a key element in the metropolisation project. Here, culture, or more precisely a large-scale cultural event, became the decisive leading and driving force behind urban development and an experimental field for metropolitan governance (Grésillon 2013). From a methodological perspective, this last point justifies our decision to include ECOC MP2013 in our analysis of metropolisation in Marseille.

4.3 The Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence

The *Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence* (M-AMP) (see Figure 4) essentially constitutes an institutional reform and an administrative restructuring of a regional territory already undergoing functional and spatial integration processes. And yet, M-AMP redefined an urban profile on a regional scale, in the sense that its urban politics aimed to transcend the traditional city borders to expand the size of its territory of operation, increasing the scope of its financial, material and economic resources, as well as the international reputation of Marseille (Douay 2013). After over two decades of planning, the M-AMP was finally launched on 1 January 2016. In practical terms, this entailed merging 92 municipalities in and around Marseille, as well as their core administrative institutions (Institut Montaigne 2020). This effectively constitutes the largest metropolitan region in France, covering over 3000 km^2 with 1.8 million inhabitants. This territorial redefinition targets the sharing and optimising of metropolitan resources, as well as regional institutional integration (Maisetti 2014; Maisetti 2017). It raises unprecedented institutional issues concerning the purpose of political and administrative unity. Moreover, it also poses fresh questions about shared territorial identity within a highly culturally, economically and politically heterogeneous region. Owing to the creation of the M-AMP, it is finally possible to tackle a number of crucial infrastructural

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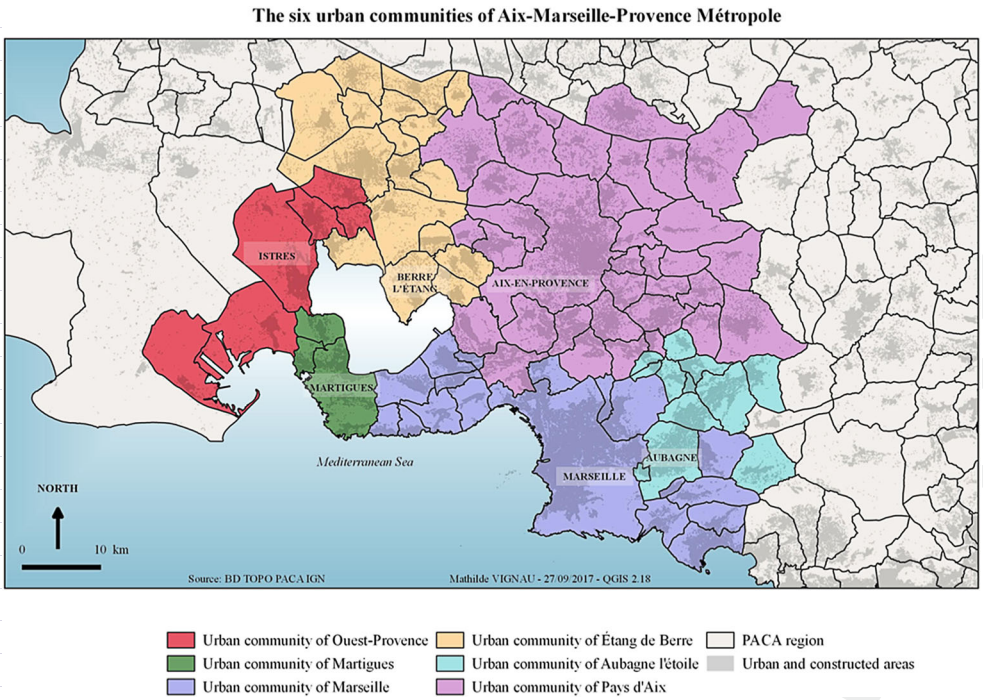

Figure 4 *Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence*, composed of six different urban communities (coloured on the map)
Credit: Mathilde Vignau

and social issues, such as transport and mobility on the right scale, namely, on the metropolitan scale.

That said, this grand scheme was confronted with long-standing historical issues and the realities of this territory with its striking contrasts. From a historical perspective, there has always been a strong element of rivalry between Marseille and Aix-en-Provence. Invariably, Marseille has looked seaward and built its fortune on trade with the overseas colonies. As the undisputed economic capital of southeast France, it has long regarded the surrounding 'villages' with a certain air of condescension. Conversely, Aix-en-Provence has always looked landward toward Provence and considers itself to be Provence's legitimate capital. The industrial revolution bypassed this city of dignitaries, renowned as a seat of learning and home to the archbishopric. With the past and current economic crisis impacting Marseille, Aix-en-Provence is taking its 'revenge' on its historic rival (Ronai 2009). The city's authorities reluctantly agreed to become part of M-AMP due to pressure from French central government, but not without obtaining something in return, starting with the name of the new entity, the M-AMP. It is highly unusual that the multi-barrelled name of a metropolitan area commences with the second-tier city (whereas Aix-en-Provence has a population of only 142,000, Marseille has 855,000). As for the region's other medium-sized cities, Arles, Aubagne, Martigues and so forth, they, likewise, do not want to amalgamate with Marseille. Establishing a metropolis in a region where local particularities forcefully assert themselves poses formidable challenges (Grésillon/Vignau 2020). Apart from Marseille, the metropolis's core city, the attitude of most municipalities in the M-AMP has been characterised by mistrust and withdrawal. However, the construction of an efficient metropolis demands trust and openness (Lefèvre 1998). To better understand 'the paradox of Marseille', we need to clarify one important point. The city of Marseille is not only asset rich but also crippled by debt and disadvantaged by its lack of financial resources. Conversely, the municipalities comprising the Marseille hinterland, Aix-en-Provence, Martigues, Aubagne, Cassis, La Ciotat, Arles and many others are small and medium-sized cities, rich, touristic and dynamic. Since the creation of the Metropolis in 2016 what they have feared above all is being undermined by Marseille and forced to share the core-city's woes: its debts, its waste, its poor migrants and so on. Naturally, this viewpoint is somewhat exaggerated and lacking in plausibility but the local political factor and the emotional component specific to the southeast of France should not be overlooked in this analysis (Péraldi/Samson 2006). This represents a concrete example of the disruption of classical, north-European patterns of virtuous metropolitan evolution.

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This is a paradox, for M-AMP is primarily a political entity, which local and regional politicians refuse to champion, blocking any attempts to re-negotiate their local powers and resources in order to safeguard their identity and political orientation. Overall, interaction between individual stakeholders has been inherently conflictual. Conversely, the vast majority of economic, cultural and academic stakeholders favour the Metropolis. This includes institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Marseille-Provence that represents the region's business leaders, while the Aix Marseille University, the region's sole university (70,000 students), was formed following a merger of the universities of Marseille and Aix-en-Provence. They all stress the need for joint operations, particularly in terms of transport infrastructure and political governance. Hence, despite the recent progress made in modernising the transport infrastructure (motorways, road and railway infrastructure, airport), the reality on the ground is still far from any form of integrated governance as outlined by Gualini (2001), Brenner (2004) or Shirlow (2009).

It is difficult to predict which trend will prevail in the next decade, but in the long term it seems likely that the metropolitan dynamic, championed by many stakeholders, will eventually succeed. In terms of metropolitan integration and efficiency, M-AMP, however, is still far from being comparable to other cosmopolitan, international, dynamic and creative metropolises that are not necessarily the political, economic and financial capital of the country, such as Barcelona, Valencia or Turin (Baron/Loyer 2015).

5 Conclusion

In the examples cited above, urban planning is an overriding issue. Cultural branding and city marketing, policy and politics, economic development and financial performance are further scopes of action that the willingness to embrace metropolisation seems to address. Hence, the *agency* and *purpose* of metropolisation processes are not one-dimensional. Rather, they touch on multiple and entangled developmental sectors of urbanisation. Ultimately, the combination of several complex processes and major events on different scales impacts the city, all while stimulating metropolisation. In Marseille, the combination of a process of urban and economic regeneration launched in 1995 (*Euroméditerranée*) and a one-off large-scale cultural event (ECOC 2013) strongly impacted not only the scale of the Marseille urban area but also the scale of the metropolis. It is no coincidence that two years after the dynamism of the European Capital of Culture had waned, the *Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence* was officially inaugurated – with a more or less equivalent geographical area. And in 2020, seven years after MP 2013, another major cultural event called *Manifesta-Biennal of contemporary art* took place in different locations in Marseille – but only in Marseille, not in the other cities of the *Métropole*.

Marseille thus presents a unique case in France of a large city with a certain number of distinct metropolitan assets (economic, scientific, tourist, cultural) but one that nonetheless remains an unfinished metropolis due to centrifugal forces that are undermining it. As long as Marseille's neighbouring and rival cities refuse to fully associate with it to jointly forge a common destiny and a new common narrative, the 'great metropolis of southeast France', which developers have been envisaging for the last thirty years, will not materialise.

What is at stake is a nascent metropolis in the search of its identity. While French cities of comparable size to Marseille (Lyon and Lille) have been characterised by a highly advanced process of metropolisation, the 'lack of metropolisation' specific to the Marseille region has heavily penalised it, if we compare it to its domestic and international rivals. Compared with Marseille-Métropole, Greater Lyon and Greater Lille have a tradition of inter-urban collaboration that is reflected across every sector involved: institutional relations, transport, waste management, the environment, economic and cultural policy, universities and research, international relations and outreach. It is challenging to draw lessons that could apply to other French cities from the case study of M-AMP, given the fact that Marseille is a case apart, or could even be considered as a 'poor example', if compared to 'best planning practice' implemented not only in Lille and Lyon but also in Bordeaux, Nantes, Montpellier and Strasbourg (Demazière/Sykes 2020).

On the scientific level, the case of the Marseille metropolitan region is of particular interest in that it does not correspond to established patterns or classical models of a metropolisation process. Such models often bring positive economic impacts for metropolitan regions because they enable the concentration of certain metropolitan command and redistribution activities in metropolitan municipalities (Scott 2001; Taylor 2003). This twofold movement, however, has not, to date, taken place in the Marseille region. Marseille, in this respect, constitutes a counterexample because the current process of metropolisation has not yet created an integrated and powerful metropolitan area as is very often the case.

From a theoretical perspective, it seems that the Marseille metropolis is characterised by "a disadvantageous fragmentation" (Hoyler/Freytag/Mager 2006) which is of no benefit to anyone, as opposed for example to the Rhine-Ruhr region and its model of spatial and functional cooperation which benefits everyone (Knapp/Kunzmann/Schmitt 2004). If the case of 'Marseille, impossible city and fragmented

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metropolis' were to be approached from the viewpoint of other similar examples, they should probably be selected from the Mediterranean area. The city-regions of Naples or Athens certainly offer comparable contemporary developments to those in Marseille-Provence, but this hypothesis should be substantiated through in-depth analyses.

In conclusion, how can the 'counterexample' of Marseille provide findings of general validity for the field of metropolitan planning? Lessons can always be drawn from atypical cases. We have drawn two major conclusions from this example. Firstly, the example of the Marseille region demonstrates the extent to which the political factor remains decisive in the construction of a metropolitan perspective. For a metropolitan project to come about, there must be an unequivocal commitment on the part of the elected officials, starting with the mayors, irrespective of their political affiliations. The lack of any desire to cooperate on the part of the M-AMP mayors cost the metropolis 30 years (Maisetti 2015: 84). It is not possible to make up for this delay, even with the interventionism of the central state since 1995. The conditions appear to be far from achieving the mandate to 'get the territory right' in the highly competitive international environment, as described by Schindler and Kanai (2019). But secondly, there is a more positive aspect to the metropolitan trajectory of Marseille, which can be generalised for the benefit of other metropolises. If and when the major infrastructure projects of metropolitan significance (of a top-down nature) are implemented, as in the case of the three examples we have discussed in this paper, and if and when there is a strong desire (of a bottom-up nature) on the part of the local economic, cultural and scientific stakeholders to bring the metropolis into existence, it will eventually emerge and establish its structures (Gross/Gualini/Ye 2019; Lefèvre/Pinson 2020).

Even if the metropolis does retain its historical, political and sociological specificities, it could be argued that the way in which M-AMP will evolve over the coming years may serve as a fresh reference point for urban planners and policymakers in terms of an alternative form of classic metropolisation, perhaps more chaotic and fragmented, but a reference point closer to the realities and identities of southern European cities than to the urban models from and applied to cities in northern Europe.

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