

# *New Governance of Urban Areas in France: Is Rationalization Possible?*

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The paper analyses urban governance and decentralisation in France. It explains the “quiet revolution” which wants to set the legal basis of the French local government back to the drawing board with special focus on the reform of local government in urban areas. The context of the too many too small communes – at the heart of the reform programme – is described since it is a typically French evil (part 2). In the absence of any successful top-down policy of amalgamating communes, new communes are deemed to be the effective solution along with a new mapping of intercommunal joint bodies (part 3). Finally, the paper describes what the metropolis *à la française* consists of (part 4) with a special focus on Lyon – the perfect model for the whole country – and Paris and Aix-Marseille as the worst pupils in transition.

*Keywords:* urban areas, urban governance, France, decentralisation, local government

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## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the 1950s, deep changes in the economy, transportation and culture have affected local communities in their way of life, their areas, and their consistency. The 36,700 communes, 101 provinces (*départements*), 18 regions<sup>1</sup>, not forgetting 2,700 joint-working bodies (*établissements publics de coopération intercommunale*, EPCIs) add to the irreducible complexity of the local government machinery in France. In spite of successive waves of decentralization reforms in 1981-1984, 1999, and 2003-2007, local government structure and shape have been kept untouched, especially communes which have been at the basis of the French territorial structure since the Revolution. The consequence is that whatever its size, and its financial and technical means, every local authority, including the smallest commune, has kept its status and general competence of free administration that has forbidden any kind of hierarchical structure between tiers.

These 36,700 communes are dedicated to the daily management of down-to-earth policies for the inhabitants' well-being. Yet, a large majority of them are too small to run and finance local services although most of them are reluctant to be amalgamated into bigger units. As compensation, the multiple joint intercommunal bodies offer an institutional tool to ensure that local services are delivered and meet the needs of the communities. They also ensure that local economic, social or cultural projects are achieved successfully and coherently. However, joint bodies typically end-up as an additional *meso* government with more and more powers but less democratic control and understanding from ordinary citizens (Le Saout, 2012).

To be done with the downside of the now well-documented “institutional multi-layer cake” (*mille-feuille institutionne*; Bazoché, 2013), France embarked in a renewed process of decentralisation and reorganisation in 2010-2015. In June 2014, President Hollande set the principles for local government reform plan which should meet four goals:

1. to half the number of regional councils (from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2016);
2. to draw a new map for intercommunal joint bodies;
3. to abolish the general clause of competence for regional and provincial councils (*conseils départementaux*) in view of greater effectiveness and simplification and clarity;

<sup>1</sup>From January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016: 13 regions in European France (including Corsica, *la collectivité territoriale de Corse*) and 5 overseas départements-regions (Guadelupe, Martinique, Guyana, La Réunion, and Mayotte).

4. to openly question the future of the latter in the view of abolishing them by 2021.

In fact, what is at stake is both budgetary cuts and increased consideration for citizens' needs.

Interestingly, the reform period spans both presidencies of Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, with some inevitable abolished then re-introduced bills after successive swings in both houses of Parliament. What is different is that President Hollande has declared the end of the *jardin à la française*, a pyramidal system of uniformed local authorities not withstanding their specificities. Yet, the idea remains roughly the same: to build a new local government structure based on two groups of functions, one for development driving and strategy, and the other for closeness to local communities.

Such a clear-cut inception of the working of local government supposes two major issues to be solved. Drawing initiatives and strategies raised the issue of the size and powers of regional authorities, which led to the creation of 13 larger regions instead of 22 in European France from 1st January 2016. The 2015 (16 January) Reform Act deals with the regions' areas and voting system at provincial (*départementales*) and regional elections, held in March 2015 and December 2015 respectively. The delivery of local services to the citizens raises the issue of the size, capacity, and responsibilities of communes and their connections with joint intercommunal bodies.

As the third and last part of this local government reform, the 2015 (7 August) Act (*Loi sur la Nouvelle Organisation Territoriale de la République*, NOTRe) transfers new responsibilities from both the central government and provinces (*départements*) to regional councils and gives a clearer definition of the responsibilities of each local government tier. Unlike regions, provinces and intercommunal councils, only communes are now endowed with the general competence of free administration. Meanwhile, the central government offices at the local and regional levels are required to contribute to the overall reform of governance under the *Charte de la déconcentration* following the 2015 Decree (8 May) on the new setting-up of arm's length state offices and boards (*Réorganisation de l'administration territoriale de l'Etat*, RéATE).

In order to explain the “quiet revolution” that aims to set the legal base of the French local government back to the drawing board, the paper will focus on the reform of local government in urban areas. The context of the too many and too small communes at the heart of the reform programme,

needs to be described since it is a typically French evil (part 2). In the absence of any successful top-down policy of amalgamating communes, new communes are deemed to be the effective solution, along with a new mapping of intercommunal joint bodies (part 3). Finally, the paper will describe what the metropolis *à la française* consists of (part 4) with a special focus on Lyon – the perfect model for the whole country – and Paris and Aix-Marseille as the worst pupils in transition.

## 2. Too Many Too Small Communes but no Amalgamation and the Long-Standing Tradition of Joint-Working

France accounts for the largest number of communes in the EU and for more than one third of all EU local government units. Germany accounts for only 11,500 communes, Italy for 8,222, and the United Kingdom only for 433 local authorities. This means that French communes are smaller and more sparsely populated. Only 2.3% of the 36,000 communes are above 10,000 inhabitants, while 90% of communes are under 2,000.<sup>2</sup> Except for the Paris area, no other French city is ranked among the 13 major European metropolises. France is characterized by extremely scattered communes and a high number of very small communes: 30% of communes have less than 200 inhabitants (Table 1).

According to the constitutional principles, Regions, *Départements* and bigger cities were to be just the same breed of local authority as the smallest villages with only a hundred inhabitants. Such has been the issue of too many too small communes in France for which a kind of institution-building skill had to be developed in order to invent various kinds and shapes of legal conventions and partnerships between all levels of local authorities, both vertically and horizontally.

<sup>2</sup> Average population of the French communes is 1,750 inhabitants, while average population of the EU communes is 4,100 inhabitants. Furthermore, 74% of all communes are under 1,000 (15.26% of the French total population) and only 0.11% of all communes are over 100,000 inhabitants (15.36% of total population in France).

Table 1: Distribution of the French Population

Strata	Communes		Population	
	Number	%	Number	%
Under 500 inhabitants	20,233	55.33	4,572 973	7.36
500 - 1,000	6,959	19.03	4,907 236	7.90
1,000 - 10,000	8,490	23.22	22,569 949	36.33
10,000 - 30,000	644	1.76	10,761 782	17.32
30,000 - 100,000	203	0.56	9,779 823	15.74
Communes	Population	0.11	9,543 210	15.36
Total	36,568	100.00	64,5 million	100.00

Source: *Direction générale des Collectivités locales*, DGCL, 2015, Ministry of the Interior.

The first attempt to help mergers of communes was voted in 1971 (*Loi Marcellin*) but the outcome met only a limited success. Only 1,100 communes were abolished through mergers from 1971 to 2009, a very small number when compared with the mergers that have been, or are still going on, in most European countries. Due to the decentralization process and the many responsibilities transferred from the central government to communes, especially in key-domains such as urban planning, the capacity of small communes to implement new powers and functions has often been questioned but never tackled. The Government could but hastily encourage various forms of joint organizations.

Table 2: Principal types of joint working bodies

	Joint bodies with budgetary contributions from the member communes	Joint bodies with own fiscal policy
Categories	<i>Syndicats intercommunaux, syndicats mixtes fermés et ouverts including poles métropolitains (&gt; 100,000 inhabitants), poles d'équilibr et erritoriaux et ruraux.</i>	Communautés de communes (CC) (<3,500-50,000 inhabitants) Communautés d'agglomération (CA) (>50,000) Communautés urbaines (CU) (>250,000), Syndicats d'agglomération nouvelle (SAN) Métropoles

Goals	Jointly designed and managed local services	Joint designed and managed services and projects
Objectives	Cost effectiveness Economy of scale Better quality of services	Cost effectiveness Economy of scale Better quality of services Jointly designed and managed local planning and development projects Fiscal and economic equalization
Responsibilities	Freely selected responsibilities	Mandatory or optional
Area	Freely designed area	Continuous with no enclave
Finances	Budgetary contributions freely budgétaires, freely shared out	Own fiscal policy + central government allowance
Evolution	A grouping of communes ( <i>syndicat</i> ) may evolve into a mixed type if it incorporates other categories of local authorities than communes; or it can be transformed into a CC or a CA.	Possibly: CCs into CAs or CUs, Possibly: CAs into CUs, and <i>metropolises</i>

Source: *Direction générale des Collectivités locales*, DGCL, 2015, Ministry of the Interior

Although the amalgamation of communes has been a forceful and streamlining process in all neighbouring states, France has never succeeded in reducing the number of its communes. Nevertheless, it has established several forms of cooperation between communes. Such cooperation first appeared at the end of the 19th century. The Law of 22 March 1890 provided for the establishment of single-purpose intercommunal associations (*Syndicats intercommunaux*). After French lawmakers and local councillors had long been aware that the communal structure inherited from the French Revolution was totally inadequate for dealing with a number of practical matters, the 1999 Act (*Loi Chevènement*) launched the era of strengthening and simplifying the complex structures into *Communauté de communes* and *Communauté d'agglomération*. *Communautés de communes* (CC) aim primarily at rural communes; *Communautés d'agglomération* (CA) aim at towns and medium-sized cities and their suburbs; and *Communautés urbaines* (CU) aim at larger cities and their suburbs. These three

structures are given varying levels of fiscal power, with CAs and CUs having the strongest fiscal power, levying the local business tax (*taxe professionnelle*) for themselves instead for the communes.

Meeting a big success, this major step in rationalization was inspired by the structure which had been imposed on bigger areas thirty years earlier. In 1966, several *communautés urbaines* were tailored for big cities and their surroundings: Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Rennes and Strasburg. Then Brest, Cherbourg, Dunkerque, Le Creusot-Montceau-les-Mines, Le Mans, Alençon, Arras, Nancy, Nantes, Nice, Marseille, and Toulouse gradually decided to gather their surrounding communes under the same structure. Part of the success has certainly happened because of the money allocated to them and based on their population, thus providing an incentive for the communes to team up and form *urban communities*.

In its latest statistics on local government, the Ministry of the Interior stated that there were 2,133 joint bodies with their own fiscal policy in 2015 (DGCL, 2015). They represent 99.8% of the total communes and 94.0% of the total population. This major step comes from the mandatory grouping of all communes as imposed in the 2010 Reform Act, in force from July 2013.

Table 3: Incidence of the various types of self-taxation inter-communalities (as on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015)

Types	Number	Number of communes	Total population included
Métropole	11	453	6.303.722
Syndicat d'agglomération nouvelle	3	15	148.674
Communauté urbaine	9	201	2.322.898
Communauté de communes à fiscalité professionnelle unique	1.062	17.704	18.284.334
Communauté d'agglomération	226	4.744	25.889.681
Communauté de communes à fiscalité additionnelle	822	13.412	8.622.173
Métropole de Lyon	1	59	1.346.720
Non-integrated municipalities	-	70	4 034 615

Source: Direction Générale des Collectivités Locales (Ministère de l'Intérieur, Ministère de la Décentralisation et de la Fonction Publique / Insee), 2015, *Les collectivités locales en chiffres 2015*, p. 8.

However, these impressive results may hide a murkier reality. In rural areas, many communes have joined in a *communauté de communes* only to benefit from government funds and the joint body is just an empty shell. Rivalries, either political or personal, often work against the spirit of the law which has established the new intercommunal structures to carry out a much broader range of activities than the mere management of garbage collection service. In urban areas, the intercommunal structures are much more solid, being created by local decision-makers out of genuine belief in the worth of working together. However, in many places local feuds had arisen (Desage & Guéranger, 2013) and to set up an intercommunal structure for the whole of the urban area was just impossible. In some places communes refused to take part in it, or they even created their own structure. In many areas, rich communes have gathered with other rich communes and refused to let in poorer communes for fear of overtaxing their citizens to the benefit of poorer suburbs.

### 3. A New Map of Communes and Intercommunal Joint Bodies

The picture of France as a laboratory for local government joint working is strengthened and no local unit in its territory should escape from being re-structured. The *mille-feuille territorial* that used to be understandable for citizens is under major improvement as far as areas, public expenses, and better answerability to local needs are concerned.

The 2010 Local Government Reform Act set an ambitious goal to simplify, streamline, and complete the map so that the whole area of France would be covered with inter-communal authorities as a more strategic and better-financed local authority to complete municipal policies. As already mentioned, it is mandatory for any municipality to join in one of the proposed structures. Only four small islands with a single commune are allowed by law to stay apart. These are Ile de Bréhat, Ile de Sein, Ouesant in Brittany and Ile d'Yeu off the Vendée shore. Inter-communalities have to gather 20,000 inhabitants as a minimum. Their area should be designed according to economic and social consistency and large-scale projects. They have to be created through a process that would secure better integration of the member-communes in order to make inter-communalities jump to a different scale.

The main goal of the 2010 Reform Act has been to try to solve these problems. Its three objectives were to complete the map of inter-communali-



ties before January 2013, to rationalize the existing areas and to simplify the present intercommunal structure. The act has made it compulsory for every municipality to join in with other communes into new or existing EPCIs before January 2014. Secondly, it proposes two new forms for grouping. One is called *metropolis* as it is designed for the most populated inter-communalities, although according to European standards most of them are only medium-sized urban areas. The other form is named *pole metropolitan* (metropolitan cluster), a kind of supra inter-communality gathering smaller joint bodies. Finally, as an attempt to revive the process of amalgamating communes, the Law proposes the creation of “new communes” (*communes nouvelles*). Officially the new commune is a tool for voluntary grouping and not forceful merging of communes and it aims at simplifying the legal process and ensuring legal as much as democratic flexibility (Guérard, 2012, p. 123).

The socialist and left-wing opposition party groups fought against the right-lead Government’s proposals: “We reaffirm our unquestionable attachment to the 36,000 communes of our country, because we believe that, thanks to them, the Republic has taken root in every part of the territory” (the Honorable MP. Marc Dolez, cited in Guérard, 2012, p. 116). However, once in power, they agreed, some of them reluctantly, to vote in March 2015 for the bill on improving the 2010 regime. The Valls Government offered to sign an agreement with “new communes” with a population of 10,000 inhabitants ensuring that their central government allowance would remain stable for three years in a row. What was surprising was that the Minister of Finance simultaneously announced an expected €14.5 billion savings in the national budget as the local authorities’ contribution to public finances restored.

The 2014 Law (*Loi MAPTAM*) has added a demographic threshold, a population of 50,000 people living in a continuous area with no enclave, which did not exist in the 1990s for *communautés d’agglomération*. In rural areas, no threshold is prescribed by the law for *communautés de communes*. They should get into integrated communities based on common economic and development plans.

The new legislation entails some most striking features:

- The regime of the new commune has been consolidated by the 16 March 2015 Act. As of January 2015, 25 new communes have existed gathering 70 communes and nearly 64,000 inhabitants. Rural areas and towns have been thinking about initiating the process, hoping to benefit from governmental subsidies for the

following three years (if they had managed to fulfil the requirements before the end of 2015). Financial incentives are still the best booster for local councillors.

- Creation of bigger EPCIs with over 20,000 inhabitants is coherent with the view of a new local government structure with only two tiers: one local, the inter-municipal council, and one regional, the regional council.
- Last but not least, the issue of a deficit in democratic legitimacy has been dealt with by Parliament in the 2010 Reform Act and in the 2013 (Local Elections) Act (Long, 2014). Inter-communal councils used to be made up of representatives appointed by the municipal councils of member communes. Since the 2014 municipal elections, they are elected at municipal elections. Citizens choose their representatives in the inter-communal council along with their representatives in the municipal council, on voting lists, but the candidates' names are the same; those standing for the inter-communal seats are the first names on the voting lists! In addition, the creation of the new commune is based on local consensus that must be expressed either by the related municipal councils or by a local referendum. The choice of the democratic process is solely in the hands of the councillors. Data show that in reality few local referenda have been organised.

Further regulations have been adopted in order to enhance the attractiveness of new communes. The law of 16 January 2015 (*Loi sur l'amélioration du régime de la commune nouvelle, pour des communes fortes et vivantes*) relaxes the rules on the composition of the council during the transition period while member communes still exist. It also strengthens the role of deputy-mayors (ex-mayors of the abolished communes). The new commune which has taken the place of the previous EPCI should better fit into the regional map of inter-communalities. The special features of the "delegated communes" should be taken into account and the harmonization of communes' urban plans ought to be clarified. The municipal council of the "new commune" substitutes for the previous municipal councils. Previous mayors have become "delegated mayors" and the mayor for the new commune is elected at the first session of the new municipal council. On 15th December 2015, 187 new communes were created by prefects' bye-laws instead of 684 pre-existing municipalities.

## 4. The Metropolis *à la Française*

For historical reasons, the French centralization (concentration of political, economic, social, and cultural functions in the capital city and its region) has hampered the development of provincial urban cities since the Revolution and the establishment of the republican regime. However, urban development has spilled over political and administrative boundaries and extended to a wider regional area. According to the OECD, metropolitan regions are large concentrations of population and economic activities that become functional economic areas. They gather a number of various local governments and build upon relationships between markets and between networks. Different types of metropolitan regions can be distinguished depending on the distribution of the population, relationships between businesses, and existing links and fluxes: with one or several centres, with different hierarchies of centrality, or developing as an urban network (OECD, 2006). The organisation of the governance of metropolitan regions is always a difficult issue, because it has to combine several government levels. Metropolitan regions can never be treated as single government tiers. Therefore, they require new forms of government that are able to liaise with various government scales, depending on areas and functions (Hoffmann-Martinot & Sellers, 2008).

Under the Fillon Government and Sarkozy presidency, the 2010 Act invented a new type of EPCI, the *metropolis*, to meet the special needs and characteristics of bigger urban areas (Protière, 2012). Nice-Côte d'Azur Métropole is the only example of a metropolis set up under the 2010 Act. The mayor for Nice, Christian Estrozy, a leading member of President Sarkozy's political party (UMP now Les Républicains), was pro-active in experimenting with the process that was modified in 2014, after the swing in the presidential and general elections. As Prime Minister Ayrault put it at a 2012 press-conference, the creation of metropolises was the greatest innovation of the decentralization reform. It is the first time since 1966 that special attention has been given to the nine larger urban areas and in January 2015 Rennes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Nantes, Brest, Lille, Rouen, Grenoble, Strasbourg et Montpellier were transformed into metropolises automatically and compulsorily. Paris region needs new legal and financial means to be the "engine" of France's economy and its world-class capital city (Gilli, 2014). Due to the extreme institutional and political fragmentation of its area (Breuillard, 2012; Béhar & Estêbe, 1999), the Government needs one more year to achieve its plan, as in the case of Aix-Marseille-Provence where six EPCIs have been amalgamated into one

metropolis. Lyon Métropole, where co-operation and good will have been shared by local councillors in all tiers of local government, makes another type of metropolis with a status of principal authority, not simply of an EPCI.

Lyon Métropole has the same area as the previous Grand Lyon-Communauté Urbaine, but its status refers to that of a full local authority as mentioned in the 1958 Constitution (Art. 72). Most importantly, it plays the role of – and has the responsibilities of – the *Département* within its territory. This innovation is the result of an unparalleled consensus between the two leaders, the Socialist Mayor of the City of Lyon, Gérard Coulomb, and the then right-wing president of the *Département*, Michel Mercier.<sup>3</sup> Such a long-standing consensus is totally lacking in the case of Aix-Marseille and Paris.

At the end of 2012, the Jean-Marc Ayrault Government announced it intended to create the Mediterranean metropolis. The civic society and particularly the private sector had been in opposition to the hostile local councillors for a long time. The Government appointed an inter-ministerial mission<sup>4</sup> chaired by a prefect who wrote a strategic plan for the largest urban area in France (3,173 km<sup>3</sup>), far larger than Paris or Lyon regions, for 1.8 million inhabitants in 92 communes (93% of the population in the *Département des Bouches du Rhône*, 37% of the population of the whole Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region).

Instead of two-tier governance – municipal councils of each commune, joint council of each intercommunal body, from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 the metropolis is governed by the Metropolitan Council and six area-councils which are drawn from the areas of the six previous EPCIs. Such a *territoire* does not exist anymore in the nine “ordinary” metropolises. Communes and mayors remain. As in the case of previous *communautés urbaines* and other “ordinary metropolises” the structure, its area, its bodies, its mandatory and optional responsibilities must be agreed upon by the Government and follow the provisions of the 2014 and 2015 Acts (*Loi MAPTAM*; *Loi NOTRe*).

Through a similarly top-down process, *La métropole du Grand Paris* was created in January 2016 as an inter-communal body with its own fiscal

<sup>3</sup> After the 2015 Election, Michel Mercier was replaced by Christophe Guilloteau, also a member of *Les républicains* party group.

<sup>4</sup> *Mission inter-ministérielle pour le projet métropolitain Aix-Marseille-Provence*, by Decree of the Prime Minister (16 May, 2013).

policy on the basis of the 2014 and 2015 Acts. It covers the City of Paris and 131 communes of the three neighbouring *départements* (Petite Couronne: Hauts-de Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne) and some bigger towns that belong to further *départements* (Grande Couronne), a total population of 7 million and 814 km<sup>3</sup>. As in the case of Aix-Marseille-Provence, it is structured into areas (*territoires*) incorporating more than 300,000 inhabitants. The borders of the areas have been approved by the Government and they match the borders of the communes. The prefect of the Ile-de-France Region is in charge of consulting each municipal council and each EPCI council about their agreement with the proposals. Again, the Government appointed an inter-ministerial mission to draft the profile of the metropolis.

At the top of the pyramidal structure, the metropolis is ruled by the council (*le conseil métropolitain*) i.e. the representatives of member communes. At the bottom, each area has its council and leader. As an effective incentive, central government allocates subsidies to the member communes.<sup>5</sup> Greater Paris will implement the classical functions that have been assigned to *Communautés Urbaines* since 1966. These include the elaboration of urban and development plans and the related building permits, housing (either social or private), strategy, economic planning, air-pollution and noise prevention planning, climate-friendly and energy-saving development planning, etc.

Along with the metropolitan council, the metropolitan assembly (*conférence métropolitaine*) gathers all mayors of the member communes in the area to discuss all metropolitan affairs and to co-ordinate or harmonize policies. A third organization is the *Conseil de développement*, which already exists for *Communautés urbaines*, in which representatives of the economic actors, voluntary sector and cultural circles make strategic proposals and assess policies.

Thus, legally speaking the French *metropolis* implies three very different situations: a) a proper local coordinating authority close the status of a unitary council in the case of Lyon; b) a better-integrated EPCI as in the case of the “ordinary” metropolis and Aix-Marseille-Provence; c) a special and unique breed of EPCI around Paris as a transition. This is how simplifying structures in France works! In the long run – and in an ideal world – the example of Lyon should become the rule for all other metropolises in view of pooling and merging means and resources to become

<sup>5</sup> *Pacte financier et fiscal*, Code général des collectivités territoriales, Art. 5219-11.

the co-ordinating engine with strengthened powers compared with the present responsibilities of EPCIs, including responsibilities delegated or transferred from the upper tiers, *Départements* and Regions.

## 5. Conclusion

As many observers report, France desperately needs to conduct an in-depth reform of its institutional architecture, which is regularly postponed. What is required is a simplification of governmental machinery: more efficiency in local policies, a clearer allocation of responsibilities, reduced expenses, governance closer to citizens, etc. (Verpeaux et al., 2015). At a time when cuts in budgets are the rule from top to bottom, from central government departments down to the smaller local councils, it seems that redesigning of the borders should be of prime importance. Simultaneously, the shape and functions of the central government are also under reconstruction. The principle of modularity was due to be fully enacted by 2016. Nowadays “the state rules [not the country but] territories in close relation with the French people to adapt to their real conditions of living which are not the same throughout all localities”<sup>6</sup> ... while the Prime Minister speaks of “Regional state” (Council of the Ministers, 17 December, 2015.).

Any attempt to redress and simplify local government borders is useful but will not be enough. The country needs a fundamental reconstruction of public policies at all tiers. Moreover, the institutional approach to metropolitanisation may have an unintended side effect. It may create inter-institutional competition and escalate existing feuds between strong metropolitan and regional governments (Degron, 2014).

France stands out as an important case where new powers bestowed upon metropolitan governments have curbed the jurisdictions of regional governments. The ambiguity over the powers and functions of local governments triggers obdurate turf wars between the two levels of government, which clearly indicates that the governance of any modern society needs to be simplified. If left unaddressed, competition – not coordination or cooperation – between regionalization and metropolitanisation, regionalization and local governments, governability and multilevel governance is likely to become the norm (Marcou, 2014). An analysis of foreign ex-

<sup>6</sup> *Charte de la déconcentration* published in May, 2015.

periences shows that regional institutions may turn against municipal self-government. A typical barrier to regional centralization is a principle that is applied in all European countries with a unitary constitution, except in the Netherlands: an upper level local authority has no supervisory or command powers upon local authorities of the lower level. This principle is stated in article 72/5 of the French constitution. The development of citizen participation at the local level is probably the best way to prevent metropolitan and regional centralisation to the detriment of municipalities, because citizens' claims will be generally based on local concerns, and because they will strengthen the legitimacy of municipal representatives (Estêbe, 2015).

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## NEW GOVERNANCE OF URBAN AREAS IN FRANCE: IS RATIONALIZATION POSSIBLE?

### *Summary*

*The paper analyses urban governance and decentralisation in France. It explains the “quiet revolution” that wants to set the legal base of French local government back to the drawing board with special focus on the reform of local government in urban areas. The context of the too many too small communes – at the heart of the reform programme – is described since it is a typically French evil (part 2). In the absence of any successful top-down policy of amalgamating communes, new communes are deemed to be the effective solution along with a new mapping of intercommunal joint bodies (part 3). Finally, the paper describes what the metropolis “à la française” consists of (part 4) with a special focus on Lyon – the perfect model for the whole country – and Paris and Aix-Marseille as the worst pupils in transition. France stands out as an important case where new powers bestowed upon metropolitan governments have curbed the jurisdictions of regional governments. The ambiguity over the powers and functions of local governments triggers obdurate turf wars between the two levels of government, which clearly indicates that the governance of any modern society needs to be simplified. If left unaddressed, competition – not coordination or cooperation – between regionalization and metropolitanisation, regionalization and local governments, governability and multilevel governance is likely to become the norm. The author concludes that France desperately needs an in-depth reform of its institutional architecture, which is regularly postponed. What is required is a simplification of governmental machinery: more efficiency in local policies, a clearer allocation of responsibilities, reduced expenses, and governance closer to citizens.*

*Keywords: urban areas, urban governance, France, decentralisation, local government*

## NOVO UREĐENJE URBANIH PODRUČJA U FRANCUSKOJ: JE LI MOGUĆA RACIONALIZACIJA?

### Sažetak

Rad se bavi upravljanjem gradovima i decentralizacijom u Francuskoj. Objasnjava se »tiba revolucija« *kojoj je cilj izmijeniti pravne temelje francuske lokalne samouprave s posebnim naglaskom na reformi lokalne samouprave u urbanim područjima. Opisuje se kontekst prevelikog broja premalenihi općina, koji je u samome središtu programa reforme, zato što je to tipično francuski problem (dio 2.). Zbog nepostojanja ijedne uspješne top-down politike spajanja općina, nove se općine smatraju učinkovitim rješenjem zajedno s novom teritorijalnom raspodjelom zajedničkih međuopćinskihi tijela (dio 3.). Na kraju rada opisuje se od čega se sastoji metropolitansko područje á la française (dio 4.) s posebnim osvrtom na Lyon – savršeni model za Francusku – te na Pariz i Aix-Marseille kao na najgore primjere prelaznog razdoblja. Francuska se ističe kao važan primjer zemlje u kojoj su nove ovlasti date metropolitanskoj razini ograničile ovlasti regionalnih vlasti. Nejasnoće oko ovlasti i poslova lokalne i regionalne samouprave potiču tvrdokorne sukobe oko područja i nadležnosti između dvije razine vlasti, što jasno pokazuje da se organizacija vlasti i javnog upravljanja u svakom modernom društvu treba pojednostaviti. Ako se problem ne riješi, doći će do kompeticije, a ne do koordinacije i suradnje između regionalizacije i metropolitanzacije, regionalizacije i lokalnih jedinica te upravljivosti i višestupanjskog upravljanja. Zaključuje se da Francuska očajnički treba dubinsku reformu svoje institucionalne strukture, koja se neprestano odlaže. Ono što zemlji treba jest pojednostavljenje sustava vlasti i javnog upravljanja: veća učinkovitost lokalnih javnih politika, jasnija podjela poslova i odgovornosti, smanjenje troškova i vršenje vlasti što bliže građanima.*

Ključne riječi: *urbana područja, upravljanje gradovima, Francuska, decentralizacija, lokalna samouprava*